Theories of the Self, Race, and Essentialization in Buddhism in the United States during the “Yellow Peril,” 1899-1957

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Theories of the Self, Race, and Essentialization in Buddhism in the United States during the “Yellow Peril,” 1899-1957

by

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DISSERTATION
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Wilfrid Laurier University

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“History is the fiction we invent to persuade ourselves that events are knowable and that life has order and direction. That’s why events are always reinterpreted when values change. We need new versions of history that allow for our current prejudices.”

-Bill Waterson-

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To my parents, Meghan, and everyone who has helped to
make me who I am constantly becoming
Abstract

This dissertation is an intellectual history tracing developing notions of the Self in Buddhism through Buddhist publications during the years from 1899-1957. I define this time period as the Era of the Yellow Peril, due to common views in the United States of an Asian “other” which formed a larger clash of civilizations globally. 1899-1957 was marked by pessimism and dread due to two World Wars and the Great Depression, while popular and academic cultures argued for the validity of race sciences, and the application of these “sciences” through eugenics. Buddhism in the United States was created through a global network of influences, involving Japanese Buddhists in Japan and the United States, as well as Metaphysical Buddhists. I also analyze issues of colonialism in the development of Buddhism.

Buddhists were influenced by global discussions of race, science, and the Self, in adapting their religious presentation for new audiences at a time when they felt threatened by encroachment, not only internationally but domestically as well. Following Victorian-Era narratives regarding colonialism and the development of the Aryan myth, Buddhists attempted to reverse these dominant tropes in order to show the superiority of Buddhism over a perceived “West.” They combined emic discussions about the “Aryan” present in Buddhism through the Sanskrit term, aryā, meaning “noble” and comparisons of Buddhism and science, in order to disprove colonial tropes of “Western” dominance, and suggest that Buddhism, represented a superior tradition in world historical development. Metaphysical Buddhists in the United States similarly utilized the Aryan myth and discussions of a Buddhist Self in order to show the evolutionary corruption which had taken place in the religion; this perceived corruption supported the idea that “true Buddhists” would eventually retake the religion from those who had degraded it.

Buddhism in the United States was formed within a global network of influences and actors, including developments in colonized nations in Asia, imperial powers such as Japan, and the influence of Buddhist immigrants within America. Buddhists variously used science, and discussions of the Self and modernity, in order to place themselves at the pinnacle of world historical development. These tropes were used to reverse common Orientalist and colonialist beliefs of the time. Finally, I argue that this presentation of a Buddhist tradition of superiority helped Buddhists to create space for Buddhism within the American religious landscape, laying the foundations for Buddhism in America, post-1957.
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Introduction

“In its denial of the permanent self or soul Buddhism stands alone; and this denial to many in the West has seemed incomprehensible, if not absurd. To many people it arouses an opposition almost amounting to antagonism. Nevertheless, this denial is the bedrock of Buddhism and everything else springs logically and of necessity from it.”¹ - Ernest Shinkaku Hunt, 1955

On a hot July evening in 1928 with the smell of incense filling the room, nine Caucasian Americans sat in a Japanese Buddhist temple in Hawai’i, waiting to receive lay-ordination in the newly formed Western Buddhist Order, run by Ernest and Dorothy Hunt of the Jōdo Shinshū Honpa Honganji Mission of Hawai’i (HHMH).² While sitting in a Japanese Buddhist temple, these eleven original members signed a founding document which traced their racial heritage back to the Aryan, Indo-European, founder of Buddhism, Siddhārtha Gautama. Within the next decade, Ernest Hunt would be fired from his teaching position at the HHMH, in part due to his racial and spiritual inferiority, as he was not Japanese.³ Why would a Buddhist group be discussing Aryans? Why would they be doing so within a Japanese Jōdo Shinshū temple? Why would the HHMH administration fire a successful and prominent teacher, writer, and administrator for not being Japanese? What does Buddhism have to do with race, colonialism, and violence? This study will analyze issues of race, superiority, and colonialism during a time of increased Asian expansion and American xenophobia. The focus of the present work will be the

³ Hunter, 1971, 171.
essentialization of religion and culture, specifically through the reinterpretation of what constitutes one’s own Self, which takes place as disparate traditions and groups come into contact with one another.

**The Yellow Peril: Limiting Historical Scope**

The limits of any historical study are always contested, as history rarely provides easy boundaries around which lines of beginning and end can be drawn. Even a study of a particular global event, like World War II, must involve a broader historical scope in order to capture the nuances and factors leading up to the beginning of a war. The current study focuses on the years from 1899-1957, or what I will call the Era of the Yellow Peril. The Yellow Peril is a broad name for a set of racialized and sexualized fears of an Asian “other,” which was based around

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4 Throughout this text, I will use the term essentialization to denote the identification and defining of a core essence within social phenomenon, including religious traditions and societies. This core essence is then used to define a religion, as well as its practitioners. An example of this thinking would be the proclamation that “all Buddhists meditate” because this is the defining characteristic of Buddhism according to scholars like CAF Rhys Davids. The danger in this essentialization is in the differentiation between what Buddhism “is” and what Buddhism “ought to be.” In other words, attempting to define Buddhism is not necessarily problematic in itself, but in defining an essentialized core for the religion, scholars then began discounting who counts as a “true” Buddhist versus the degraded practices which had corrupted the religious tradition. Essentialization therefore becomes a means for disregarding Asian forms of Buddhism, because they were believed to be so far removed from the essentialized core of Buddhism defined by American and European scholars. A comparable term to essentialization is stereotyping; however, I assert that the key difference is that stereotypes represent an “outside-in” approach, whereby it is believed that all African Americans, for instance, behave in a specified way which separates them from others. This would suggest a level of homogeneity within African Americans due to the fact that they are African American. For essentialization, however, it functions from the “inside-out” as an essential core is identified which defines what is “true” Buddhism, which then becomes the measurement for the level of adherence for all Buddhists in the world. Stereotyping allows all persons within a group to be lumped as a singular bloc, while essentialization creates a defined limit for who counts as “Buddhist,” even as that line is defined by non-Buddhists. Essentialization allows for the idea of a “pure” religious tradition which is then corrupted by its very adherents.

5 I will go into far more detail about the specific fears and xenophobia of the Yellow Peril in Chapter Two.
imagery of Asians as barbarous apes with special mystical powers and the fear that Europe and North America would be overrun and enslaved by East Asians. European and North American writers pointed to the high population of Asian nations, especially China, as proof of the danger posed, but also the unending sexual appetites of the “primitive” Chinese. Examples of this notion do not come simply from Europe and North America. In fact, the Chinese often served as an essentialized group who were responsible for a vast array of societal ills throughout Asia. Like the essentialized and imagined stereotypes of Jews, the Chinese were blamed for excessive “racial loyalty and astuteness in financial matters…money is their god. Life itself is of little value compared with the leanest bank account.” In 1914, King Vajiravudph, the King of Thailand who was also called Rama VI, published a newspaper article referring to the Chinese as the “Jews of the East.” This displays the racial essentialization further separating the world in two between a clash of civilizations, creating an “in-group” and an “out-group” whether this be an imagined Asian menace or a broadly defined “Jew.” The phrase Yellow Peril actually originates with Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, who had a dream in which he saw the Buddha riding a dragon and threatening to invade Europe. This general fear was combined with race sciences, beliefs of an apocalyptic-style end to the purity of race and culture in North America.


8 Wongsurawat,

and Europe, and the threat of militarism to form a ubiquitous cultural anxiety regarding the
violent and debased Asian “other.”

The Yellow Peril, like other historical phenomenon, does not fit within easy delineations
of years or time periods. Although The Yellow Peril had been building globally for nearly two
decades, Leung-Wing Fai and John Dower both argue that the real beginning of an international
Yellow Peril was the Boxer Rebellion (August 1899-September 1901), when the anti-colonial
Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fist began killing Caucasians in China, blaming them
for economic and social problems. The Boxer Rebellion solidified a number of disjointed racial
tensions and fears, and it was at this point that “Boxerism” was used as proof that the Chinese,
and all Asians, were inherently and genetically violent and barbarous. The Boxer Rebellion was
considered proof of an inevitable race war between “East” and “West,” a fear which had been
growing for roughly two decades, but was now given a concrete name and “face.” One example
of this clash of civilizations language can be seen on the 28 July 1900 cover of Harper’s Weekly
in the illustration “Is this Imperialism?” which features Uncle Sam holding a gun and an
American flag emblazoned with “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness,” and President
William McKinley against the Chinese Boxers; the Boxers’ faces are grotesque, they carry
human heads on pikes, and one of them is actively stabbing a young American girl, while her
doll is trampled under foot. The symbolism displayed here is a barbarous and immoral group of

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“The Boxers” as they were commonly known, were also trained in martial-arts, which only added to the fearsome mystique, playing upon fears that Asians held mystical powers.

11 William A. Rogers, “Is this Imperialism?,” Harper’s Weekly 44, no. 2275 (July 28 1900), cover.
savages against the advanced forces of life and liberty. The Boxer Rebellion certainly was not the beginning of Anti-Asian sentiment in the United States, as in the Chinese Massacre of 1871, when five hundred white men lynched twenty Chinese people in Los Angeles’ Chinatown. These examples, coupled with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, show that Anti-Asian sentiment was growing in America throughout the 1870s-1890s, but the most important turning point for the Yellow Peril happened in 1899 with the Boxer Rebellion.

Concordantly, Shūe Sonoda, a Shin Buddhist Priest, started the Buddhist Mission of North America, with the Buddhist Church of San Francisco becoming the first major Buddhist temple on the American mainland, in 1899. Hawai‘i was annexed by the United States in July 1898, which brought an increase in the number of Buddhists to the American population. This reinforces the beginning of my time period, as 1899 simultaneously marks a rising global fear of

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Asians and a time of Asian immigration and domestication in America. First, that the United States functions as a singular locale which is the confluence of a vast network of global actors and shifting ideas. Secondly, beginning my time period in 1899 shows that Asian Buddhists were attempting to adapt traditional doctrines, missionize, and immigrate to America at precisely the same moment that the United States was facing an increasing fear and hatred for Asian immigrants. However, as the current study will show, by the end of the Era of Yellow Peril, 1957, Asian Buddhists had been largely successful in domesticating Buddhism in the United States, despite having just fought World War II against Japan (and others). In other words, this study

15 I will be using the term “domestication” in the sense of Thomas A. Tweed’s definition of religion’s ability to allow people to “make homes,” and Richard McBride’s notion of domestication representing Buddhism’s ability to adapt to a new culture. I wish to clearly articulate here that I do not mean domestication in a negative connotation. In Jack Goody’s 1997 book, The Domestication of the Savage Mind, [Jack Goody, The Domestication of the Savage Mind, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), 3] he argues that previous sociological literature separated the world into traditional and modern, creating an ethnocentric measure whereby European society and culture is prioritized. Goody argues that the process of modernization is not a simple bifurcation, but involves a psychological process whereby a “savage” becomes psychologically domesticated, and then behaviours such as language and social structures are formed later following this psychological development. Goody’s contribution to this debate is his argument that peoples cannot be separated simply into “primitive” and “modern” but that developing societies undergo a multifaceted process. However, he continues to assume that the process of “modernization” is an a priori good and that others must undergo a psychological restructuring in order to “catch up.” My study uses domestication to mean the process of creating a personal space within a new location, not a bifurcated process of moving from primitive to modern. My use of domestication includes the agency of groups attempting to make these spaces, as they reconstitute their own beliefs and practices but simultaneously change the host society, as can be seen in the popularity of Buddhism post-1957 to today. Similarly, Ivan Strenski described the “domestication” of the samgha as a process of corruption whereby the early monks and nuns gave up their ascetic lifestyle for the material benefit of lay donations [Ivan Strenski, “On Generalized Exchange and the Domestication of the Sangha,” Man (New Series) 18, no. 3 (September 1983): 463-477]. Again, my study does not argue for domestication as a corruption, whereby a once normative tradition is lost, but an engaged process of creation whereby groups move into a space, and both are mutually transformed. In Richard T. McBride’s Domesticating the Dharma: Buddhist Cults and the Hwaôm Synthesis in Silla Korea, (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008), he uses domestication to mean the larger cultural adoption of Buddhism into Korea, including the adaptation of doctrines to become more ‘Korean-ized.’ McBride argues that the place of Korea within the larger East Asian context made the nation more amenable to a doctrine of inclusion, such as Hwaôm Buddhism.

16 Interestingly, this also represents a time when Americans were attempting to protect the purity of their superior Aryan race while simultaneously fighting against Hitler’s Germany, which was attempting to spread the Aryan race throughout Europe.
shows the ways in which Buddhists were able to use Buddhism to “cross boundaries and make homes” during a period of immense persecution in America, and the ways in which writings from South Asia, East Asia, and America formed a global network which ultimately led to the domestication of Buddhism in the United States. In adapting one religious tradition to better fit within the cultural frameworks of a new land, I will be utilizing the term “domestication.” By domestication, I mean that Buddhists are able to “make homes” by re-imagining their religious system in order to better accommodate native traditions, practices, and modes of thought. In other words, domestication is the ability to cross boundaries and make homes, rather than any perceived breaking of a spirit, such as one may think of with a horse or barnyard animal. I argue that some of the past debates surrounding the use of domestication as a term comes from the essentialization of Buddhist tradition, as only something which was once defined and authentic can then be retrained into a new way of being. Instead, I will be arguing that Buddhists were domesticating themselves by adapting more traditional doctrines within a new cultural framework, which was changing itself. This domestication represents a continual process, beyond passive notions of “accepting” or “rejecting” whereby ideas continue to produce new “fruits” of interpretation.

17 Thomas A. Tweed, Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 54. Throughout this work, I will be using Tweed’s language of “crossing boundaries and making homes” from Crossing and Dwelling in order to show the ways in which religion functions (can be used) to allow people to “create space” for themselves within a larger global, or even cosmic, framework. In other words, religion allows for the creation of identity and space within an individual’s understanding of the universe.

18 Tweed, 2006, 54. Tweed’s definition of religion as a means for creating space, identity, and the ability to move across boundaries will be utilized throughout this work in conjunction with domestication.

From 1899 to 1957, popular sources in America show that it was common belief that there was a “clash of civilization” between “East” and “West,” or Buddhism and Christianity, with some even predicting an oncoming “Eugenic Apocalypse,” or destruction of the white race. This is why I will be referring to my time period as the Era of the Yellow Peril. Of course, this is not to suggest that Asians were the only victims of persecution and racialized white supremacist or Eurocentrist ideologies. In America, there existed a broad culture of xenophobia, including a mistrust of Catholics (including Irish, Italian, and other immigrants), Jews, Mormons African-Americans and others. However, given the apocalyptic tone of the Yellow Peril, I would argue that Anti-Asian sentiment specifically was a major social force from 1899-1957. The second reason for defining the time period in this way is because this is a study of Buddhism. Few other eras in human history have seen as much rapid change as the era of 1899-1957, and so it would be easy to find other defining characteristics for this time, but given the clash of civilizations language in popular books and newspapers from the era regarding the fundamental gulf between “East” and “West,” typified by the differences between Buddhism and Christianity, I would argue that the Yellow Peril is one of the defining characteristics of the first half of the 20th century. The Yellow Peril functioned as a symbolic “other” for a battery of global fears and anxieties circulating around shifting definitions of Self, not only in an individual sense, but also in the idea of nationalism, racism, and colonialism.

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20 C.G. Rupert, *The Yellow Peril, or The Orient vs. The Occident as Viewed by Modern Statesmen and Ancient Prophets*, (Britton, OK: Union Publishing Co., 1911), 44. Rupert quotes the Book of Revelation, 16:12: “Then the sixth angel poured out his own on the great Euphrates River, and it dried up so that the kings from the east could march their armies toward the west without hindrance.”

The question of when the Yellow Peril ends is just as complex and nebulous as when it began. Despite the fact that Japan became a major economic trading partner with the United States following World War II, Anti-Asian sentiment continues to reemerge from time to time, such as in the 1980s when economic fears surrounding Japanese business success led to renewed worries of Asian takeover.\textsuperscript{22} However, at least for the initial phase of the Yellow Peril, the years around 1957 mark a large shift in the way Asians were perceived more broadly. This shift takes place for three main reasons; the “Zen Boom,” anti-Communism and the beginning of the Vietnam War, and the Supreme Court decision \textit{Brown v. Board of Education}. The first is the supposed “Zen Boom” of 1955, when certain sections of American society, including certain elites and the fashion industry, began to take notice of Zen Buddhism, and Zen became a prevalent topic of discussion.\textsuperscript{23} Jane Naomi Iwamura traces this development to D.T. Suzuki’s appearance on the cover of \textit{Vogue} magazine in January 1957, as she claims that this marks the beginning of American popular culture’s fascination with Zen.\textsuperscript{24} The “Zen Boom” has been reified by certain scholars in the history of Buddhism in the United States.\textsuperscript{25} However, in many ways, this study proves that there never was a “Zen Boom,” as Buddhists were in the United

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Anningson2016} Wing-Fai, 2016.
\bibitem{Iwamura2011b} Iwamura, 2011, 27.
\bibitem{Prebish1979} Charles S. Prebish, \textit{American Buddhism}, (North Scituate, MA: Duxbury Press, 1979), 9-10. “To a large degree, the history of Buddhism in America up to 1960 is, with the exception of the Buddhist Churches of America, really a history of Zen in America…it was not until a full decade after the conclusion of World War II that America witnessed the ‘Zen Explosion.’”
\end{thebibliography}
States, writing and influencing culture for over 55 years by that point. The “Zen Boom,” then, is not a moment in Buddhist history, but a moment of a shifting popular culture, with certain elites and ‘culture mavens’ becoming interested in Buddhism. However, the supposed “Zen Boom” is important for the present study as it displays the cultural shift towards acceptability for the Japanese, and Japanese Buddhism. The “Zen Boom” does not represent a major shift for Buddhism or American involvement in Buddhist practices; Americans were practicing Buddhism in the decades preceding the “Boom” and continued to do so after.

The second factor delimiting the Era of Yellow Peril was the rising threat of Communism. The fear of Communism and the Red Menace had been rising in the United States since the Russian Revolution in 1917. The Korean War, fought in part to contain Communism ended in 1953, while the “McCarthy Trials” of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations ended in 1954. The John Birch Society was a private citizen’s group which was created in 1958 to help fight the Communist menace that was supposedly hiding within the American populace. The Vietnam War also began on 1 November 1955, which was a war ostensibly fought to contain the spread of Communism. International fears for Americans were therefore no longer based entirely on race, but had shifted to a fear of worldview. Although the United States was still fighting Asians, and using similar stereotypes about ‘godless Communists,’ the reason for fear and war had shifted away from a Yellow Peril to a Communist Menace. Similarly, by focusing on

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26 Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture & the Limits of Dissent*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000/1992), 2. Tweed identifies the Victorian Era as a “fad” period for Buddhism, with 1899-1957 as a relative low point, which is why the Era of the Yellow Peril has been understudied in the literature of studies of Buddhism in the United States.

worldview, Asians could be split into good and bad, allowing the more Westernized Capitalist Japanese to be acceptable while the Communist and godless Chinese were not. The international threat posed by Communism shifted to central focus once the ideal of the Truman Doctrine resulted in actual war with Vietnam.

The third reinforcement for ending the Yellow Peril in 1957 is the decisions of the United States Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (347 US 483) in 1954, and the courts secondary ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (349 US 294) in 1955, which desegregated schools and ended “Jim Crow Laws.” The decision of the US Supreme Court regarding segregation had little to do with Buddhism per se. However, in many ways the current study is about the broader racialized fears of Americans, and the ways in which minority groups find space within that landscape. Therefore, I would argue that the decision to desegregate schools marks a turning point in my history because at a time when Japanese culture and Zen Buddhism were becoming socially acceptable, *Brown v. Board of Education* shifted the broader societal perception away from Asians and towards African Americans. This shift represents a difference in quality and focus, and not a distinct contrast of kind. African Americans became the more immediate and personal threat, following the court decision, as African Americans would now be integrated into the daily lives of individuals, including their children. Meanwhile, Asian Americans were becoming more acceptable, and presenting Buddhism specifically as a superior tradition which was perfectly aligned with modern science. Prejudice against Asian Americans

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did not end in 1957, nor did racism against African Americans begin with Brown v. Board; instead, the focus shifted to protect the perceived “Self” of the nation, as African Americans became the most immediate threat to the racial and cultural makeup the United States. This is not to say that African Americans were not feared and demonized prior to 1957, but simply that fears tend to manifest with the feeling of impending danger; prior to Brown v. Board of Education, African Americans were the subject of intense racism, but many could be reassured that this “other” was kept at arms length.

Previous Studies about race and Buddhism in the United States also utilize Brown v. Board of Education as a demarcation for historical eras in the United States. In Race and Religion in American Buddhism: White Supremacy and Immigrant Adaptation, Joseph Cheah cites Brown v. Board of Education as the beginning of his time period, calling it a “watershed for subsequent, progressive-minded reforms of current and past legislation,” including Affirmative Action policies meant to counter past discriminatory practices. Cheah argues that the Brown v. Board decision forced the subject of race further into the American consciousness and created a domestic fear at a time when Immigration was largely cut off. Although I think Cheah is correct in suggesting that Brown v. Board of Education furthered the ideas of a certain “progressive-minded” segment of the American population; however, I would also argue that the court decision added a great deal of immediacy to the danger perceived by another segment of the United States. In other words, for those who were already fearful of the supposed “pollution” of America, Brown v. Board represented the forced inclusion of those segments of society which were corrupting the nation. Brown v. Board was a watershed in that it allowed for the inclusion of

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those who had previously experienced segregation, but it also galvanized two segments of “White” America by forcing people to take sides on this divisive issue. The court decision created an immediate situation within the borders of the United States, as the previously hegemonic “truism” in the United States that African Americans should be separated was now being called into question.

The Yellow Peril, however, was global in scope, entering American borders, and growing rapidly according to eugenic scientists. In other words, the cultural fear of the Yellow Peril was much more immediate prior to 1957, but this is not to say that African Americans were not the subject of racism; racism is infrequently unidirectional. It was in 1957, when African Americans began attending school with the children of Caucasians, that this particular “terror” became much more immediate. The rising threat of Communism and desegregation, combined with an increase in acceptability of Zen Buddhism in popular culture in the years 1954-1957 marks the end of the Yellow Peril. The adaptations undertaken by Buddhists from 1899-1957 allowed for Buddhism to be presented as a mystical tradition of superiority, allowing Buddhism a level of success with American audiences as fears shifted to African Americans and Communists.

The Self in American Culture

One of the most important aspects of religion is the notion of the Self, or soul, and its characteristics, essence, and destination. In Sources of the Self, Charles Taylor argues that the Christian notion of individual and family life as representations of the path to heaven inspired
modern American culture’s focus on autonomy and even rights discourses. Sacvan Bercovitch also argues that the Puritan notion of the Self in contradistinction to a sick and sinful world helped to form the American notion of exceptionalism versus all other nations, a sense of private individuality as superseding the demands of the world, or humanity more broadly. Bercovitch argues that the defining feature of American intellectual development has been a focus on the Self, from the defiled self of the Puritans to the Victorian Divided Self. Bercovitch asserts early American settlers wrote journals which focused on the idea of contempt for the self, which must be overcome before god. However, he claims that in reading these autobiographies one can see the sense of Freudian narcissism in these claims as “the force of I-ness is transparent in the violent vocabulary of self-abhorrence.” He then traces this initial sense of individualism throughout American history to the “self in opposition” within a larger cosmic battle created during the Revolutionary War, the Romantics, and finally the Victorian divided self. According to Bercovitch, the pessimism and dread of the inter-war years led many North Americans to the view of a good self in opposition to a bad world. The way in which individuals view themselves in relation to the rest of the world has a tremendous impact on their worldview and


33 Bercovitch, 1975, 12.

34 Ibid, 17.


36 Ibid, 180.
their perceived place vis-à-vis others. However, these notions changed when Buddhism, which claims No-Self (*anātman*), began to move into American culture.

The Buddhist notion of *anātman*, which has been debated by Buddhists and scholars for centuries, was utilized during the Era of the Yellow Peril in order to promote Buddhism in the United States and portray the religion as superior. It is generally considered true that Buddha proposed a lack of a personalized essence, or permanent reality underlying our sense of individuality, but the exact nature of this claim and what it means for those engaging the Dharma, or Buddhist teachings, has been contested. During the Yellow Peril, Buddhist groups from differing backgrounds were all adapting traditional doctrinal understandings to better fit within an American cultural and religious framework. One example is Shin Buddhist Reverend K. Kino, who wrote Śākyamuni would have prescribed a middle ground between the excesses of capitalism and the tyranny of socialism, because equality can appear only when coupled with inequality.  

Buddhists in the United States, South Asia, and East Asia capitalized on broader discussions of Buddhism and science, as well as race sciences and eugenics, in order to portray the religion as superior, and the path to a reimagined future, whether emerging from colonialism, embarking on a new golden age, or steering human evolution. In each of these cases, Buddhism functions not as a singular and essentialized object, whereby individuals are able to cross a line and “convert” to Buddhism by transformation of a personalized soul; instead, Buddhism is empty (*Śūnya*) and without distinct borders as the religion is utilized in order to perpetuate preconceived biases or explain the state of the world in a highly contested era. This imagined

37 Rev. K. Kino, “Buddhism and Socialism,” *The Light of Dharma* 4, no. 3 (October 1904): 217. “Equality is not true equality if it is liberated from inequality; inequality is not true inequality unless it is accompanied by equality, because they are the two sides of one and the same thing; they cannot exist separately; indeed they are mutually dependent on each other, having no independent nature.”
sense of Self can be seen in religion as well as nationalism. In other words, Buddhism is imagined, fitting the time period and location from which writers were viewing the world. \(^{38}\) The history of Buddhism was presented in the United States for the benefit of current generations, to place order and perpetual narrative back into historical record, rather than to explain the story of an Indian religious tradition.

**Imagined History in American Religious Traditions**

In the modern era, it is increasingly difficult to define the boundaries of specific groupings, such as a particular religious tradition or a nation. In other words, if we seek to define America, or Americans, one would quickly run into issues of race within the black community, national sub-groups like Mormons, and border issues such as Puerto Rico. This raises the issue of what is America, and who counts as “American?” According to Benedict Anderson, specific communities imagine their history and significations in order to create a profound emotional legitimacy, or nationalism. \(^{39}\) Anderson claims that a community such as “Americans” or “Christians” is imagined, “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives

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\(^{38}\) This discussion ties closely to Jonathan Z. Smith’s discussion of religion as identity construction in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982). Throughout the early to middle 20th century, Buddhists were using Buddhism in order to construct their identity over and against Christianity and “the West.” Simultaneously, non-Buddhist Americans and Europeans used Buddhism to define and essentialize the identities of Asians.

the image of their communion.”\textsuperscript{40} Our sense of being a member of specific groups is created through the invention of history.

In order to create a community with a sense of cohesion, tradition is often invented and reconstituted so that “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” may be manufactured.\textsuperscript{41} Imagined history thus creates a continuity with the past, sometimes connected to the Naturalistic Fallacy, or the idea that what is or was, ought to be. Tradition is invented in order to give precedent to current social predilections and behaviours. This takes place even when society is undergoing periods of intense change. Maurice Halbwachs, generally credited as the founder of sociological ideas of collective memory accurately describes the movement of religious traditions, arguing:

\textbf{Above all when a society transforms its religion, it advances somewhat into unknown territory. At the beginning it does not foresee the consequences of the new principles that it asserts. Social forces, among others, prevail and displace the group’s centre of gravity. But in order for this centre to remain in equilibrium, preadaptation is required so that the various tendencies of all the institutions constituting the common way of life are adjusted to each other. Society is aware that the new religion is not an absolute beginning. The society wishes to adopt these larger and deeper beliefs without entirely rupturing the framework of notions in which it has matured up until this point. That is why at the same time that society projects into its past conceptions that were recently elaborated, it is also intent on incorporating into the new religion elements of old cults that are assimilable into a new framework. Society must persuade its members that they already carry these beliefs within themselves at least partially, or even that they}

\textsuperscript{40} Anderson, 2006, 6.

will recover beliefs which had been rejected some time ago. But this is possible only if society does not confront all of the past, if it at least preserves the forms of the past. Even at the moment that it is evolving, society returns to its past. It enframes the new elements that it pushes to the forefront in a totality of remembrances, traditions, and familiar ideas.42

Throughout the Yellow Peril, Buddhists actively reimagined Buddhist history in order to place their current predilections into the past, thus creating a precedent for the future, and a way of reinterpreting traditional doctrines in order to bolster the present. By doing so, Buddhist groups in South Asia were able to fight against colonialism by imagining a Buddhism of racial and spiritual superiority, while East Asians could argue their own mystical spiritual superiority against the United States, and Metaphysical Buddhists claimed a racial evolutionary superiority as the true Buddhists of the future. Buddhist doctrinal adaptation was used to reimagine past historical events, and to therefore create a future golden age. In *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam*, Edward E. Curtis IV shows that the Nation of Islam used invented traditions and constructed history in order to place themselves historically within an imagined community of early Islam to assuage critiques of NOI doctrines from traditional Islam.43 In other words, members of the Nation of Islam were not considered to be part of the Ummah, or global Muslim community, and therefore created an imagined past which placed them solidly within the historical founding of Islam. NOI members were from a marginalized sector of society, but were reshaping their future by joining a group with a history of power. Similarly, Asian Buddhists in the United States felt marginalized and therefore attempted to reshape the Buddhist past to place


themselves as superior Aryans, while Metaphysical Buddhists claimed ownership of a racially superior religion in order to explain their past trajectory, as well as why they are currently in a position of power, and how that trajectory fit within a longer movement of upward human evolution. Religion can be used to claim superiority by groups who feel marginalized and subaltern, or to explain and justify power, both in the past and the future, for those who feel they are being pushed from their position. Buddhists during the Yellow Peril were engaged in a similar practice to the NOI, whereby they imagined their own history in order to place themselves more centrally within the creation of specific cultures. In so doing, Buddhists groups hoped to show their own superiority in relation to those who traditionally held power; for white Americans, that meant claiming ownership of Buddhism through the use of doctrinal renegotiations of the Self and a racial connection to Śākyamuni, while for Japanese Buddhists this involved imagining Japanese Buddhism as central to the development of world culture.

The re-imagination of history by Japanese, Metaphysical, and South Asian Buddhist groups in the United States throughout the Yellow Peril, all surrounding notions of the Self, allowed various groups to explain the course of past events in order to place themselves at the centre of human development. This renegotiation came at a time when Buddhism was being praised as a philosophy of science, while Asians fought against colonialism and racialized fears of otherness. It was through this seeming chaos and confusion of ideas that Buddhists were able to present the religion in a way that made it seem superior for Asian Buddhists and authentic for American seekers. In other words, Buddhism became what people wanted it to be, and it was here that Buddhism developed the counter-cultural cache—simultaneously exotic, authentic, and
superior—which propelled its own popularity through the 1950s and 1960s, and continues to this day.

In many ways, this is not a study of Buddhism at all, but simply a case study of religious movement, race, and essentialization in American religious history, ultimately focusing on issues of the Self, including perceived identity. East Asian Buddhists in the Yellow Peril faced discrimination racially, such as the Anti-Asian Riots of Vancouver in 1907 or the internment of Japanese citizens in 1942, which is comparable to the treatment of Catholics in the 18th and 19th centuries and Muslims today. In other words, this is a study of how religion becomes essentialized as Self; the creation of identity and the delimiting of an in-group versus the secular or in contradistinction to other religious traditions represents the creation and maintenance of a persistent and unchanging Self. Rather than being what others claim it to be, Buddhists were able to define Buddhism for themselves in relation to the pressures of the broader culture, both in the United States and globally. This is a study about who defines what a religious tradition is, and who has the agency to recreate that tradition in light of current worldviews, or how religious history becomes the singular narrative of an identifiable Self in contradistinction to others, who do not have a “history” in the same favoured sense. This means that while other religious traditions may have a history, in the traditional sense, they do not have an ordained narrative history which is created through this re-imagining, or its function as historical identity-creation. My study analyzes religion not “as abstracted windows into belief or as essential statements of religious truth,” but “specific events of speaking, commenting, and reflecting” which allowed adherents to imagine Buddhism in the United States.44 The story of Buddhist presence in the

44 Curtis, 2006, 6.
United States has been a fairly successful one, and it is through the use of doctrinal reimagination of the Self that Buddhists have been able to find a place within the American religious landscape.

This study shows how Buddhists were able to better fit their tradition within the limits of American culture, but I will argue that this success is at least in part due to Buddhist use of race sciences, triumphalism, and militarism. American culture was also engaged in the language of race sciences and militarism. Therefore, this is not a study of Buddhists “behaving badly,” but instead a study of Buddhists fitting themselves into a global culture of pessimism and dread which was spreading rapidly in a new era of globalization. In other words, a history of Buddhism in the time of Yellow Peril nuances scholarly discussions of Buddhism by showing the use of race sciences and militaristic language in the success of Buddhism in the United States, but this is not a study which suggests one specific group of Buddhists were attempting to overtake the Buddhist world. Instead, it shows that Buddhist groups from South Asia, East Asia, and Caucasian Americans were actively engaged in a broader global culture of superiority and might, and it was adaptations to this cultural milieu which allowed Buddhism to find a more permanent home in the United States. East Asian Buddhists were simultaneously facing the pressure of overt racism while arguing for the superiority of their own tradition, South Asian Buddhists wrote of the superiority of Buddhism against European colonialism, and Metaphysical Buddhists believed that Buddhism was a superior mystical tradition to which they were the rightful heirs, thus creating a utopian Buddhism of the future, which would begin in the United States. Buddhism, presented as racially and spiritually advanced and combined with militaristic
language represents a global turn to a Buddhism of superiority, which directly contributed to the success of Buddhism in the United States.

**Mapping the Buddhist Landscape, 1899-1957**

An intellectual history is created by the ideas being transmitted within a certain culture or religious tradition. In presenting a history of ideas, this study will show that American society, including Buddhists, were reevaluating notions of the Self. Therefore, Buddhists were engaged in a more common societal trend within America. Thus, I have organized this study based upon the source location, as this will display that groups from varying backgrounds were commonly engaged with ideas of the Self. In other words, separating this study by Japanese Buddhist sources or Metaphysical Buddhist sources works to show that all of these groups commonly adapted notions of the Self in the United States.

As noted earlier, unlike the Victorian Era and the later 1950s, American culture during the Yellow Peril held large undercurrents of pessimism and dread brought on by two World Wars, the fear of a “eugenic apocalypse,” and the Great Depression. The Era of the Yellow Peril also saw the rise of race sciences and the popularization of Eugenics in America. Simultaneously, I will argue that Buddhist writers used doctrinal adaptations in order to reimagine Buddhist notions of the Self to change their presentation to American audiences: During this time, Buddhists in Asia and America laid the foundations for what would become a more sustained and permanent home for Buddhism in the United States. I will focus this study on two main “Buddhist” groups;

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Japanese Buddhists and Caucasian Metaphysical Buddhists, while also including Sri Lankan Buddhists and academics studying Buddhism who also helped to shape this discussion. However, these groupings of Buddhists routinely overlap, and were creating similar adaptations in Buddhist tradition during this time period. Therefore, by analyzing these groups in conjunction, with the input of American scholars and popular culture, I will show a broader trend of American Buddhist domestication.

Chapter One is a literature review of past Buddhist Studies, and Religious Studies, literature, which displays the ways in which the Buddhist religion has been essentialized, with scholars at the very beginning of academic Buddhist Studies arguing the religion was a once-great tradition which had been overtaken by Asian cultural accretions of devotionalism and practical benefit. Intellectual history will allow me to focus on issues of hybridity, as Buddhist groups fail to easily fit within one categorization or another, which is displayed in primary source literature.

A great deal of previous literature conflates Buddhism in the United States with Buddhist Modernism, which leads to a lack of Asian contributions and agency in the development of both of these phenomenon. This is certainly not to suggest that the rise of Buddhist Modernism and Buddhist presence in the United States do not overlap, but they are not synonymous. Buddhist history is filled with examples of spread and adaptation to new cultures, of which the United States represents a new reiteration. Adding the agency of a supposedly superior Asian Buddhism in the United States nuances historical discussions regarding the way Buddhists directly contributed to the development of Buddhist Modernism, while some American Buddhists attempted to create a more fundamentalist form of Buddhism. Essentialized categorizations of
Buddhism in the United States as the same as Buddhist Modernism misses the complexity of varying groups. More importantly than the simple conflation of Buddhism in America with Buddhist Modernism is the analysis of what this actually means; for instance, this study will show that Buddhists used race sciences to posit themselves as superior against other religious traditions. Therefore, the more fruitful question to ask may be, what if as Asian Buddhism became more modern, it became more racist? That is to say, what if becoming modern is synonymous with becoming racist? This may call into question the very fundamentals of what it means to be modern, or what it means to be American.

Chapter Two is an analysis of academic literature as well as popular media sources covering Buddhism in the time of Yellow Peril. I present these two sources together in order to display a common American narrative outside of Buddhism, or the more general reaction to Buddhism. Academics and popular sources also present a juxtaposition in their reactions, between praise of a once-great (but now ruined) tradition and fear of a clash of civilizations which threatened to overtake American culture. These concerns were tied to broader cultural shifts, such as the rise of individual egoism, a culture of pessimism and dread, and scientific racism.

Chapter Three presents Japanese Buddhist sources, or the writings of specific Japanese-based lineages. In the first half of the 20th century, Japanese society underwent a rising nationalism and militarism which culminated in the Pacific War. Japanese Buddhists utilized similar strategies of essentialization and imagined history, coupled with the language of race sciences and superiority, in order to argue that many were wrong to search for an original Buddhism, as Japan represented the highest form of Buddhism. Through doctrinal renegotiations
of the Self and imagined history, Japanese Buddhists presented their religion and race as the most superior, which I will argue eventually created the supposed “Zen Boom” of the later-1950s. The United States becomes a singular historical location for analysis, in which the discussions of East Asian, as well as South Asian, and American Buddhists were taking place, and later coming to fruition.

Chapter Four displays the ways in which Buddhism reflected the tenor of a more globalized society. This chapter shows the effects of World War II upon Buddhism, as well as the ways in which Buddhism was a part of the war. However, this narrative will be further complicated when considering the alternative voices of “White Missionaries” and youth movements within the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), a group which has not traditionally been associated with Buddhist Modernism. Unlike Brian Victoria and Robert Sharf, I do not argue that Buddhists were active participants in World War II, in the sense of promoting a “holy war” amongst devotees, but instead that Buddhists capitalized on the militaristic language in order to create a religious alternative of superiority.46

Chapter Five is an analysis of Metaphysical Buddhists, or sources from the United States which view Buddhism as an esoteric wisdom tradition, or even a non-dogmatic scientific philosophy. This chapter will also deal with issues of colonialism and race as they relate to imagined history, as Metaphysical Buddhists often argued that pure, original Buddhism was ruined by Asians; an assertion which becomes even more problematic during a historical time period of colonialism and war between Asian, European, and North American countries. This

also helps to complicate narratives of Buddhist Modernism, as discussed above, since

Metaphysical Buddhists called for a return to the original Buddhism through means of racialized
science and religious doctrines, none of which are normally categorized as Buddhist Modernism
in academic literature today. Metaphysical Buddhists, especially between the end of World War
II and the beginning of the “Zen Boom” were instrumental in the creation of a domesticated
Buddhism in America.

Conclusion

The use of intellectual history has, in many ways, faded from its academic popularity. In
this post-modern world, if we want to call it that, scholars are reticent to trace the development
of ideas, choosing largely to focus on studies of singular groups. However, it is with the lessons
of post-modernity in mind that I have created this study. I contend that scholarship has come
around well enough so as to produce intellectual histories with the lessons gained in the past.
This intellectual history, therefore, is not so much a work of what Buddhism in the United States
is, as much as what Buddhists in America say it is, and how these discussions were framed
within the larger cultural framework of the United States during the Era of the Yellow Peril. The
creation of Buddhism in the United States involves numerous flows, voices, and characters,
including sympathizers, opponents and Buddhists themselves. Buddhism in the United States is a
vastly complex entity, lacking singular definition or identification. It is with this truth in mind
that I contend an intellectual history is possible. I have no intention of describing the totality of
Buddhism in the United States between 1899-1957, attempting to limit “Buddhism” as a singular
entity. However, the tracing of ideas and doctrinal adaptations across affiliations and sectarian lines may tell us something about Buddhism in the United States particularly, as well as religion in America more broadly. The global discussion between Buddhists in East Asia, South Asia, and America, coupled with broader societal trends of race sciences and the Self, helped to create the eventual perceived success of Buddhism within the specific location of the United States in the 1950s.
“Furthermore, Universal Expanse, if in the future ages there are evil people, ghosts or spirits who see that there are virtuous men and women turning in reverence, making offerings, praising, and gazing in veneration upon the image of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, then they may wrongly express ridicule, decrying the acts as lacking merit or any benefit, or they may bare their teeth grinning, slandering them behind their backs, and encourage others – be it one or many – to express ridicule even if for only a moment.”

*Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Pūrvapraṇidhāna Sūtra* ¹

In this passage from the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra*, sometimes called the “Earth Store Bodhisattva” *Sūtra*, the Buddha claims that in the future, people will ridicule those who engage in devotional practices towards the buddhas, arguing that these rituals lack merit; this prophetic announcement comes to define the analysis of Buddhism in a great deal of early Buddhist Studies literature. In fact, it is the assumption that these rituals represent the devolution of a once-pristine Buddhist tradition which leads American and European scholars to denigrate large portions of Buddhism against an essentialized definition which they had created, and creates the impetus for Asian Buddhists to fight back against these characterizations. Simultaneously, Buddhist Modernists in Asia also decried Buddhist ritualism as evidence of the religion’s decline. It is from this milieu that an Aryan Buddhism of superiority is developed.

This chapter is a review of secondary literature in the study of Buddhism in America, dealing first with the era prior to 1899, and then drawing out some of the larger themes of

Buddhist Modernism post-1960s, and the ways in which the current study represents the continued germination of those seeds, before finally coming to further fruition following 1957. The 19th century represents a time of early contact between Imperial powers in Europe, Orientalist scholarship, and Buddhism in South and East Asia. As the British colonized India, they encountered the remnants of a once popular but now lost religion, which would become the subject of great debate and imagination. Orientalists became enamoured with India as the ‘cradle of civilization,’ and thus the explanatory power for the entire trajectory of human history which it accompanied. In India, British and other European explorers were told of an ancient race of people, superior socially, militarily, and spiritually, who had previously conquered the area. This information would set off a chain of events stretching nearly a century, beyond World War II, during which the world, and especially the United States, would undergo immense change, and in many ways helping to create the globalized society which would define the era following the 1960s.

In this chapter, I will begin by defining a number of terms which are very important for framing the rest of the study. Next, I will discuss the historical roots of Buddhist Studies, and its relation to theories of evolution and devolution within cultures, and on a more globalized scale of human history. Finally, I will shift focus slightly to the development of Buddhist Modernism. By relating some themes within more current secondary literature on Buddhism Modernism, I will show the ways in which these ideas begin to develop between 1899-1957. This will show that although Buddhist Modernism is sometimes characterized as being synonymous with developments of Buddhism in America post-1960s, the seeds (bīja) for these developments were actually planted throughout a global network in earlier decades.
Briefly, before beginning, I wish to draw attention to the place of studies of Buddhism in the United States within the discipline of American religious history. Studies of Buddhism in America necessarily occupy a liminal space, as Buddhism is not a dominant tradition in the United States. Therefore, scholars of Buddhism in America must utilize the work of those studying other religious traditions, like Christianity. Not only will this provide scholars of Buddhism new methodologies and theoretical framings, but it will also help to show the position and agency of Asian religions in American religious history. George M. Marsden and William R. Hutchison have produced intellectual histories of Christianity during the same time period as my own work. Marsden argues that despite common popular views on Fundamentalism, the movement was created by academic theologians and premillennial dispensationalism was affected by early twentieth century pessimism. Hutchison analyzes the rise of Protestant Modernism until the beginning of the World Wars, when he says the national zeitgeist changed into feelings of pessimism and dread. Interestingly, my own research has shown similar thought trajectories within Buddhism and Christianity during this time period. This would suggest that my study will simultaneously be a study of Buddhism and America itself. Although the current study will involve actors from across the globe publishing new ideas and reinterpreting traditional doctrines, all of this discussion will be viewed from a single location, the United States of America. The history of America, and American exceptionalism, produces new interpretations and outcomes for the ideas coming in from Japan, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere. In other words, although seeds are being scattered from South and East Asia, with their varying

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backgrounds and concerns, those seeds are being cast into, and growing up in, American soil, and therefore producing fruit which is simultaneously global, East Asian, American, modern, traditional, and utopian. The study of culture’s relation to religion and their mutually related flows similarly relates to Nathan O. Hatch’s *The Democratization of American Christianity* in which he argues that the idea of democratization popular in the Republican Era reciprocally affected Christianity and American culture. In *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, Sacvan Bercovitch provides an intellectual history tracing the ways in which Puritan theology affected the creation of the American myth. These intellectual histories will provide useful comparisons as well as windows through which to view commonalities of American culture.

**Definition of Terms in Historical Context**

The most important term throughout this dissertation is Aryan. The exact definition of this term was contested and shifting throughout the latter-19th and early 20th centuries. Aryan comes from the Sanskrit word, *ārya*, which was originally an ethnic self-designation meaning “noble,” or “superior.” According to Indian historians whom the British encountered, the Aryans were a race of people who invaded India around 1500 BCE, against the indigenous Dravidians,

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4 Bercovitch, 1975, 2.

therefore creating the system of caste designation. The Aryans were believed to be an advanced civilization in comparison to the Dravidians, with supposedly higher forms of religion and technology. In the 19th century, academics were very interested in a global quest for origins, which would find the physical location of the Garden of Eden and prove that Hebrew was its language, and thus be able to explain the development of humanity in its entirety. If humanity came from a singular location, where everyone spoke the same language, then this would lend credence to Christian doctrines like the Garden of Eden, and thought, like Augustine’s “City of God,” but also explain the trajectory of human history, complete with a favoured Aryan race which had been superior since nearly the dawn of man. This line of thinking creates two benefits, the first is a recursive philosophy, whereby history can be seen as the repeating development of a divinely-ordained trajectory, a hand which guides history to favour those who are chosen by god. This recursive philosophy centralizes all human development within a singular origin, thereby making it easier to claim which behaviours and beliefs are correct and which ones run counter to the destiny of human development. Secondly, the quest for a central

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6 Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 30-31. The Aryans were said to possess superior war technology and superior religious beliefs and cultural practices. Later scholars will debate an “out of India” theory whereby the Aryan peoples were native to India and moved out along the Eurasian Steppes. This theory is likely the result of Indian writers attempting to place themselves at the centre of historical development, a point which will be discussed in the next chapter.


9 Ed. and tr. R.W. Dyson, *Augustine: The City of God Against the Pagans*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [Original in 426 CE]), 2. Augustine argues that the entirety of human history has been one of struggle between the Earthly City and the City of God. The Christian God aids his favoured city, and thus influences the development of the human race against those who are in league with the Devil. The Aryan debate similarly attempts to separate an ancient favoured group from an outside “other.”
origin provides a counter to the Jewish belief in being a chosen people who have a covenant with
god. The Aryan myth proved that there was a divinely inspired original society, and that those
people were chosen by god, not the Semites of Israel. The development of Aryans and Semites
gained a mystical quality, with humans ordained by god, and functioning to work out a cosmic
drama between the righteous chosen elect, and those working against the kingdom of god.

The quest for origins often involves an imagined history, such as The City of God, which
creates a recursive philosophy, often resulting in a utopian view of the future. In Imagined
Communities, Benedict Anderson describes the way societies will create history in order to create
a unified timeline, or recursive philosophy, in order to define an in-group through patriotism and
thereby denigrate an out-group which does not share in the imagined past.\textsuperscript{10} By unifying
historical development, with the aid of an omnipotent arbiter, a utopian future can be imagined
which moves society towards a perceived goal. In Environment and Utopia: A Synthesis,
Rudolph Moos and Robert Brownstein argue that utopian movements are often stifled by
competing conceptions of ‘the good,’ but when combined with an imagined history of recursive
philosophy, these differences are removed, leading to the “authoritarian and coercive aspect that
has led strident critics to argue that utopias are in fact antiutopian because of their lack of
freedom and human spontaneity.”\textsuperscript{11} The creation of a recursive philosophy with a utopian future
provides direction for the entire human trajectory, and with the addition of the Aryan myth,
human history was provided with a favoured group pushing society forward from its earliest

\textsuperscript{10} Anderson, 2006, 141.

\textsuperscript{11} Rudolph Moos and Robert Brownstein, Environment and Utopia: A Synthesis, (New York: Plenum
development, and an “other” which was consistently holding back evolution from its ultimate goal.

The Aryan myth came to be known in Europe during the 18th century. Although different, this myth was further reinforced by the scientific discovery of linguistic families, which was used to connect Indo-European languages to Aryan peoples. Sir William Jones was a British judge in India who wrote *Grammar of the Persian Language*, the first English guide to classical Persian, in 1771.\(^1\) By 1786, Jones was a justice in the Supreme Court of Bengal, where he used classical Indian texts, like the *Vedas*, to learn Sanskrit. Jones told the Asiatic Society of Bengal, which he founded:

> The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure: more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either; yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists.\(^2\)

Jones went on to conclude that Persian, Celtic, and German probably belonged to the same language family. This led scholars to the belief in a Proto-Indo-European language, which existed prior to the separation of the Aryan people, and perhaps even represented the language of the Garden of Eden, rather than Hebrew.\(^3\) The “Hindoos” of India, generally believed in British


\(^{13}\) Anthony, 2007, 7.

\(^{14}\) Ibid, 11. In other words, a language closer to English, rather than the language of Semitic Jews.
society to be the most exotic of Asian “others” were now considered to be long-lost cousins. Linguistic sciences were used to reinforce a preexisting Aryan myth. This led to the development of universalism as a chief object of study. Although today, universalism is generally viewed as a belief in the validity of all religions, in the 18th and 19th century European researchers attempted to create a universal human history which would prove their place in human development and evolution. In other words, universalism, combined with imagined history, recursive philosophy, and utopianism, could show that Aryans, not Semites, were the chosen people of god, and had been pushing human evolution forward since leaving the Garden of Eden. The connection of an Aryan race to Europeans was simultaneously mystical and imagined, but then reified by what was considered to be the most cutting edge science of the time, including philology, anthropology, biology, and eugenics. The Aryan race, so imagined, acted as the key to explain the entirety of human history and place European Christians firmly at the centre of that development.

**Evolution and Devolution in Buddhist Traditions**

Only fifteen years after the beginning of the academic study of Buddhism, Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Following this publication, the Romantic conviction that language was a defining factor of national identity was combined with new theories of evolution and Biology, such as the idea of an “Aryan skull type.”\(^{15}\) The Proto-Indo-Europeans were described as “a slim, tall, light-complexioned, blonde race, superior to all other

\(^{15}\) Ibid, 10.
peoples, calm and firm in character, constantly striving, intellectually brilliant, with an almost ideal attitude towards the world and life in general.” Evolutionary Theory was therefore used to create a warning based on biological racial determinism, whereby certain races could pollute the purity of “Aryan blood” through intermarriage and immigration. During the Progressive Era, this biological theory was used to suggest that all human constructions evolve in a system of survival of the fittest, whereby certain institutions, like religion, decline and fade away. At first glance it may seem strange to suggest that evolution could perpetuate a theory of decline. However, if survival of the fittest is used to analyze religion, then we can realize the reasoning behind the theory of decline as well as the preoccupation of early scholars with the search for origins. If Orientalists could find the earliest forms of religion then they could create a timeline similar to the ascent of man famed on many posters and science textbooks. Scholars could show the ways that religious systems rose in the infancy of humanity, then declined to be replaced with something superior. Religions arose, declined and were replaced until the pinnacle of human development represented by European Christianity. This ascent of man’s religious mind contributed to the simultaneous theory of decline asserted upon other religious traditions while reaffirming the superiority of Christianity.

This new view was reinforced and furthered by British colonialists interpretations of artistic representations of the Buddha versus those of Hindu deities in India. These new interpreters, as opposed to earlier missionary interpretations, said that Buddha was a more


simplistic and serene figure versus the “monsters” found in “Hinduism.” In the late nineteenth century, Henry Cole claimed that from an art historical standpoint, the early art of Buddhism was far superior to that of later Hinduism, especially the art of the post-15th century Bhakti movement. Similarly, British imperialists looked favourably upon the Buddha’s denunciation of the caste system and animal sacrifice, which the British found abhorrent in Brahmanical Hinduism. American and European scholars were able to reinforce their own anti-Papist sentiments by viewing the Buddha as a social revolutionary against the clericalism of the Brahmins. However, this began a separation between Buddha as founder of a philosophy and comparison to religious Buddhism in Siam (Thailand), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), China, and Japan. Lopez quotes John Crawfurd (1783-1868) of the East India Company as writing, “we shall be compelled to consider the religion of the Burmans, Siamese, and Cingalese, as corruptions of genuine Buddhism, most probably superinduced by local causes and superstitions, which, operating upon the original system, produced, in the course of ages, a form of worship differing essentially from its purest form.”

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18 Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *From Stone to Flesh: A Short History of the Buddha*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 167. In this study, the religion of Hinduism is largely presented as a monolithic block, by non-Buddhists as well as Buddhists. “Hinduism” functions as an essentialized object which is used as the repository for the negative aspects of Buddhism. For instance, when discussing the corruption of Buddhism over time, it is said that Buddhism is the victim of “Hindu-ization.” Therefore, when it is applicable, I will refer to a specific form of Hinduism; when I am referring to the essentialized object projected as “Hinduism” I will use quotations. “Hinduism” in this sense has been removed from its historical development and diverse lineages, and is instead the projection of the perceived negative aspects of Indian culture and history.


20 Lopez, 2013, 170.
This disjuncture between “original” Buddhism and its current religious practice has been a common feature of Buddhist Studies since its earliest writings, and is closely related to political dynamics between India, Europe, and America. Theories of decay, decline, and devolution became very popular, not only in the academic study of Buddhism, but also helped to justify the colonial project in India. As Robert DeCaroli asserts, this theory of decline was linked to nineteenth century views of racial determinism, being used to suggest that as the Aryan people of early India mixed with Dravidians and others, their civilizations and religions declined. Traces of this view will continue throughout the historiography of Buddhism. DeCaroli argues that scholars and imperialists alike attempted to identify an Indian and Aryan golden age which was as early as possible. Therefore, Vedic Hinduism declined to an overly clerical Brahmanism which led to the reforms of Buddhism, which then declined to the Mahāyāna and finally modern Bhakti “Hinduism.”

As mentioned above, the view of consistent decline within Indian religions helped to justify colonialism as saving a ‘once great’ civilization from itself, and similarly devalued Buddhism’s spread outwards to other nations, as they received a denigrated form of Buddhism from the beginning, which would continue to have a lasting effect on Buddhist Studies. As C.T. Strauss writes in 1923 in *The Buddha and His Doctrines*, “the old genuine Buddhism does not exist any more anywhere in its original purity, and in the land of its birth it has entirely disappeared through persecution by Brahmins and Mohammedans.”

This quote is telling for two reasons, first furthering the negative views many Orientalists had against

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Hindus and Muslims, and secondly by positing a theory of decline onto all other Buddhist nations.

This view of decline led scholars to search for the most original form of Buddhism, closest to the founder, which helps to explain Buddhist Studies focus on Pāli texts, and the prioritization of text over ritual more generally. The view that a religion in its pure form can only be found in texts is based on *sola scriptura* notions of Protestantism. Christian scholars assumed that a central feature of any religion throughout the world would be its reliance upon text. Similarly, the theory of decline meant that to find “true” Buddhism, scholars must go to the most reliable source, which was the earliest text. Obviously, actual Buddhists could not be trusted as their religion had become so corrupted, and this went even more for those within the Mahāyāna. DeCaroli provides evidence of early Buddhism’s inclusion of local deities, such as *yakṣas*. He argues that a “pure” tradition was never the case and that this view is merely the construction of Buddhist Studies. These critiques went even further upon the discovery of “Lamaism,” or what we now know as Vajrayāna. Buddhist Studies scholars would variously posit that Buddhism’s most corrupted form could be found in Japan, Tibet, or other nations. In the *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* published April 1880, Max Müller claimed that Jōdo Shinshū Buddhists in Japan deserved to be told that their lineage was the most corrupted from the original teachings saying,

Is it not high time that the millions who live in Japan and profess a faith in Buddha should be told that this doctrine of Amitābha is a secondary form of Buddhism, a corruption of the pure doctrine of the Royal Prince, and that if they

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really mean to be Buddhists, they should return to the words of Buddha, as they are preserved to us in the older Sūtras? But these older Sūtras are evidently far less considered in Japan than the degraded and degrading tracts, the silly and mischievous stories of Amitābha and his paradise of which, I feel convinced, Buddha himself never knew even the names.25

Müller believed that “true Buddhism” could be decoupled from the social and historical context within which Buddhist traditions developed; thus, Shin Buddhism could be separated as false against the Pāli Canon, studied by European and American scholars. The creation of a singular monolithic “true Buddhism,” separated from the Buddhism practiced by Asians outside of historical contexts, allowed scholars to judge the superior Buddhism of Siddhārtha Gautama against the corruption of Asian Buddhist development. Two Buddhisms were immediately created; a superior, pure Buddhism which was being created by scholars and connecting them to the true meaning of the original Aryan founder, and a defiled Buddhism for the peasantry of Asia which was defined by idol worship and dogma.26 For instance, in comparison to the religious texts and philosophy of Indian traditions, T.W. Rhys Davids describes the ritual practices as “unspeakably banal,” and a corruption undertaken to reinforce “priestly patronage.”27 This meant that scholars like C.T. Strauss believed “our knowledge of the original genuine Buddhism depends on the holy writings of the so-called Southern Buddhism which exist in the Pāli language.”28 As Hallisey points out, the view of authority given to the Pāli text placed constructed limits onto Buddhism and the authenticity of Buddhists themselves. Apocryphal


26 Schopen, 1991, 2. Schopen describes the way European and North American scholars created a separation between the normative prescriptions of the text and the lived religion of early Buddhists.


28 Strauss, 1923, 25.
texts, commentaries in vernacular, and the word of actual Buddhists were all denigrated as corrupted forms in comparison to the written Pāli.

As Judith Snodgrass and others have argued, this was the exact theory underpinning the Columbian Exposition at the World’s Parliament of Religion associated with the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893. Snodgrass claims that the event was “aggressively Christian” and triumphalist, consciously organized as an “object lesson” in Social Darwinism. The Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 is probably the most important single event for the history of Asian religions in the United States. Judith Snodgrass has provided a detailed account regarding Japanese Buddhism at the Parliament. In many ways the Chicago Fair was meant to display the idea of social evolution, as spectators walked along the pavilions they began with Indigenous traditions of various nations and finally ended with a display of American Christianity. For those who created the event, the religions of the world represented aspects of a shared human past, each of which may contribute something to the future of the species, but ultimately Christianity represented a pinnacle of truth. Charles C. Bonney, a Chicago lawyer and civic leader who helped to organize the Parliament, declared that his mission was “a blueprint for the kingdom of God on earth…the Babel tongues of the world…coming back to speak the one dialect of Heaven.”


30 Snodgrass, 2003, 1.

31 Ibid, 46-47.

32 Ibid, 47.

33 Ibid, 51.
Despite these biases, the World Parliament is now generally seen as Buddhism’s debut into the American consciousness. Anāgārika Dharmapāla was very popular amongst attendees, even though his paper claimed Buddhist antecedents for Christianity in “The World’s Debt to Buddha.” Dharmapāla extolled the virtues of “Southern Buddhism,” or what we now call Theravāda, in comparison not only to Christianity but also the Eastern Buddhism of his Japanese counterparts. Zen Patriarch Shaku Sōen delivered a paper extolling the scientific virtues of “The Law of Cause and Effect as Taught by the Buddha.” Sōen and his assistant D.T. Suzuki considered the Parliament a victory, claiming “the meeting showed the great superiority of Buddhism.” The presenters believed the Parliament represented the beginning of the Western acceptance of Buddhism.

**America’s Theravāda Focus**

The ideas of Theravāda Buddhism also found a presence within the United States. In *Heartwood*, Wendy Cadge claims that Theravāda Buddhism did not arrive in the United States until 1966. However, Henry Steele Olcott and Madame Blavatsky took the Precepts and Three

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34 Ibid, 205.

35 Ibid, 204. Snodgrass argues that Eastern Buddhism was the name for Japanese Mahāyāna Buddhism as a whole, which the Japanese delegation was extolling as the most supreme form of the religion.

36 Ibid, 12.


Refuges in 1880, and Olcott wrote the *Buddhist Catechism* in 1881.\(^{39}\) Anagārika Dharmapāla attended the 1893 World Parliament of Religions and had been helping to produce the *Maha-

Bodhi and the United Buddhist World* journal since that time. Obviously Cadge is aware of these, and other, historical instances of Theravāda ideas being present in America, so the question becomes why she would cite the beginning of Theravāda so late? I argue that Cadge’s pronouncement simply comes from a focus on institutional Theravāda. Cadge’s delineation of what constitutes the “beginning” of Theravāda is merely a methodological choice, whereby the work of sympathizers and Buddhist ideas do not constitute a full genesis. From an institutional standpoint this argument is correct, however, information about Theravāda had been available in the United States for over a century, both as an object of projection and rejection.

For many, Theravāda Buddhism was the most rational and scientific of the Buddhist traditions, without the presence of eternal deities. Buddhism, without a permanent hell, also did not have the perceived harshness of Calvinism. Tweed has referred to these people as rationalists. Those drawn to this idea of Theravāda produced a Weberian ideal type, whereby Theravāda forms of Buddhism represented a pure and agnostic form of the religion. In other words, Theravāda became essentialized as the quietistic renouncer tradition of science, a recursive philosophy concerned only with mental training rather than religious devotionalism, which can be seen in the Theosophist Olcott’s *Buddhist Catechism* as well as the writings of academics like

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T.W. Rhys Davids. During the Victorian Era, current science was touted as the pinnacle of man’s achievements. Therefore, a religion which was scientific could serve as the religion of the future.

The intellectual threads of Enlightenment philosophy and traditions of Deism, especially Scottish Common Sense philosophy, continued to influence the broader intellectual culture of America in the twentieth century and the scientific presentation of Theravāda fit well within this niche. One of the most famous agnostics of the age, Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899) claimed his appreciation of Buddhism and said that it would “surprise and educate many.”

During this period, sources such as the Journal of the Mahā-Bodhi Society (name later changed to The Mahā-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World) and Journal of the Pāli Text Society became popular for those portraying the religion as rational. The view of Buddhism as the rational tradition also ties into the idea of finding original sources and scholarly portrayal of original sources as most authentic. In “Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravāda Buddhism,” Charles Hallisey describes the historical and cultural situation which led to the

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41 Jenna Weissman Joselit, The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880-1950, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 139. Jenna W. Joselit describes the role of new theories of hygiene for social service workers in Jewish neighbourhoods. She also argues that science was touted as a pinnacle of culture and achievement, and was therefore used to enforce a certain level of control over immigrant and other populations. In my study, science being touted as a pinnacle of man’s development will be used to impose eugenic legislation and promote religious traditions as superior.

42 Hutchison, 1976, 4. Hutchison asserts that the assumption that “god” is immanent within nature (including science), created a broader optimism with regards to scientific development. Meanwhile, Marsden asserts that the United States was dominated by “common-sense” philosophy, whereby things were knowable through “common” understandings [Marsden, 2006, 5]. These ideas were certainly not new in the 19th and 20th centuries, but continued to influence understandings about human development.

43 Tweed, 1992, 61.
Buddhological focus on the authority of the Pāli texts. First of all, in what Gregory Schopen calls Protestant presuppositions, early Buddhologists searched for the earliest textual tradition of Buddhism, which would therefore be the most authentically true to the founder. Lopez suggests that by the turn of the nineteenth century a new view of the Buddha and Buddhism was beginning to take shape. By projecting Buddhism as a scientific religion, then claiming that American English speakers had access to the original texts, sympathizers could claim special access to religious Truth and disregard the whole of Asian Buddhism simultaneously. Therefore, projection and rejection can occur with a single sweep. The idea of Buddhism as “the religion of reason” and “modern science” will run throughout this study, but it began prior to the twentieth century, and in many ways continues to flourish today.

The rejection of Theravāda Buddhism forms the inverse of my previous argument. As Tweed describes, Buddhist doctrines were considered pessimistic nihilism by intellectuals engaging with Buddhism in the Victorian era. During the Victorian Era, Americans had a great deal of trouble understanding nirvāṇa; according to Unitarian Minister and author of early Comparative Religion texts, William Rounseville Alger (1822-1905), “it cannot be that a deliberate suicide of the soul is the ideal holding the deepest desire of hundred millions of

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46 Lopez, 2013, 168.

47 Tweed, 2000, 5.
people.\textsuperscript{48} Those who rejected Buddhism at this time saw atheism, the annihilation of the soul, and ritualistic idolatry. In the era from 1899-1957, however, Buddhists actively promoted a more utopian religion, which had a god, a soul, and used science to prove the superiority of their worldview. Those who engaged in the ritualism of Buddhism, said some critics, were merely substituting a monotheism which their religion did not encapsulate, while other critics claimed these same subjects were not engaged in “pure” Buddhism. Others asserted that Buddhism was atheism and that those bowing to statues had been duped into idolatry. We can see how Buddhism, or more specifically Buddhists, were in a winless situation as the views of many Americans regarding Theravāda Buddhism especially were based on the projections of Orientalism, an ambivalence towards a scientific Aryan tradition and the devolved idol-worship of Asian Buddhists. Some wanted to see original Buddhism as a pure religion of science while others wanted to see it as ignorant idolatry masking a desire for monotheism. In any case, the situation of Buddhism in the United States prior to 1899 was largely one of projection and rejection.

\textbf{Universalism and Devolution}

The progressive evolution of religions, and cultures more broadly, was viewed as the conglomeramation of numerous social factors, most prominently including race theories, universalism, and philology. Tomoko Masuzawa has shown the ways that European universalism

was employed in the creation of World Religions. She argues that Europeans simultaneous desire to create an identity as well as justify power relations and global imperialism contributed to theories of universalism and social evolution culminating in their own triumphalism. This triumphalism was the driving force between early comparative religion, such as that employed by Frederick Denison Maurice and James Freeman Clarke who sought to compare other religions for the sake of proving their own superiority. The rise of philology was connected with the search for origins and the early study of Buddhism. Philologists searched for common language families, and similar patterns of inflection in order to connect varying cultures thereby showing the direct progression of humanity. Raymond Schwab has pointed out the Orientalist fascination with India as the cradle from which all humanity flowed. Philologists were able to determine that an Indo-Aryan language family existed which connected Sanskrit to Greek and English. Scholars such as Monier Monier-Williams (1819-99) and Eugène Burnouf believed that the study of Sanskrit could shed further light on the origins of humanity. Philology allowed for a direct thread to be traced between the religions of India to the Middle East and through Europe, thus proving the progressive evolution discussed above.

Many of the languages of India, Greece, and Europe were categorized within the Indo-Aryan Language family, which were then connected to race theories of eugenicists and scientists popular during the Progressive Era. Scholars argued that Aryans created Vedic Hinduism and

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49 Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1.

50 Masuzawa, 2005, 75.


52 Masuzawa, 2005, 128.
then began mixing with “lesser” races until an Aryan reformer fought against this socio-religious situation. Aryans then moved through the Middle East to Greece connecting them to the New Testament and early Christianity before moving into England as the Anglo-Saxons. This theory further reinforced the evolutionary superiority of Anglo-Saxons both religiously and racially. The studies of Philologists were utilized and combined with race sciences and other popular beliefs of the time, such as the notion that language and outward appearances like skull-shape were indicative of personality traits and behaviours as suggested by Sir Francis Galton. It was not the aim of linguists to create the racial determinism which the Aryan myth grew into, as Müller emphatically claimed, “an ethnologist who speaks of Aryan race, Aryan blood, Aryan eyes and hair, is as great a sinner as a linguist who speaks of a dolichocephalic dictionary or a brachycephalic grammar.” However, the view of Aryan racial superiority which came from Philological studies, combined with other academic disciplines, represent seeds which come to fruition throughout the Yellow Peril. Masuzawa argues that early Buddhist Studies scholars posited the Buddha as a social reformer, and quotes Hermann Oldenberg who wrote “Buddha discredited the sacrificial system [of the Vedas].” Europeans and Americans saw a connection between Martin Luther fighting against the outmoded ritualism of the Catholic Church and

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53 Ibid., 133-134.

54 Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*, (London: J.M. Dent & Company, 1883), 2. Galton argued that language, physical characteristics, and even fingerprints were all evidence of a person’s innate qualities which had developed through evolution. In other words, a person’s character was evidenced in their outward appearance. Galton also posited an idea of “regression toward the mean” whereby racial characteristics which did not advance the group, but merely kept the status quo, were favoured in order to increase harmony, which explained the perceived malaise of certain nations, which were most often the subject of colonization [Galton, 57].


Siddhārtha Gautama denying the efficacy of animal sacrifice in the Brahmanical tradition. The Buddha was thus a reformer who fought against the priestly caste of his time. Early scholarship thus had a racial connection back to humanity’s ancient past, as a reformer against a system akin to the anti-Catholicism of their own Protestant tradition. The Protestants of Europe and the United States claimed a history of reform against the powers of tyranny, from the anti-Papism at the turn of the 20th century, to Martin Luther, and back to the Aryan reformer Śākyamuni. Thus, studying the Buddha provided scholars with a racial and religious connection to the past, scientifically proven by Philology. In fact, French aristocrat and race science theorist Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) claimed the Buddha was a great traitor to the Aryan race, as his anti-caste sentiments and call to alleviate suffering resulted in the deterioration of the race by sanctioning racial mixing. This example proves that the Buddha’s Aryan racial past was accepted by the broader intellectual and scientific community, whether that made him a hero or a villain, his supposed genetics were unquestioned. An evolutionary map could be traced proving European superiority through the study of an Ancient Indian Holy Man. Perhaps equally important was the delineation of those who were not superior and working for god, which justified the “otherness” of groups like Semites, Hindus, or Catholics.

These discussions continued to grow during the Era of the Yellow Peril. The view of religious evolution beginning in India was prominent in Buddhist primary source material from 1899-1957. Metaphysical Buddhists wrote in *The Golden Lotus* in 1944 that the Buddha was an Aryan reformer, claiming that throughout history each race attained further and further and that a

single race continually aided human evolution. Similarly, in July 1928 sixty Caucasians, including Ernest Shinkaku Hunt, started a nonsectarian branch of the Honpa Honganji Mission of Hawai’i; they argued that Buddhism was the only religion fully compatible with Western civilization because it was founded by an Aryan prince and not tainted by Semitic, or other races. These same race theories of Aryan and Semite were also reinterpreted and utilized by South Asian Buddhists, such as Anagārika Dharmapāla in *The Maha-Bodhi*, and East Asian Buddhists, such as Mock Joya in *The Young East*. Race theories played a major role in the construction of Buddhism as a singular essentialized religion.

A related issue discussed by Judith Snodgrass is the scholarly focus on Buddha as founder of the religious tradition. She claims that the very term “Buddhism” and the fact that we often refer to Śākyamuni as “the Buddha” are consequences of this focus. Christianity depends on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and it was therefore assumed that Buddhism was the same. This is actually counter to the ideas of ārya dharma, or eternal teaching, and the succession of various Buddhas throughout history. However, the search for “the historical Buddha” had commenced. I argue that the search for the historical Buddha also relates to the evolutionary progress of race theories popular in the early days of Buddhist Studies. Śākyamuni had to be a historical figure who revolutionized his social world in order to fit the Aryan paradigm of Race Science development, whereby exceptional humans come into being to push

58 “Sentinel’s Signals,” *The Golden Lotus* 1, No. 3 (March 1944): 17. By 1944, the United States was nearly five years into World War II, and fighting Hitler, who was also claiming mystical Aryan origins.


60 Snodgrass, 2003, 5.
society forward, including Martin Luther and the Buddha.\textsuperscript{61} This view of race sciences helped to explain the supposedly upwards trajectory of human evolution, as social developments could be traced through the production of racially superior people. Furthermore, the Buddha’s death was necessary so that the Dharma could devolve, thus necessitating further reforms and continuing the succession of religious traditions thereby creating the pinnacle of European Christianity. In other words, the fact that Šākyamuni lived as a man allowed scholars to view him as an Aryan historical reformer, but when he died, he did not appoint an heir, which allowed Buddhism to devolve; however, other religions could then take the place of Buddhism, which continued a broader upwards evolution of religion, resulting in the supposedly most superior form of religion in the latter 19th century, European Protestant Christianity. Snodgrass correctly argues that the focus on the Buddha as a religious founder is the result of Judaeo-Christian presuppositions and the desire for an identifiable singular source. However, in this study, I will also show that the preoccupation with a singular religious founder, in this case, also involves connections to race and human evolutionary development, as academics and Buddhists mutually attempted to show their racial connection to a recursive trajectory of superior humans, and therefore the progression of history.

Buddhists in East and South Asia became interested in the establishment of a universal Buddhism, which would include all the peoples of Asia without lineage distinction. Buddhist Modernists actively attempted to identify a core set of values, and sometimes practices, which could be defined broadly as Buddhism, outside of sectarian distinctions often found historically within different locales in Asia. This would introduce an essentialized “global Buddhism” to the

\footnote{Olender, 2002, viii.}
world, rather than the particulars of Honzan Sōtō Zen, for example. Perhaps the most ardent supporter of this movement around the turn of the 20th century was Anagārika Dharmapāla, who worked tirelessly to restore the Maha-Bodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya, expressly for the purpose of creating a centralized global Buddhist location, comparable to Mecca or Jerusalem. This message involved two simultaneous processes; the first involves finding a core set of values and practices which can function as the heart of Buddhist teachings, theoretically disavowing those which are unnecessary. The second process incorporates the spread of Buddhism with the counterflow of what traditions to keep and who has authority, or how a religion is able to keep its “pure” aspects as the religion spreads to new cultures. When Buddhism moved from India to China, for example, who had the authority to reinterpret the core teachings (if these ever really existed), and what would those changes mean for these supposed original doctrines in their geographical homeland? In How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China, Jungnok Park argues that Chinese translators interpolated their own notions of shen, a permanent agent of perception popular in 5th and 6th century Chinese thought, into sūtra translations, which was then reintroduced to India through certain Mahāyāna texts, such as the Heart Sūtra.

To portray a universal Buddhism, devoid of national and sectarian distinctions, Buddhist Modernists had to decide what doctrines and practices should be considered as original and necessary. Throughout the present study, imagined history will refer to the process of

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63 I am not convinced that a “pure” religious tradition ever exists, as beliefs and practices are always contested. This is even more pronounced in a religion with the doctrine of “skillful means” whereby the teachings are able to be changed based on the predilections of the intended audience.

reinterpreting history in order to lend cohesion and consistent narrative. Benedict Anderson described the process of reinterpreting history for social cohesion as “imagined communities.”

However, my focus will be less on the creation of singular communities, and more on the process of myth-making through imagined history, which can then be utilized for multiple ends, including in-group cohesion as well as anti-colonial movements and to counter xenophobia against immigration. When this process occurs, a liminal space-time is being enacted whereby Buddhists are attempting to modernize and universalize by going back to an imagined time and place in history. History is imagined in order to create an idealized community with cohesive unity. The medicine for society’s ills can be found in an imagined Magadha India in 500 BCE. This reimagining often creates a democratization within a religion, whereby anyone can claim their monopoly on a religion’s ideal purity. This democratization leads to the second process, formed by a hierarchical and historical vacuum. If the ideal was actually in the time of Śākyamuni, then any other religious form or practice can be disavowed. When history is imagined, there is a danger of creating a blank slate so that anything can be substituted. Are monks and nuns necessary for the spread of universal Buddhism? What texts should be spread across the globe? What rituals, if any, should remain? These questions were paramount to Buddhist Modernists attempting to spread the Dharma.

The questions also led to numerous polemical debates as to who could claim historical authority over Buddhist doctrine and practice. Buddhists were attempting to unearth an original Buddhism. This meant that those favouring Theravāda sources could use their own history of


66 Hobsbawm, 1992, 1.
polemical debate against the Mahāyāna, but could now also use modern Buddhological debates to suggest that they had the most historically accurate form of the Dharma. Conversely, Mahāyāna apologists argued that there was no more historical proof for Theravāda sūtras over Mahāyāna śāstras. D.T. Suzuki argued that not only did Pāli suttas have no claim to historical accuracy, but he completely negated the academic argument about Japanese Buddhism as degraded and devolved by saying that Japanese Buddhism was the most highly formed version of the religion.67 This argument was actually based on a centuries-old polemic, whereby the Buddha taught a certain version of the dharma to his original followers before moving on to teach subsequently higher forms to others, resulting in the Nirvāṇa and Lotus sūtras, among others.68 No matter the particularities of one Buddhist’s affiliations versus another, each Modernist was dealing with an imagined place, time, and historical continuum. They were each modernizing by returning to the past, and creating a new historical trajectory from ancient India into the future which happened to place their own particular lineage at the pinnacle of Buddhist development.

The idea of time and history is already more complex in Buddhism than other religious traditions prevalent in the West. For instance, Śākyamuni is not the original Buddha, nor is he the actual founder of the tradition. Depending on lineage, there have been seven, twenty-five, or even thousands of Buddhas through the ages.69 The historical Buddha we know today realized the Dharma, which is the constant law of the universe, but he is one of many who discovered what was already there. Beyond that, all Buddhist traditions have some theory of decline. Each

tradition claims that the Dharma is realized by a buddha who teaches during a golden age; after his death, the Dharma declines to the point of near-catastrophe when a new buddha will reappear.\textsuperscript{70} This cyclical decline happens every five hundred to ten thousand years, depending on tradition.\textsuperscript{71} The fact that this theory has existed in Buddhism since the beginning makes the new search for the founder and his ideal society more perplexing.

In the Christian tradition, ideas of a return to the founding church are prevalent, such as the United Movement, a Restorationist group which claimed over one million members in the United States in 1906.\textsuperscript{72} I argue that this reimagining of historical place, as well as chronological trajectory is actually quite common amongst reform and modernization movements, including

\textsuperscript{70} Nattier, 1991, 3.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, 62.

fundamentalist movements within Christianity\textsuperscript{73} and Islam.\textsuperscript{74} It may be possible that 19th and 20th century contact between Christians and Buddhists produced this new thought process.

The idea of decline towards an end, or cataclysm, can function as an impetus for reform within religious traditions. However, in Buddhism, the decline of the Dharma results in a revitalization, albeit after cataclysmic hardship, whereas in Christianity the final apocalypse ushers the destruction of humanity. In modern Evangelical traditions, the final judgement has taken on a new importance with premillennial dispensational theology. In this case, similarly to Buddhism, the world will decline into further and further chaos before ushering in the kingdom of god and the salvation of believers. Nattier compares this dispensationalism to the Buddhist theory of \textit{mo-fa} (Jap. \textit{mappō}), or “age of declining Dharma.”\textsuperscript{75} The idea of a return to the original founder may be the result of adaptation of Western religious patterns entering Buddhist

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\textsuperscript{73} When Christian Fundamentalists in America attempt to reform the decadence of modern society and other Christians, they claim to desire a return to the original church and the teachings of Jesus Christ. \textit{The Fundamentals} was written by a group of Bible teachers and evangelists with the backing of a California oil millionaire between 1910 and 1915. Within this text, the authors lay a blueprint for what would become modern conservative Christianity by appealing to the original church. They use this claim to the authority of the founder in order to argue against modern churches with whom they disagree. In \textit{The Fundamentals}, this circumnavigation of church authority leads to an increased individualism allowing for the democratization of doctrines, and therefore the diversity we see in Fundamentalist and Evangelical movements in America today. Therefore, in creating an imagined past, these Christians can claim a special individualistic authority which will lead their particular group into the future. Fundamentalist groups appeal to a past while using modern technology and arguments. They simultaneously occupy an imagined past, in this case Jerusalem in the first years of the Common Era, and attempt to reform the modern era.

\textsuperscript{74} For example, Abul A'la Maududi discusses the need to return to the Islamic state of Medina in order to create a perfect nation. However, he also discusses political philosophies such as Marx and Kierkegaard, suggesting his ideas are also quite modern. Maududi’s adaptations of Islamic Sharia with Western philosophers combines disparate ideas in order to create a specific religiously influenced future. I argue that this general pattern is quite common across religious reform movements, whether modernist or fundamentalist. In either case, an imagined place and time is created which adherents must attempt to recreate in order to create a better future. In Christian theology, this impulse is referred to as primitivism, or restorationism.

\textsuperscript{75} Nattier, 1991, 138. The age of declining Dharma is a theory prevalent in East Asia, and is generally considered to be the impetus for the rise of Pure Land Buddhism.
frameworks, similar to Christian Primitivist movements which were popular in the time period between 1899-1957. This is only one possible explanation. It could also be that the belief humanity is living in a negative time and that there was once a golden age is ubiquitous. This dogma could also result in a call for change, as proving that things are the worst they have ever been could usher in the need for activism. In the Buddhist tradition mappō was a key factor in the rise of Nichiren Buddhism, Jōdo Shinshū, and Jōdo Shū. In other words, there seems to be a common notion that we live in a degenerate time, resulting in an idealization of the past, which will be very prevalent during the Yellow Peril. Buddhist Modernists, like other religious reform movements, are concerned with decline and therefore idealize an imagined history which shows the importance of collective memory for groups attempting reform.

Themes in Buddhist Modernism

The subject of Buddhist Modernism has been a dominant topic in studies of Buddhism for the last decade. David L. McMahan’s *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* is the most comprehensive history of the phenomenon to date. In many ways, my work is a continuation, drawing heavily on the work of McMahan. As I am analyzing primary sources, the authors represent a form of McMahan’s global folk Buddhism, or Buddhism which appeals to elite,

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78 Marsden, 2006, 120.

globally-minded people who believe they have no cultural and ethnic background. The problem which I see with McMahan’s text is its reliance on two distinct entities, known as “the West” and “Buddhism.” He analyzes the “growing and shifting patterns of overlap between Buddhism and Western culture.” However, as I will argue, these are not mutually exclusive entities. From this distinction, McMahan claims that the Buddhist Modernist movement is the result of Asian interaction with Western culture and thought. McMahan relies too heavily on the encroachment of Western imperialism, Western philosophy, and Western culture. Of course, this is not to say that these things were not major catalysts for the rise of Buddhist Modernism. For instance, Notto R. Thelle has described how the incursion of Christian missionaries to Japan was a major catalyst for the rise of the new Buddhism, or Shin Bukkyō. However, as James Edward Ketelaar asserts, intra-Japanese competition between Shinto officials and Buddhists also produced adaptation, and Buddhists often drew on their own philosophy in order to modernize as much as Western thought. Erik Braun has also described the reforms of Ledi Sayadaw, which took place both before and during British colonization in Burma, suggesting that Western encroachment was not the sole catalyst. Therefore, I believe that this critique of McMahan can

80 McMahan, 2008, 5.
81 Ibid., 4.
84 Erik Braun, The Birth of Insight: Meditation, Modern Buddhism, and the Burmese Monk Ledi Sayadaw, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). Braun shows that some modernist reforms were undertaken prior to British colonization, but still done within the shadow of impending colonization. It is worth pointing out that the perceived threat of colonization, or violence, can sometimes cause just as great an affect as the actual action [37]. The perception of violence, colonization, or invasion can influence reforms and the creation of imagined history.
be rectified by the inclusion of more emic intellectual arguments. As Buddhists during
1899-1957 drew on their own modes of thought, an analysis and intellectual history focused on
emic doctrinal discussions can also be useful in order to fill in gaps as well as add increased
agency to reformers themselves.

Lori Pierce’s chapter in *Issei Buddhism in the Americas*, entitled “Buddhist Modernism in
English-Language Buddhist Periodicals,” also analyzes primary sources in the Yellow Peril.\(^85\)
She argues that English language periodicals were an important source of information and reform
between 1888-1960 and writers actively attempted to create a globalized non-sectarian
Buddhism in the process. Many of the publications she describes in her chapter-length essay will
also inform my dissertation. However, Pierce describes Buddhist Modernism largely through
sociological methodologies, and while she suggests that doctrinal adaptation and renewed
textual authority marked these changes, she does not analyze them specifically.\(^86\) Therefore, my
work will complement and fill in pieces presented by McMahan and Pierce.

I have no intention, nor would it even be possible, to give the history of Buddhism up till
the present day, beginning with a prince in India over two millennia ago. However, I will provide
some broad themes as to the movement and spread of Buddhism from its original homeland
towards its inception and domestication within vastly different lands throughout Asia. In many
ways, the historiography of Buddhism has involved largely recurring themes which have resulted
in domestication and cultural acceptance, and this process of adaptation continues today in a

\(^{85}\) Lori Pierce, “Buddhist Modernism in English-Language Buddhist Periodicals,” in *Issei Buddhism in
the Americas*, ed. Duncan Ryūken Williams and Tomoe Moriya, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press,
2010).

\(^{86}\) Pierce, 2010, 88.
globalized world. The themes of Buddhist Modernism which I will discuss are movement and adaptation, including the way the Buddhist tradition has continually changed in light of new surroundings, colonialism and the Buddhist relation to imperial powers, the multiple beginnings or scattered seeds of Buddhist Modernism, the utilization of Christianity as an “other” or straw-man against Buddhism, the relation of Buddhism and atheism, and a larger turn towards the psychologization of Buddhist doctrines.

Movement and adaptation are recurring themes in the study of Buddhism, as the religion has proven to be very apt at spreading and changing within new cultural frameworks. A number of scholars have provided the social history in which Siddhārtha Gautama was born. Following Buddhism’s early success and the reign of Ashoka Maurya, Buddhism began to spread both to the North in the Tarim Basin and into China, and to the South to what is now Sri Lanka. In *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks* Jason Neelis used epigraphical evidence to suggest the long-distance travel that missionaries engaged in order to bring Buddhism to new lands. He claims that the evidence of material culture suggests a vast network of transcultural flows which involved a complex economy of merit as much as missionary zeal. These vast networks of expanse continue between 1899-1957, as a global network of actors influenced the direction of Buddhism in the United States, and therefore reciprocally, a globalized Buddhism. Neelis discusses the influence of trade nodes on Buddhist culture and doctrine involving mutual transformations of Indian Buddhism and Chinese culture. Xinru Liu has also described the

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influence of economic prosperity and the use of material culture on the early spread of
Buddhism. She says that Buddhists used stories, merit, and signs of physical prosperity
including the seven jewels (sapta-ratna) in order to equate wealth with spiritual success.
Therefore, spiritual and physical might were used to show the superiority of Buddhism, leading
to future success, a theme that will continue with the Aryan myth and the rise of global wars
during the Yellow Peril.

Buddhism has often spread through the use of tangible benefits. This fact has been
discussed by numerous authors in the case of China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet. However, in the
scholarly historiography this focus on practical benefits, such as rituals for the king, or to ward
off danger, has been a recent inquiry of study. Many scholars did not view these practices as
authentically Buddhist. When Buddhism came to the United States, many of those reaching
Buddhism anew claimed to be doing away with this type of practical focus. Scholarly and insider
anti-Catholic biases in America have no doubt played a part in the disparaging of Buddhist
ritualism and this-worldly benefit. Jeff Wilson has also described the role of anti-Catholicism in
the introduction of Buddhism to the United States, which influences the anti-clerical rhetoric

89 Xinru Liu, Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges AD 1-600, (Delhi: Oxford
University Press, 1997).

90 Liu, 1997, 93. The sapta-ratna consists of gold (suvana), silver (rupya), lapis lazuli (vaidurya), crystal
or quartz (sphatika), pearl (mukta), red coral (lohitika), and ammonite or agate or coral (musaragalva).

91 The list of books which discuss this phenomenon could be seemingly endless. However, to give but a
few examples: Kenneth Ch’en, The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism, (Princeton: Princeton
Tanabe, Jr. Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan, (Honolulu:
University of Hawai’i Press, 1998).

92 Hwansoo Ilmee Kim, Empire of the Dharma: Korean and Japanese Buddhism, 1877-1912,
used by academics, like C.A.F. Rhys Davids, and Metaphysical Buddhists, like Gottfried de Purucker, throughout the Era of the Yellow Peril. Wilson chronicles the connection of tangible benefits in the practice of Buddhism in America in *Mindful America*. Scholarship on Buddhism in America seemed to merely accept the decree of American Buddhists that they were only interested in Buddhist spirituality and practice and had done away with ritualism and tangibly-based practices. However, as Wilson has shown with *Mourning the Unborn Dead* in the case of ritualism, and *Mindful America* in the case of practical benefits, this simply is not true. Buddhism in America engages a process nearly as old as Buddhism itself whereby religious adaptation allows the tradition to “cross boundaries and make homes” for itself in a new context.

Does Buddhism really shun material benefit? Buddhism has been portrayed as a quietistic religion, shunning material goods and being unconcerned with worldly surroundings. Max Weber described the Samgha as religious elites living a mystical and quietistic life separated from the “congregation” of *upāsakas* and *upāsikās*. This characterization has led to a denigration of material culture, such as charms, protective spells, and other supposedly popular elements. In the discourse of Buddhist Modernism, as well as Buddhism in America, the religion is portrayed as either not having these elements, or when a person learns of these things, it is said that these represent late popular additions, in opposition to “real” Buddhism. Writers such as James William Coleman then claim that Americans do not partake in such materialism, as opposed to

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Asian Buddhists. However, as Wilson argues, and is further corroborated in primary sources from 1899-1957, American Buddhists were very enticed by pragmatic benefits, and today make great use of material goods. More specifically to my own research, although I do not deal with material culture in the present study, I would argue that the draw of superiority, and the allure of a utopian Buddhist future during a time of pessimism and dread mark practical benefits which enticed Buddhists and sympathizers in the United States, as well as popular culture through the “Zen Boom.” Although this study does not deal directly with material benefits as it pertains to material culture, the drive to explain historical trajectories, maintain societal status, and therefore create a future of superiority does relate to Buddhism being utilized for practical development; the Buddhist adaptations of 1899-1957 represent this attempt to utilize Buddhism in order to promote societal status and create future superiority.

Upon entering various countries, Buddhism has been very adept at assimilating the native traditions and cultures which existed prior to its arrival. Much has been written upon the development of Chán in China, the assimilation of Bön in Tibet, and the influence of the Kamakura period on the development of new forms of Buddhism in Japan. What has been less studied is the interaction back and forth between these nations. However, as Robert E. Buswell’s edited volume displayed, Buddhists travelled between East, Central, and South East Asia from as early as the first millennium of the Common Era. Despite the unique aspects of Buddhism within each geographical area, the transfusion of ideas between cultures began early throughout the Buddhist world.

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The nineteenth century ushered an era of vast expansion for colonial empires throughout Asia. The Buddhist Modernist movement was created and refined with the influence of colonialism. However, as Erik Braun argues in *The Birth of Insight*, the correlation of colonial governments and the development of Modernist ideas and practices are not always so clearly defined. Ledi Sayadaw was developing interpretations of Abhidhamma literature and meditation specifically for the laity prior to the British taking full control of Burma in 1885. Buddhist Modernism, which is generally associated with a focus on meditation and a disparaging of practices such as prayer and merit-making, is often correlated with the Western influence on Asian Buddhism. However, the mass spread of Vipassanā has roots with Sayadaw, which began prior to British incursion into Burma. This example does not negate Western influence upon the development of Buddhist Modernism. Even Sayadaw’s most profound crystallizations came after the British took control of Burma. However, Sayadaw’s example does add nuance to the typical correlation narrative found in the historiography of Buddhist Modernism.

Movements characterized as Buddhist Modernism are not simply created through Buddhist reaction to a perceived “West,” but also involve internal pressures. Further nuance to this direct correlation can be found in James Edward Ketelaar’s *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, where he argues that the persecution of Buddhism from the Meiji government instituted the developments of the shin Bukkyō (New Buddhism) more than the influence of Christian

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97 McMahan, 2008, 5.
98 Braun, 2013, 4.
99 Ibid, 5.
100 McMahan, 2008, 24.
missionaries or Western philosophy. Thelle argues that critiques of Christians led to Buddhist reevaluation of specific doctrines and a disparagement of “superstition.” The Unitarian Church was especially influential as they allowed shin Bukkyō groups to meet in their spaces in Japan. The liberal theology of the Unitarians allowed Buddhists an opening to critique Christian doctrines, although it also led to the critical examination of their own ideas. Buddhists were forced to reexamine the relationship of their religion with Japanese culture under direct competition from government-supported Shintoism. The result was a more philosophically inclined modern Buddhism (kindaiteki Bukkyō), and a view of superiority for Japanese Eastern Buddhism which viewed itself as the culmination of developments following Śākyamuni’s enlightenment. In other words, the development of Buddhist adaptations in Japan was certainly not immune to the influence of international incursions and critiques, but these religious changes also involved internal pressures and calls for reform. The additional nuance of internal pressures from within Asia to the development of Buddhist Modernism buttresses some of the historical narrative produced by scholarship in recent decades and will be influential in reevaluating the establishment of Buddhism in America further below.

Buddhist Modernism did not develop from one specific point in time or space, as different nations had alternative histories and traditions; thus, Buddhist Modernism in Japan developed differently than in a colonized nation like Sri Lanka. In analyzing the development of Buddhism in America, this means numerous actors each casting seeds, or publishing ideas,  

101 Ketelaar, 1993, x.  
102 Thelle, 1987, 249.  
103 Ketelaar, 1993, x-xi.
within the American religious landscape; some of the seeds scattered throughout 1899-1957 realize full fruition in the latter-1950s and 1960s. The beginnings of Buddhist Modernism actually involves numerous sites and cross-cultural flows; the pace of these developments either hastened or slowed by the domestic and international situation at the specific time. Heinz Bechert cites the public debates between Mahotsivattē Guṇānanda Thera and the Reverends David de Silva and F.S. Sirimanne in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1873 as the genesis of the Modernist movement. It was after these public debates that Henry Steele Olcott moved to India in 1879, and then Ceylon where he took the Buddhist precept ceremony (pansil) in 1880. In 1881, Olcott wrote *The Buddhist Catechism*, a short question-and-answer text used across Sri Lanka in schools and translated into over twenty languages. The text represented a mixture of Olcott’s views, theosophical esotericism, occult science, and traditional Theravāda.

Another recurring theme is setting Buddhism against Christianity, whereby Buddhism is made to represent a scientific and rational tradition which would be a perfect fit for the Western world. This is posited against the blind-faith and violence which the polemicist authors used to characterize Christianity. In one of the more negative characterizations of Christianity found in a Buddhist text, the authors of *What is Buddhism?* claim monotheism represents, “a spiritual slavery calculated to destroy self-confidence, self-reliance, and consequently self-respect.”

Typically, Buddhist Modernist writings take a more Middle Path approach, claiming that

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106 Ibid., 101.

Buddhism has a conception of god, but one which differs from the Christian form. Buddhist Modernists often compare their own doctrines to Christianity, and the idea of a theistic “god” in Buddhism will be a recurring theme. As Christian missionaries entered countries like Japan, they attempted to portray Buddhism as antiquated, superstitious, and backwards. Therefore, as Buddhists attempted to portray themselves as the modern religion for the world, it behooved them to prove themselves against Christianity. In many cases a perceived version of Christianity, and its form of Monotheism, became the straw-man against which Buddhist Modernism could duel.

Thomas Tweed and David L. McMahan have commented upon the varying roles which views of Buddhism as scientific, romantic, progressive, and artistic have played in the widespread acceptance of the religion as well as its perceived compatibility with modernity. Those who viewed Buddhism as a form of scientific rationalism presented the “critical and analytical nature” of the religion, and disavowed any ritualism or dogmas. Unfortunately, one of the side effects stemming from the promotion of Buddhism as scientific and rational was the disparaging of more traditional forms of Buddhism. The forms of religious expression which focused on devotion to the saṃgha, rituals for the benefit of ancestors, and local deities were considered devolved forms of the religion which was lost over time.

Perhaps the biggest change involved in Buddhist Modernism, as well as the most controversial, has sometimes been referred to as “Buddhism without beliefs” or “Atheist

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110 Tweed, 2000, 64.
Buddhism.” As early as 1668, the Italian Jesuit Prospero Intorcetta (1626-1696) presented Buddhism as atheism.\textsuperscript{111} The lack of a creator god led many Christian missionaries to conclude that Buddhism was atheistic, therefore representing pure idolatry as Buddhists seemed to believe their statues to be living beings. Interestingly, this continued an old polemic in Buddhism, which would continue into Buddhist Modernism and Buddhism in the United States, whereby Pure Land Buddhism represented superstition, while Chán atheism.\textsuperscript{112} These two streams were often related. Thierry Meynard quotes Plutarch of Chaeronea (46-122 CE), who says that when a religion or society is formed with atheism at its base, then ignorant people turn it into rampant superstition.\textsuperscript{113} This seems to echo early Christian assessments of Buddhism more broadly, which asserted Buddhism was both superstition and atheism. However, these examples are from theologians over five hundred years ago. Today, the idea of Buddhism as atheism, removed from superstition, has taken on a very different framework.

The theory of secularization has been discussed by scholars across multiple disciplines, which relates to Buddhist Modernism as developing nations reform their religious traditions to become more secularized. The basic theory is that as cultures modernize, gain economically, and embrace science, they will devalue religion. This theory began as a result of Enlightenment thinking and the French Revolution, while mixing anti-Catholic thinking.\textsuperscript{114} Secularization often involved a critique of powerful clerics and religions which overtook large portions of a


\textsuperscript{112} Meynard, 2011, 3.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 12.

\textsuperscript{114} Steve Bruce, \textit{God is Dead: Secularization in the West}, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 63-65.
practitioners life. In any case, secular institutions, science, and individualism now fill the role religion once did.

Throughout the Yellow Peril, claims that Buddhism was synonymous with atheism represented a major deterrent for the religion in the American landscape, but in many ways, this accusation creates the seeds for the eventual flourishing of a Buddhist atheism. In 1668, Intorcetta’s accusation that Buddhism was atheism represented a dangerous accusation, while in modern America, some gravitate towards a Buddhist atheism. In the case of Buddhism in the United States, the agnostic and atheist elements of Buddhism have been of great import. Stephen Batchelor’s Buddhism Without Beliefs and Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist have both occupied the New York Times Best-Seller List.\textsuperscript{115} Batchelor claims that the Buddha focused on agnosticism and did not teach any divine elements.\textsuperscript{116} Batchelor also focuses on the Kālāma Sūtta, in which the Buddha famously says to test all religious theories by oneself, and to not simply believe in dogmas. He claims that the historical Buddha would have gone against Buddhist orthodoxy and preferred a community of self-reliant seekers.\textsuperscript{117} The Kālāma Sūtta was utilized by Metaphysical Buddhists beginning in the Yellow Peril. Claims of supposed Buddhist atheism become accusations within popular culture, as will be seen in the next chapter, while claims that Buddhism is not atheism represent the adaptations of Japanese and Sri Lankan Buddhist publications.


\textsuperscript{116} Batchelor, 1997, 5.

\textsuperscript{117} Batchelor, 2010, 99. This view of a perceived early Buddhism has taken hold for many in America, such as the Secular Buddhist Association (SBA). “The Basics,” Secular Buddhist Association, accessed 11 April 2015, http://secularbuddhism.org/about/the-basics/.
Buddhism disassociated from metaphysical elements has become increasingly popular in recent decades. Buddhists Modernism is associated with the psychologization of metaphysical elements, such as explaining the Wheel of Life as emotional states.\textsuperscript{118} Batchelor describes how certain Bodhisattvas represent human mental elements, such as Avalokiteśvara being the psychological capacity for compassion and not a physical being.\textsuperscript{119} The removal of metaphysical elements has been a consistent trope, even effecting the buddhas. Śākyamuni, as mentioned above, has been reimagined as the human leader of a group of religious seekers. This re-imagination also applies to figures like Amitābha, who is considered as humanity’s innate ability for forgiveness and love.\textsuperscript{120} The figures of metaphysical devotion have been reinterpreted in order to place Buddhism as a secular and scientific religion for the modern world, a process which began developing between 1899-1957.

In many Western secular Buddhist sources, the dichotomy is applied between Asian orthodoxy and traditionalism versus “atheist” Western scientific understandings. However, Ketelaar describes a situation in Japan during the Meiji Era, when Christian and scientific critiques against the Buddhist doctrine of Jambudvipa and Mount Sumeru resulted in Buddhists

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\textsuperscript{119} Batchelor, 2010, 22-23.

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rethinking the idea.\textsuperscript{121} Meiji Buddhists began to include ideas of modern science, at which point they used this adaptation to claim Buddhism was most compatible with modernism against their Meiji opponents.\textsuperscript{122} Shin Buddhists in Japan, like Kiyozawa Manshi, argued that faith and science could be reconciled through Buddhism, as Buddhist faith never requires “unreasoned or unreasonable belief.”\textsuperscript{123} Buddhist Modernism and Buddhism in the United States are often mixed and involve differing flows but are not to be conflated. Even Buddhist atheism, or secular Buddhism, has deep roots within the modernization movements of Asian nations from Burma to Japan. Buddhism in Asia has involved flows of secularization for over a century.

**Conclusion**

As we have seen in this chapter, the development of Buddhist Modernism involves various flows and countercurrents throughout various nations, and not simply Asian Buddhism changing in association with Western Philosophy and modernization. The predilections and adaptations of Buddhist Modernism are not the sole idea of Buddhists in the United States. Often calls for change come from varying sources, and have roots within traditional Buddhist frameworks, such as *mappō*. Neither Buddhist Modernism nor Buddhism in America and their

\textsuperscript{121} Ketelaar, 1993, 17. Mount Sumeru is the central mountain in the universe, surrounded by a mandala-like array of water and mountains. The planet earth is on the Jambudvipa mountain. The critique of this doctrine during the Meiji Era was quite strong, with Christians saying it proved the implausibility of Buddhism, modern science suggesting this was factually incorrect, and Meiji opponents claiming the doctrine was proof of Buddhism’s antiquity. Buddhists during this era were forced to rethink the idea, and suggested that Mount Sumeru (normally portrayed as gold) was actually the sun, while the seas were space, and Mount Jambudvipa was a planet.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid, 17.

religious adaptation result from a vacuum. When scholars discuss the adaptations of Buddhism in the United States they attach the changes to Western philosophical traditions, Christian mores, or even simply American culture. However, as we have seen with mappō, and I will discuss further below, changes in the religion often involve age old Buddhist traditions which are similarly utilized in order to call for adaptation. The ideas discussed throughout this dissertation function as seeds being cast into America from varying corners of the world, with scholars from Europe, Zen Buddhists in Japan, Shin Buddhists and Hawai’i, and other actors each contributing their own seeds from their part of the globe. These seeds are not necessarily native to the United States, and therefore have their own unique background, but due to the fertile soil found in a rapidly shifting America, certain seeds were able to come to fruition, while others, like a focus on racial Aryanism fade back into the dirt. Due to the varying lineages of seeds which flowered in the United States, the ideas presented will involve Asia, Europe, and America, but also the imagined versions of places and times like 5th century BCE India, medieval Japan, and the promise of a utopian future yet to come.

I will show how this time period laid groundwork for modern Buddhism in the United States by further imagining a perceived India and a future America, at a time when it seemed that humanity was heading towards a cataclysmic end. Buddhists were not passively being overtaken by American culture, but producing a Buddhism of racial and spiritual superiority based around notions of the Self, which would create Buddhism’s success following 1957.
Chapter Two
Buddhism in Academia and Popular American Culture:
Vedāntic Buddhism, Race Sciences, and Imagined Aryan History

“It would, we think, be no great wonder if a few years after the conclusion of this war [Russo-Japanese War] saw the completion of a defensive alliance between Japan, China, and not impossibly Siam—the formulation of a new Monroe Doctrine for the Far East, guaranteeing the integrity of existing states against further aggression from the West. The West has justified—perhaps with some reason—every aggression on weaker races by the doctrine of the Survival of the Fittest; on the ground that it is best for future humanity that the unfit should be eliminated and give place to the most able race. That doctrine applies equally well to any possible struggle between Aryan and Mongolian-whichever survives, should it ever come to a struggle between the two for world-mastery, will, on their own doctrine, be the one most fit to do so”

Anonymous, 1905

“The colored peril of arms may thus be summarized: The brown and yellow races possess great military potentialities. These (barring the action of certain ill understood emotional stimuli) are unlikely to flame out in spontaneous fanaticism; but, on the other hand, they are very likely to be mobilized for political reasons like revolt against white dominion or for social reasons like overpopulation”

- Lothrop Stoddard, 1920

The preceding quotes make the same relative argument, that the peoples of Asia represent a great threat to the civilizations of Europe and North America. One excerpt is taken from an academic journal published in 1905, while the other is from a popular book advocating eugenics to curb the threat of a revolt amongst the “lesser races.” Perhaps somewhat shockingly, the first quote, which describes the struggle of the Aryan against the “weaker races” is the academic journal. I utilize these two quotes in particular to show the ubiquitous nature of race sciences and anti-Asian fears during the era of the Yellow Peril. In the early decades of the 20th century, scientific literature about race was often similar to popular discussions of a “eugenic

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apocalypse,” thus creating a national zeitgeist of xenophobia. However, it is by entering into this national discussion, I will argue, that Buddhists were able to capitalize on this language in order to position themselves as a superior religious tradition.

From 1899-1957, Buddhists both fit themselves within the limits of cultural acceptability, and helped to adapt those frameworks in order to provide a viable religious and cultural alternative. In this chapter, I will argue that academic studies of Buddhism—and popular culture coverage of Buddhism—helped position the religion as a suitable alternative to Christianity, and its derivative societal norms, within the American religious landscape.³ In *The American Encounter with Buddhism*, Thomas Tweed argues that Buddhists attempted to provide a religious alternative to the perceived dogmatism of Christianity, but were too far outside the limits of cultural acceptability in the Victorian-era United States to provide a sustainable option. However, as I will show, by utilizing doctrinal adaptations regarding the Self, Buddhists were able to fit their religion within American cultural frames, and position the religion as superior, designed by, and for, worthier individuals. This new characterization of Buddhism, accomplished through reinterpretation of Buddhist doctrine and the ambivalent interplay of acceptance and rejection, created a more domesticated and counter-cultural Buddhism of superiority which was the foundation for the later popularity of Buddhism in the 1950s and 1960s, and even into today.

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³ Thomas A. Tweed, “Why are Buddhists so Nice? Media Representations of Buddhism and Islam in the United States since 1945,” *Material Religion* 4, no. 1: 91-93. Tweed compares American media portrayals of Islam and Buddhism since 1945, especially focusing on the portrayal of individualism which has accompanied Buddhism through the notion of a solitary meditator. This is in contradistinction to the communal portrayal of Muslim prayers or the large numbers at Mecca. In other words, Tweed argues that Americans are able to recognize the individual Self in Buddhism versus the communal “no-Self” (being used here to mean a sense of being lost in a crowd) portrayals of Islam. The success of Buddhism following 1945, according to Tweed, depends in part upon notions of the Buddhist and American Self.
In this chapter, I am splitting my focus between: academics studying Buddhism and media coverage of Buddhism in the broader culture. By analyzing both groups in a single chapter, I will show the reception of Buddhism in the larger cultural milieu, and give evidence for the ways in which Buddhism contributed to the development of this broader cultural fabric. Academics and popular media published countering descriptions of Buddhism which presented the religion in such ambiguous terms that Buddhism became almost a *tabula rasa*, as a recursive philosophy for all ages which could then be utilized for varying ends. The rather unique form of Buddhism in the United States explored in this chapter which emerged from this tableau held a counter-culture caché which would result in the rising popularity and acceptance of Buddhism when popular culture created the “Zen Boom.”

In the academic section of this chapter, I will begin by arguing that academics from across the globe attempted to find the “original” Buddhism, prior to its corruption which resulted in the ritualism and supernaturalism of Buddhism in the present day. Next, I will analyze the rise of psychology, with roots in race sciences and *völkisch* movements, and the ways in which this discipline related to perceptions of Buddhism in North America; while scholars searched for the “original Buddhism,” scientists attempted to find the original man, whether that be in humanity’s racial forbearers or in a collective unconscious. The scholars analyzed in this chapter come from all over the world, including India and Europe. Although they are not American scholars of Buddhism, their writings came to inform a larger discussion as they were cited by Buddhists in the United States, Europe, and Asia, but also by popular writers in the United States, which will be the subject of the second half of this chapter. To continue the metaphor of seeds from the previous chapter, the United States represented a large, open field, unregulated by a state church
or religious government. Academics from all over the world could “cast their seeds,” representing their ideas, from afar into the American religious landscape. As these scholars are not from the United States, they have their own biases and networks which they are connected to from home, which further influences the seeds being placed into American soil. Simultaneously, popular writers could cast their seeds into this soil domestically, resulting in numerous growths, sometimes in combination with each other. Scholars attempted to study global Buddhism in antiquity and show its decline, sometimes resulting in a romanticized view of a past golden age. Meanwhile, popular writers in the United States attempted to cover Buddhism as it was in the present, while using academic studies to show the degradation of Asian society and Buddhism in general, although some alternative newspapers, such as the *Blue-Grass Blade*, similarly romanticized Buddhism as a religion of science which was more intellectual than Christianity.

Scholars created grand narratives, explaining the entire trajectory of human history through universalism which would then filter down into the United States through the use of recursive philosophy, while popular culture writers were experiencing Asians and Asian Religions on small scales, through books and individual travel, which they would then compare to their own views, thus perpetuating colonial narratives throughout the world. In other words, a reciprocal relationship is created whereby the grand narratives of scholars are used to produce the small narratives of popular writers, which are used to justify racism and colonialism, and so on. Scholars agreed that Buddhism had become corrupted over time, from the superiority of the religion’s founding to the present, which displayed more about the position of the scholar than the history of Buddhism. Depending on their own biases, various scholars characterized Buddhism as an essentialized object defined by a singular representation, such as the focus on
the Self; however, other scholars often argued the exact opposite point with similar certainty, or that Buddhism did not originally have a Self. The only constant in scholarly portrayals of Buddhism during the Yellow Peril was the assumption that the religion was corrupted. Scholars argued that Buddhism was corrupted by the addition of a Self, or by the removal of a Self, by the inclusion of “Hinduism,” or the removal of “Hinduism,” and by the use of Rationalist philosophy by the Buddha, or by the Irrationalism of Yogācāra. In other words, this chapter will display the ambivalent relationship of the United States and Europe with Buddhism, as the religion was simultaneously a scientific religion created by an Aryan master and the corrupted religion of a tradition which was overtaken by Hinduization, a metaphor for the creeping Asian menace threatening to invade the United States.

**The Pāli Text Society**

The Pāli Text Society was started in 1881 by T.W. Rhys Davids (1843-1922), a British scholar, in order to promote the study of Pāli texts, and therefore “original Buddhism.” The Pāli Text Society in many ways represented European scholars travelling to South Asia, metaphorically through text and literally, in order to then send “real Buddhism,” an essentialized philosophy created from the European imagination, out to Europe and the United States. This sense of ownership can be seen in “Notes on the Enlarged Text of the Mahāvaṃsa, Extant in a Kambodjan Manuscript,” by Edmond Hardy, a German scholar, who writes a glowing article about the poetry of the *Mahāvaṃsa* before stating that the text originates in “the pearl of the
British Indian Empire.” The genius of the *Mahâvamsa* does not spring from the mind of an Indian or Sri Lankan, but is instead claimed by Europeans during a time in which most of the Eastern Hemisphere was colonized by various European powers. The universalism which was so popular with European intellectuals was not an argument for the validity of all religious traditions as they are practiced within varying nations, but instead an imperial project whereby an Aryan religion, like Buddhism, could be included in the development of European history and removed from its Asian cultural mores.

The broader idea of European scholars laying claim to the development of Buddhism can even be seen within specific doctrines. For instance, F. Otto Schrader, a German Indologist, argues that the Buddha remained famously silent about the meaning of *nirvāṇa* and the ātman because “he could not attain to an inner certainty of it.” The Buddha, believed to be omniscient in Buddhism, did not fully comprehend the nature of the Self and *nirvāṇa*. Schrader then goes on to scour the Pāli canon to deduce the nature of *nirvāṇa* for himself. In the end, Schrader deduces that the Buddha was more concerned about *śīla*, or behaviours and actions, rather than the Supernatural, which he claims Buddhists are forbidden from even discussing. I argue that Schrader’s assertions are telling for two reasons. The first is the idea that Buddhism can be better understood by European philosophers than the Buddha himself, which displays the broader trend of colonialism present in the *Journal of the Pāli Text Society*. Secondly, Schrader, as an Aryan

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6 Schrader, 1905, 170. The Buddha himself prioritized behaviour and action above Metaphysical speculation, which is why he refused to answer certain questions (the parable of the arrow). Ultimately, Schrader arrives at the exact same conclusion that the Buddha did.
(German), or at least a Caucasian European, may have felt himself in a position to continue the work of other Aryans (the Buddha), perpetuating the language of many völkisch movements popular in Germany in the first decade of the 20th century. These movements focused on a mystical, sometimes called irrational, connection of the soul to nature, suggesting that Schrader felt well within his rights to experience Buddhism as he saw fit, without the strictures of academic distance. I will return to the rise of völkisch movements below. In any case, Schrader, the Rhys Davids, and Hardy all felt themselves able to explain “true Buddhism” for the rest of the world better than Asians, and perhaps even better than the Buddha himself.

Scholars attempted to claim Buddhism as their own, as they felt themselves to be racially connected to it, and they did so by reinterpreting the Buddhist Self. In “Cosmic Law in Ancient Thought,” T.W. Rhys Davids argues that the Buddhist notion of No-Self is only misunderstood in the present day because the notion of a “soul” in ancient India is so different from modern notions. However, modern scientists, which included what we would call religious studies, have now hypothesized a “scientific word,” which is the theory of Animism. Rhys Davids believed that Animism more accurately represented the metaphysical notion of a “soul,” versus the materialistic, physical soul posited by the “modern savage.” Modern science can therefore be

7 This point is further reinforced by other texts about Buddhism popular at the time, such as CAF Rhys Davids first-person account of the life of the Buddha, with Rhys Davids literally speaking for the Buddha, and J.G. Jennings who edited the texts of Buddhist literature to remove the incorrect elements, which was anything deemed to be the corrupting influence of “Hinduism” [J.G. Jennings, The Vedāntic Buddhism of the Buddha: A Collection of Historical Texts Translated from the Original Pāli, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1947), xxiv-xxvi.] European scholars seemed to feel themselves able to speak for the Buddha, more so than his current followers.


9 Rhys Davids, 1919, 39.
used to explain what is incorrect about Buddhism to Buddhists. Harry E. Barnes, professor of
history and international relations at Clark University, compared the relation of cranial shape
(Cephalic Index) to the development of national institutions and the rule of law.\(^\text{10}\) Always
compared to European society, the lack of development in other nations was thus proven to be
determined by biology.\(^\text{11}\) Race sciences were often used to “prove” preexisting conditions, rather
than creating new hypotheses. Rhys Davids continues by stating there are two streams of thought
in ancient religion; the animistic and the normalistic. The “normalist” view is that the world is
controlled by an unknowable force as opposed to the animism of religions which believe all
things have “souls.”\(^\text{12}\) He then traces the development of normalist religion from Buddhism,
represented by the Dharma, through Persia, Egypt, and Greece, which is the exact same “path”
supposedly taken by Aryans en route to Europe. How can Buddhism be animism and normalism?
Animism is the corruption of Buddhism in the present day, as modern Buddhists do not
understand the \textit{anātman} doctrine, and therefore need European scientists to explain it to them.
Conversely, when it was created by an Aryan, Buddhism was normalism, and therefore
influenced the development of religious systems from Asia through the Middle East and into
Europe, further reinforcing the position of European academics to speak for Buddhism. The


\(^{11}\) Development, civilization, law, and other cultural mores were always based on European and American ideas of what constituted “civilized,” or “modern.” The failure of people in other parts of the world to live by European standards was proof of their savagery, which was explained by scientifically by biology. The fact that people in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) did not live like Europeans was proof that they were barbarians, a result of inferior genes and their collective unconscious, or “Eastern mind.”

\(^{12}\) Rhys Davids, 1919, 37-38.
development of the correct version of the religion, according to Rhys Davids, follows the same path as the Aryan myth, while the bad version of Buddhism remains stagnant in Asia.

European universalism represented a very subtle form of colonialism, whereby the universal aspects of all religions could be claimed by Europeans through their own mystical-Aryan connection to the past. This is why scholars of Buddhism from across Europe could move into South Asia, speak for the Buddha, and send “true Buddhism” back out to the rest of the world. This historical trajectory, encapsulated from 1904-1919, was thousands of years in the making, from the time of the Buddha, through Greece, Egypt, and Persia, into modern European Aryans. The coverage of the Pāli Text Society displays the ambivalent relationship of European scholars and Buddhism, especially present in Rhys Davids work. Buddhism can be normalism from the beginning, but animism by the end, which allows European scholars to speak for the Buddha as well as for the Buddhists.

The Rise of Psychology

The rise of psychology as a science and academic discipline was important for the ways in which people view science, and continued to have lasting effects on religion and the Self. Experimental psychology research began in the 1830s in Leipzig with Gustav Fechner (1801-1887), a German philosopher and physicist, who conducted laboratory studies in psychophysics, or the relation between physical stimuli and mental perceptions. Fechner attracted a number of students to Leipzig, including Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), a German

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physician, widely considered to be a founding figure in psychology. One of Wundt’s Leipzig students was Sir Francis Galton, considered to be the founder of eugenics. For the present discussion, the most important shift in cultural attitudes towards psychology, which eventually related to Buddhism, was the rise of popular psychology, beginning with Sigmund Freud.

Psychology as an academic discipline both influenced and was shaped by race sciences, which is displayed in the writings of two of the most famous historical psychologists, Sigmund Freud and his pupil Carl Gustav Jung. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was a Jewish Austrian, widely considered the father of psychoanalysis; never one to downplay his own importance, Freud purposefully withheld publication of his first major work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, till 1900 because he believed it would define the coming century. Freud argued that human minds were driven in large part due to the influence of hidden and unconscious desires, and that beyond the interplay of the three mental strata, peoples shared in a collective memory, including specific ones for differing groups, which he called “racial unconscious.” For instance, Freud argued that African Americans in the United States shared a collective unconscious which was

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14 Leahey, 2000, 62.

15 Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea, 3rd ed.*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 308-310. Wundt also taught Edward Titchener, who created the psychology program at Cornell University, where he was a professor to both John Dewey (quoted in the next chapter) and William James, a famous figure in the study of religion, and quoted extensively by D.T. Suzuki. Wundt’s other students include G. Stanley Hall, who, along with Yujiro Motora, helped to create the first experimental psychology lab at the Imperial University of Tokyo, and Hugo Münsterberg, who taught Narendra Nath Sen Gupta before he went on to found the psychology department at the University of Calcutta [Leahey, 2000, 178-182].


17 Zaretsky, 2015, 38. The three mental strata in Freud’s work are, id, or part of the mind ruled by unconscious desire (our animalistic drive), the super-ego, or part of the mind ruled by societal norms and laws usually taught by parents, and the ego, which is the conscious mind playing out the tension between id and super-ego [Sigmund Freud, “The Ego and the Id,” in *Freud - Complete Works*, ed. Ivan Smith, (E-Book Edition, 2010/Originally 1923)].
dominated by the slave-mentality, a theory which would become quite popular amongst African Americans during the years of developing racial consciousness prior to 1957.\textsuperscript{18} Freud himself wrote very little on Asians, as he believed that the cultural divide between “East” and “West” was too great, and that Asians may be so foreign as to contain a separate unconscious.\textsuperscript{19} One of Freud’s top pupils believed that he could bridge this supposed gulf:

The psychological theories of Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), a student of Sigmund Freud’s, influenced not only the popularization of psychological terms and thinking, but also helped to push Asian religions into the mainstream American consciousness. In 1909, Jung first hypothesized that Freud’s racial unconscious, normally constructed through social remembering passed down from one’s parents, held a deeper “phylogenetic” layer, or biological store of racial memories.\textsuperscript{20} Jung’s theoretical memory stores led him to posit a transpersonal collective unconscious in 1916, and his theory of human archetypes in 1919.\textsuperscript{21} Jung’s inclusion of spirituality, Asian religious ideas and imagery, the occult, and his language regarding a transcendent unconscious, have made him influential in circles of Hinduism and Buddhism in the United States, but also New Age, neopagan, and other movements in American culture. Jung used wide-ranging cultural examples, such as mandalas and myths, to argue that humans could be defined by a series of psychological “types,” which were based in part on biologically

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\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 2015, 38.


\textsuperscript{21} Noll, 1994, 6. This also correlates with the rise of race sciences in the United States and Europe, suggesting that Jung’s theories could easily reinforce biological findings regarding the insurmountable difference between “East” and “West.”
determined circumstances, and that these were defined by collective unconsciousnesses until an individual moves beyond their cultural collective unconscious to achieve a principle of individuation.\textsuperscript{22} Jung, like other psychologists, posited that the key to human happiness lay within the individual mind, and specifically within the current lifetime rather than an after-life. Jung argued that human mental health and happiness was the result of an increasingly deepening sense of Self and its connection to the collective unconscious of humanity, which functioned throughout human history into a recursive past.\textsuperscript{23}

In the latter 19th and early 20th century, a revival of \textit{völkisch} (folkish), nationalist, and nativist clubs took place in the United States and Europe.\textsuperscript{24} These groups saw groups bonded together by common ethnic and cultural identities, imagined an idealized past based on the supposed uniformity of those groups, and often posited an utopian golden age to be enacted in the future.\textsuperscript{25} Around 1900, \textit{völkisch} groups in Germany began exploring what they believed to be a mystical connection between ancient Aryans (especially Teutons, or Germans) and their

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 9.

\textsuperscript{23} Franz Aubrey Metcalf, “The Encounter of Buddhism and Psychology,” in Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia, ed. Charles S. Prebisch and Martin Baumann, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 351. I mean recursive in the sense that Jung’s archetypes posit a continual patterning of human history. Recursive philosophy can be combined with views of science to reinforce networks of preconceived biases. Although outside of the confines of the current historical work, Buddhists removing certain supernatural elements and psychologizing other features, both through comparison and reinterpretation, have been important qualities of the global Buddhist Modernist movement as well as being impactful for the success of Buddhism in the United States.

\textsuperscript{24} Noll, 1994, 75.

\textsuperscript{25} Laurence Gronlund, “Our Destiny: God in Humanity,” The Nationalist 3, no. 2 (September 1890): 55, 123. The Nationalist was the journal of the Nationalist Movement popularized by Edward Bellamy in the 1890s. Bellamy combined elements of Socialism, Theosophy, and Populism to write Looking Backwards, 2000-1887, a utopian novel where the protagonist wakes up in the year 2000 and must study how the United States became a utopia over the past century. Bellamy’s work was extremely influential, spawning the creation of politically-active Nationalist Clubs from the 1890s-1920s, including the rise of the People’s Party in 1891.
connection to Norse and Greek mythology, and the idealization of the ancient Teutonic warrior, such as Siegfried, legendary hero of Norse mythology. Houston Stewart Chamberlin, a völkisch philosopher and self-proclaimed “Evangelist of Race,” expressly compared the Boer War (1899-1902) with the Boxer Rebellion, stating, “one thing I can clearly see, that is, that it is criminal for Englishmen and Dutchmen to go on murdering each other, for all sorts of sophisticated reasons, while the Great Yellow Danger overshadows us white men, and threatens destruction.”

Jung wrote admirably and extensively about the völkisch movement, especially in “Über den Unbewussten” (“The Role of the Unconscious”), written in 1918, where he says, “The Jew is domesticated to a higher degree than we are, but he is badly at a loss for that quality in man which roots him to the earth and draws new strength from below.”

Similarly, völkisch clubs engaged a tradition of mystical sun-worship, which they believed represented the ancient Aryan. Jung, who was widely read and cited by Buddhists during the Yellow Peril and beyond, also connected “solar mysticism” to the Aryan peoples, as well as Isis, even creating an “Aryan Mandala,” which displayed the sun, and therefore Aryans,

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26 Noll, 1994, 78-79. Völkish groups commonly borrowed from Theosophical use of Aryan occult symbolism, such as the swastika and Norse runes, both of which eventually found their way to Nazi uniforms.


28 C.G. Jung, “The Role of the Unconscious (1918),” Civilization in Transition, Vol. 10, The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 464. In völkisch terminology, rootedness means one’s connection to the land, and therefore the “volk,” through one’s soul. This means that if “The Jew” is not rooted, he does not have a people, a land, or a soul. Jung uses “domesticated” in the sense of Goody, see fn. 14, to mean living a “civilized” life with a home. This removes the agency of domestication which I propose in my definition.

at the centre of the universe. Furthermore, Jung claims that sun-worship was the common spiritual thread underlying Indian (Aryan), Egyptian, and Hellenistic religious motifs before stating, “the Jews do not have this image.”

Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) was a German biologist and naturalist who helped to popularize Darwinian theories in Germany, as well as combining evolution with race sciences. In 1899, Haeckel wrote *The Riddle of the Universe*, in which he argued that Jesus of Nazareth was only half-Jewish because he was actually the offspring of Mary and a Roman officer. Haeckel utilized the most advanced scientific thinking of the time, race sciences, anthropology, and philology, to prove that Jesus was actually an Aryan, which völkisch movements connected to Aryan sun-worship (son-worship); in 1913, Jung likened himself to the “Aryan Christ” after having a “self-deification” experience, which he prescribed as a sign of mental health. For some within the larger race sciences debate, proving an Aryan Christ connected their religious views to science and reinforced a preconceived idea of racial superiority with imagined history and a mystical connection to an ancient race connected to the sun. The point here is not to accuse, but to simply show the ubiquitousness of Aryan, nationalist, and völkisch movements in the United States and Europe; this larger international discussion of race sciences, and with Jung, the collective unconscious of race connected to biology and determining the mental faculties of various cultures, underlies the rise of psychology, which directly connects to the domestication of Buddhism in the United States through Buddhist use of

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31 Ibid, 129.
32 Ibid, 85.
33 Ibid, 85-86.
34 Ibid, 223.
psychology texts, especially Jung. This connection to Buddhism can be shown through Buddhist use of the term Aryan and race sciences, Madame Blavatsky’s connection to similar mystical syncretism as that engaged by Jung (Blavatsky in the 1870s-1880s, Jung in the 1910s-1920s), and Jung’s characterizations of Asians and Asian religions during the Era of the Yellow Peril.

Comparisons of Buddhism and psychology have been a part of both academic and popular coverage of Buddhism for over a century, with C.A.F. Rhys Davids publishing the first book of the Abhidharma, *Dhamma Sangani*, under the title, *Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics* in 1900. Beginning around 1920, Jung became interested in Asian religions, which he believed would prove his theories of a collective unconscious, and started studying classical Chinese and Sanskrit. Jung wrote increasingly about Buddhism and Hinduism throughout the 1930s and 1940s, including writing introductory chapters for W.Y. Evans-Wentz’s translation of the “Tibetan Book of the Dead” (1954 - Jung claims to have written the introduction in 1939) and D.T. Suzuki’s *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1948). In his commentary on the “Book of the Dead,” Jung sets out his definitions of the “Eastern mind,” in contradistinction to the “Western mind,” which he argued was the result of the collective unconscious working within races. Jung argued that the “Universal Mind” created specific race-based patterns of thinking

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35 CAF Rhys Davids, ed., *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics of the Fourth Century B.C.*, (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1900), 1. There are many examples of comparisons of Buddhism and psychology today, some of which are cited in the present study.

36 Noll, 1994, 300.

37 Jung’s claim to have written the introduction in 1939 is not a spurious one, as he says that he wrote it prior to Evans-Wentz beginning work on an English translation (W.Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 475.

which defined the characteristics of the two global poles, namely the clash of civilizations which was posited between “East” and “West.”\textsuperscript{39} The Self also factored heavily into Jung’s religious writings, stating, “Christ – like Buddha – is an embodiment of the self, but in an altogether different sense. Both stood for an overcoming of the world.”\textsuperscript{40} In many ways, Jesus and Buddha came to represent the Self of both “West” and “East.”

Jung claimed that “the West” was materialistic, rational, and masculine, while “the East” was spiritual, irrational and mystical, and feminine.\textsuperscript{41} According to Jung, Western religious traditions depended on forgiveness by god, while Asian religious traditions believed “man is God and he redeems himself,” thus lending further credence to other theories of the time, such as Buddhism as quietistic and narcissistic, and Asians having access to mystical powers. Similarly, Asians were introverted and child-like in their belief in idol-worship, and magical powers.\textsuperscript{42} Jung’s definition of the “Eastern mind” both utilized and contributed to an ongoing discussion of race sciences in the United States and Europe, and simultaneously helped to justify stereotypes of Asians during the Yellow Peril. The focus on the Asian mind, coupled with the belief in a collective unconscious, meant that in many ways Asians were the “victims” of their own Self, as there was nothing one could do to separate themselves from their own place of birth and genealogical heritage, which came to define their entire being. Jung’s psychology posited that an Asian person was “naturally” effeminate and introverted, a consequence of thousands of years of

\textsuperscript{39} Jung, 1954, 477.


\textsuperscript{41} Jung, 1954, 481.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 486. Americans and Europeans believed that Asians had mystical powers, but then defined them as child-like for believing in the efficacy of mystical powers.
patterning the “Eastern mind.” The individual mind of an Asian person is then defined by a Swiss psychologist, which in many ways, represents a different form of colonialism than an occupation force. The rise of psychology, especially popular psychology, has roots within race sciences and discussions of biologically-determined Aryanism, which gave scientific credence to völkisch and other populist movements throughout the Yellow Peril.

Psychology placed the key to happiness firmly with the Self, not in a distant after-life, which contributed to Buddhism’s removal of supernatural elements and the psychologization of doctrines, especially during the supposed “Zen Boom” of the 1950s. However, it was in the 1920s through the 1940s when the Self of Asia came to be defined by psychological studies, which was combined with race sciences and eugenics to set out a deterministic racial view of the world, which many believed was being cleaved in two by a clash of civilizations between the barbarous, feminine, mystical, childish “East,” and the materialistic, masculine, rational “West.” Buddhism was thus simultaneously a religion of science and an ancient mystical psychology, while Asians were a barbarous and racially-inferior group defined by the “Eastern mind,” which represents the ambivalent relationship of romanticization and inferiority typical of many of the seeds being grown within the American religious landscape.

The Search for a Central Philosophy

In the literature review chapter of this work, I analyzed the previous literature of Buddhist Studies which normally comprises the historiography of academic writings. However, most works on the academic study of Buddhism, such as those by Donald S. Lopez, focus on
early theorists, such as Max Müller or Eugène Burnouf, with very little coverage of the 1910s-1940s. As Jin Y. Park argues in “Philosophizing and Power,” the power imbalance between Asian Nations and the United States was necessarily embedded in the forced encounter between Asian Buddhist thought and Western philosophy.\footnote{Jin Y. Park, “Philosophizing and Power: East-West Encounter in the Formation of Modern East Asian Buddhist Philosophy,” \textit{Philosophy East & West} 67, no. 3 (July 2017): 801.} According to Tweed, Buddhist Studies, as well as the larger cultural discussion, focused on explaining and expounding upon the ideal of \textit{nirvāṇa}.\footnote{Tweed, 1992, 1.} Scholars attempted to explain the final goal of the Buddhist religion, but generally portrayed it as outside of the limits of cultural acceptability and rational assessment, as scholars could not understand how millions of people considered the complete annihilation of the individual as an ultimate religious aim.\footnote{Guy Richard Welbon, \textit{Nirvāṇa and its Western Interpreters}, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), i.} Following the Victorian Era, academic analysis focused more heavily on the doctrines of \textit{anātman}, which scholars described as the central philosophy of Buddhism.\footnote{Tweed [1992, 1] describes the academic preoccupation with \textit{nirvāṇa} during the Victorian Era, while Murti, Rhys Davids, and others focus on the Self.} This is not to say that \textit{nirvāṇa} disappeared from the academic discussion, but that the broader tenor of the time, combined with the idea that Self may be the defining, and essentializing, characteristic of Buddhism, encouraged scholars to look more closely at the Self. In explaining the Buddhist understanding of a Self, scholars unwittingly helped to domesticate Buddhism within the cultural framework of America by creating a more appealing superior version of Buddhism with a Self.
Academics were searching for a true original Buddhism, which they believed lay underneath the layers of Asian accretions which had been added to the religion over the past millennia. Early Buddhist Studies focused mainly on cataloguing and translating the Pāli Tipiṭaka, as they assumed that these texts would get them closest to the opinions of the historical Buddha. Following the extraordinary output of the late 19th and early 20th century, scholars began to analyze Buddhism and Buddhist texts through the lens of philosophy. Scholars believed that the Buddha was first and foremost a philosopher, with religious ritualism and cultural accretions added later, therefore studying the thought of the Buddha would allow academics to bypass Asian religious additions and ascertain the true essence of Śākyamuni’s teaching.

According to John P. Jones, a Professor of Missions at the Kennedy School of Missions at Harvard, tensions between British colonizers and Indians were the result of two Aryan groups clashing; it was because both groups were born “of the sun,” meaning Aryans, that the “Aryan Brown” of India refused to succumb like those of other nations. The Journal of Race Development was a race sciences journal from 1910-1922, suggesting that science was proving the impossibility of the British colonial project. Even in 1918, nearly 30 years prior to the end of British colonialism in India, scientists were questioning the efficacy of colonialism more broadly; however, based on the cranial shape of colonized races, M. Hefner, a professor at Worcester Polytechnic, argued that colonialism was the only proven way to teach other races the

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European scholars would therefore need to occupy India in alternative ways. Academics attempted to identify the core essence of the Buddha’s philosophy, often through a combination of critical analysis and comparison to other philosophical systems. Where each scholar placed this essential core often had as much, or more, to do with their own positioning as historical fact. These broad comparisons and philosophical assumptions often led to misunderstandings, which ultimately reveal more about the position of scholars than Buddhism itself. For example, J.G. Jennings, a British academic who taught at Patna University in India in 1947, at the end of British occupation, edits Buddhist texts in order to remove the supposed “Hinduizing” accretions which corrupted the religion. Through the use of rough equivalencies, Buddhism could be removed from its historical roots, thus explaining Buddhism in comparison to its perceived corruption over the course of historical development. This meant that Buddhism was not really a religion in the first place, but instead a philosophy of life, or that it became a religion later due to negative corruption. Buddhism was either corrupt from the beginning or corrupted by the end. In either case, the religion is relegated to being a stepping stone within a lineage of recursive philosophy which leads ultimately to more rational “Western” understandings of philosophy or religion. Rather than viewing this decision as an editorial one, I argue that this decision displays more about Jennings’ position as a Caucasian European scholar and his view of Asians than what is initially seen.

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49 M. Heffner, “Does Colonization Pay?,” The Journal of Race Development 8, no. 3 (Jan. 1918): 365. Interestingly, Heffner concludes his article by saying that the only way to end colonialism without creating global anarchy would be the creation of a “union of states” which would function to teach other cultures about civilization by giving them a “share” in its success. His vision was realized in part two years later with the League of Nations, which the United States ultimately refused to join (despite being proposed by Woodrow Wilson), and much later in the United Nations (1945).

Buddhist Studies scholarship from 1899-1957 shifted focus to doctrinal understandings of the Self in Buddhism in relation to other religions, as well as against previous understandings of Buddhist anātman. Scholars argued that anātman represented the most important difference between Buddhism and “Hinduism,” and therefore Buddhologists’ presentation of the Self shifted during the course of the Yellow Peril. Global attitudes, Buddhist doctrinal understandings, and Buddhological presentation of doctrines were all shifting in relation to global wars, economic crises, and other factors. As displayed in the writings of Buddhologists during the Yellow Peril, Buddhism could often be used in order to further an author’s own preconceived notions, especially when Buddhism was combined with race sciences and the historical place of the Aryan. For instance, C.A.F. Rhys Davids argued that Buddhist monks became isolated and inconsequential, and therefore created anātman in order to obfuscate their own simple doctrines to create a situation where the laity felt they had to rely on the monks. She assumes that Asians are generally ignorant and gullible, while the Buddhist monks are inherently sneaky and disingenuous; this portrayal relates more closely to broader depictions of Asians during the Era of the Yellow Peril than it relays a nuance history.

51 George Grimm, ed. M Keller-Grimm and Max Hoppe, *The Doctrine of the Buddha: The Religion of Reason and Meditation*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1958/1926), 67. [This is an English translation produced in India. The original was written in German in 1926] Many scholars, such as Grimm, claimed that the Buddha adopted reincarnation and karma from "Hinduism" whole-heartedly, while others claimed that Buddhists added these aspects later to make Buddhism more appealing to the Indian masses. This distinction becomes important as the first is a mischaracterization of Buddhism and its distinctions from “Hinduism.” The Buddhist notion of karma is not the same as the Hindu, as Buddhism does not have an ātman. In the second argument, the suggestion is that Buddhism was corrupted (CAF Rhys Davids lays this corruption directly on Buddhaghosa).

Beginning especially in the 1920s, scholars throughout the Yellow Peril argued that Buddhist texts originally represented further chapters of the Upaniṣads. This argument claims that the original doctrines of the Buddha posited a permanent ātman, and it was later monkish scholasticism which removed the Self. Anti-Catholic thought was rampant in the United States, and parts of Europe, in the 1920s, as evidenced by the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the resulting anti-Catholic riots in South Bend, Indiana in May 1924. I would argue that multiple academics all citing the navel-gazing of narcissistic monks as the driving force of corruption in Buddhism has more to do with anti-clerical thought related to Catholicism than the historical developments of Buddhism.

Caroline Augusta Foley Rhys Davids (1857-1942) was the honorary secretary and later president of the Pāli Text Society and a noted academic at University College, London. During her early career, Rhys Davids writings show her agreement with her husband, T.W. Rhys Davids, who was a philologist and popularizer of many “original Buddhism” theories. By the 1930s, Mr. Rhys Davids and her son Arthur had died, and Caroline became interested in Theosophy and Spiritualism. It was also in the 1930s that she began writing on what would become her intellectual focus in the idea that original Buddhism did not have a doctrine of No-Self. According to C.A.F. Rhys Davids,


you may find that genuine Sākya more in what the Pīṭakas betray and have suffered to survive than in what they affirm as chief and fundamental. This happened because the Pīṭakas are the work of men removed from the Founder by centuries, not far short of five centuries when values were undergoing change.57

In *Gotama the Man*, Rhys Davids writes for the Buddha in the first person, referring to the *anātman* Buddha claims, “thus the positive word with which I could have helped man was taken from me and the negative word, which by itself makes my teaching worthless, is put forward as the most characteristic note in our philosophy.”58 The argument that a religious founder could be so disappointed in the outcome of that religion’s development is similar to the language used in anti-Catholic thought, which reinforces the need for a primitivist restoration movement. C.A.F. Rhys Davids, a rationalist British scholar, also argued that Buddhism was more Hindu in its beginning, and that it was corrupted by the *samgha*, in other words the very Asians who were meant to protect the great tradition. Buddhism becomes a metaphor for the larger colonial project in India, while also betraying an anti-Catholic bias common in the 1920s. Around 1930, race sciences had become firmly established as a breakthrough in modern science, and it was at this time that Rhys Davids went from arguing for a pristine Buddhism corrupted by Hindu outsiders to a Universalist Buddhism, corrupted by all Indians, Hindu and Buddhist.

Other scholars argued that it was the *samtāna*, or “Mindstream,” which represented the Buddhist Self, as this continuum could be theoretically passed from a dying being to a new

57 C.A.F. Rhys Davids, 1931, 339.

vessel during rebirth.\textsuperscript{59} The \textit{saṃtāna}, according to Louis de la Vallée Poussin (1869-1938), provides a persistent, albeit changing, Self which navigates the rounds of rebirth. Poussin was a Belgian academic trained at the University of Liège, and writing just after the German invasion of Belgium in 1914, which means he would be well acquainted with the rising \textit{völkisch} movements and the influences of Irrationalist and Naturalist philosophy which were popular in Germany.\textsuperscript{60} C.A.F. Rhys Davids argues that this Mindstream is proof that Buddhists were “dimly and crudely” grasping for what modern science already knows.\textsuperscript{61} In either case, Buddhists did not adequately understand the Self, or their own religion, but the final word on the issue rests with scholars and scientists. According to some, primitive Buddhism had a Self, and the Buddha taught the best way to realize the Upaniṣadic ideal of mokṣa, but Buddhists could not understand his teachings, so they reverted to a doctrine of “monkish gibberish” in order to convince the laity of the need for donations and ritual.\textsuperscript{62} George Grimm (1868-1945) argues \textit{anātman} is the late addition to Buddhism, because Buddhism was originally synonymous with “Hinduism” which is proven by the fact that rebirth and \textit{nirvāṇa}, which is extinction, necessarily rely upon the notion of a Self, and cannot function rationally without.\textsuperscript{63} If Buddhism had a Self, this would more

\textsuperscript{59} Louis De La Vallée Poussin, \textit{The Way to Nirvāṇa: Six Lectures on Ancient Buddhism as a Discipline of Salvation}, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1917), 30. Poussin uses the term Mindstream for \textit{saṃtāna}, a term which means the connection between the moment-to-moment arising and ceasing of a singular being. In other words, although we are different beings from moment to moment, the \textit{saṃtāna} is the connecting thread which allows beings to recognize themselves.

\textsuperscript{60} Welbon, 1968, 256.


\textsuperscript{63} Grimm, 1926, 7.
easily connect the Aryan religious founder to the commonly held beliefs regarding a soul in modern Europe. George Grimm was a German judge and Pāli scholar writing in the latter 1920s, which means he would have been very aware of the connection of Aryan Buddhism, with a Self, to the German Teutons. Could it be that the saṃtāna proved that Buddhism had a Self, and also provided the “mindstream” which explained the connection of European Aryans to the ancient Indian past? The saṃtāna may be the exact mystical connection between modern day and the ancient past for which völkisch movements were searching. Grimm planned a second volume for The Doctrine of the Buddha, but this was prevented by the unfavourable climate for academics in Germany following 1933.

Conversely, other scholars believed anātman was the original teaching of the Buddha, while other doctrines represented Asian corruption. J.G. Jennings argues that No-Self is the real teaching of Śākyamuni and karma and rebirth are later additions, which is proven by the story of the Buddha hesitating prior to beginning his teaching career, because if he wanted to teach a doctrine of karma and rebirth within ancient Hindu India, why would he hesitate? The point here is not to get into a long discussion regarding the finer points of Buddhist metaphysics in comparison to Hinduism, or how closely Buddhism may or may not mirror the arguments of the Upaniṣads, but it suffices to say that scholars of Buddhism asserted that millions of Buddhists have been totally wrong about their own religion for the past two millennia. The assertion that

64 Ibid, 1.
65 Ibid, 1.
66 Jennings, 1947, xxiv-xxvi. According to Sūtras, following the Buddha’s enlightenment, he did not want to teach his doctrine as he thought it would be too difficult to comprehend. Often, it is the high Hindu god Brahma who comes to implore the Buddha to teach humanity, or “those with little dust in their eyes.”
others are ignorant of their own religious tradition in comparison to scholars is a trope which was
also used against Catholics, such as Robert Orsi describes at a shrine to St. Jude in Chicago.\textsuperscript{67}
The assumption which is made, based on appeals to “common sense” and “logic,” is most often
that Buddhists themselves are wrong, and that some part of Buddhism must represent the later
addition of corruption.\textsuperscript{68} The disparaging of lived tradition, be it Buddhist, Catholic, or Muslim,
suggests that each religion has an essentialized core which can be known through scholarly study
or by comparison to Protestant Christianity or European Philosophy; this supposed universalism
removes the complexity of lived religious traditions and the translocative quality of religions
which are shifting and modifying across time and space.\textsuperscript{69}

**Buddhism, European Philosophy, and the Corruption of Yogācāra**

Many scholars throughout the Yellow Peril disparaged the Yogācāra as the ultimate
corruption of Buddhism.\textsuperscript{70} Why did academics have such disdain for the Yogācāra school?\textsuperscript{71}  
\textsuperscript{67} Robert A. Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women’s Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes*, (New

\textsuperscript{68} The arguments of 20th century academics seem rather circular here. Either early Buddhism had a Self,
in which case it was really “Hinduism” and it was only the later corruption of monks which mired the
religion into No-Self, or early Buddhism did not have a Self, was really an agnostic philosophy, and it
was later corrupted by Hinduization transforming it into a religion. Either way, Buddhism as it currently
stands is wrong.

\textsuperscript{69} Thomas A. Tweed, “Toward a Translocative History of Occult Buddhism: Flows and Confluences,
1881-1912,” *History of Religions* 54, no. 4 (May 2015): 423. Tweed argues in this, and other, articles that
the study of Buddhism in America must involve a wider perspective of global flows which moves across
time in order to show the changing nature of individuals and ideas in historical context.

\textsuperscript{70} Yogācāra is one of two main modes of thought in Mahāyāna Buddhism, with the other being
Mādhyamika. Yogācāra is also known as the “mind only” school, due to their belief in the ālayavijñāna,
or storehouse consciousness, which is the collective mind of all beings.

\textsuperscript{71} Murti, 1955, 106.
First, T.R.V. Murti claims that Asaṅga, one of the founders of the Yogācāra school, did not fully agree with what he was writing, and instead was attempting to found Tantric Buddhism. Tantra of all sorts was considered debasing by scholars, and was viewed as Hindu-Buddhism. In fact, scholars claimed that Yogācāra represented the completion of the process of “Hinduism’s” takeover of the once-great Buddhism. Furthermore, Yogācāra was “blamed” for the expanding Buddhist pantheon, as the school was viewed as producing such “degrading” characters as Amitābha. In other words, Yogācāra could be blamed for what scholars already viewed as the problem of corruption and debasement within Buddhist history. Scholarly disdain for Yogācāra may have also related to the fact that Metaphysical Buddhists were expressly Yogācārin, as can be seen in the Mission Statement of the Golden Lotus and was even made clear by H.P. Blavatsky herself. It is unclear whether Metaphysical Buddhists affinity for Yogācāra fuelled academic disdain, or vice versa, but this may explain the gap in scholarship where Metaphysical Buddhists have been traditionally understudied.

Academic disdain for Yogācāra was also influenced by social factors, as scholars portrayed Yogācāra as variously “Chinese,” “Hindu,” or simply as bad philosophy in comparison to European standards. Comparisons of Buddhist metaphysics and philosophy forced Buddhism into categories specifically designed by Western academics, and therefore reflected global power


dynamics by creating an imagined history which Asian nations only fit as peripheral actors and examples of bad religion. A. Berriedale Keith, a Scottish lawyer and Indologist, argues that as the Yogācāra school developed in China it became a form of idealistic negativism because the Chinese mind was prone to the imaginary and the evasion of “the heresy of existence.”  

Keith is writing during the first rumblings of the Chinese Communist Party (est. 1921), which may further characterize his negative assessment of China during the Yellow Peril. Edward Conze (1904-1979) argues that the negative influence of Yogācāra was a direct result of the Chinese mind being, “ill-equipped for grasping the sublimities of Buddhist thought,” which explains the need for additional divinities.  

Conze was an Anglo-German Sanskritist who became interested in Theosophy early in life before later joining the Communist Party in Germany to oppose Hitler, which likely influenced his views on Buddhist supernaturalism.  

During the Era of the Yellow Peril, many viewed the world as split between the Buddhist East and Christian West, and in American popular culture, many feared the “Asian horde” which would overtake the world. As such, China was viewed with great suspicion, as a barbarous nation of backwards idol-worship. By saying that Yogācāra was a form of philosophical negativism developed in China, academics were showing that the school was backwards and atheistic, reinforcing preconceived notions about the Chinese.

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76 A. Berriedale Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy in India and Ceylon*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 250. As Yogācāra is idealistic negativism according to Keith, all existence other than mind is a heresy.


How could the Yogācāra school be Chinese, while scholars also denigrated it for being Hindu? Scholars argued that the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas characteristic of the Yogācāra school represented the Hinduization of Buddhism, while the philosophically idealistic negativism of Yogācāra was a Chinese invention. Yogācāra could then simultaneously represent the worst aspects of “Hinduism,” with its vast pantheons which were compared to the Catholic choirs of angels, and the atheistic pessimism of the Chinese mind. In other words, Yogācāra became the repository of racialized assessments of cultures during a time of colonialism in both China and India. In Keith’s *Buddhist Philosophy*, he refers to Yogācāra practitioners not as Buddhists, but magicians, displaying the negative view which scholars took towards the school.79

Scholars also disparaged the Yogācāra school through comparison to Western philosophy. By the turn of the 20th century, philosophy in the United States and Europe had moved towards ideals of Pragmatism and Rationalism against Idealism. Scholars argued that the “Mind-Only” maxim of the Yogācāra was untenable to common sense, as the idea of a mind existing without permanent and knowable externalities was, “unthinkable…and [sic] absurd also, and any attempt to carry it out simply leads into difficulties; without parts there can be no whole, but it is impossible to describe any manner in which the whole can really be related to the parts, so that the entire conception must be laid aside.”80 Mahāyāna philosophy, especially Yogācāra, is actually somewhat different from Western Idealism as the Mind in Yogācāra arises on a moment to moment basis, thus not providing a fixed entity through which the world is imagined, such as in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. These types of nuances were lost within the broad

79 Keith, 1923, 251.

80 Ibid, 247. In other words, the suggestion that Mind exists, while the external world is impermanent and in constant flux is absurd, and the whole school should be done away with.
comparisons of Buddhist Studies academics. Scholars judged Yogācāra idealism against their own views of Western philosophy as naturally correct and in conjunction with preconceived social notions related to international power dynamics.

**Academic Studies of Buddhism in Post-Colonial Frames**

In the 1950s, World War II was over, and England had retreated from most of its colonial empire. This represented a time in which academics who were once under colonial rule, such as Indian scholars, could begin writing their own studies of Buddhism in light of the post-colonial world. These scholars often utilized the academic streams of thought which had been growing in the United States and Europe since 1900. T.R.V. Murti (1902-1986) was an Indian philosopher, translator, and an Advaita Vedāntist Hindu. He studied with Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who was a professor of philosophy at the University of Calcutta and the University of Oxford before eventually becoming the second president of India in 1952.³¹ Radhakrishnan wrote of the history of the world as having a “divine unity,” and a universalism which had the developments of “Hinduism” in India as its base.³² Murti studied Buddhism, searching for its essential core, which he could use to define the religion in relation “Hinduism.” Murti argues that the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism relies upon the Self, when he expressly claims, “the fundamental difference between Buddhism and the Upaniṣads seems to be about the metaphysical reality of an immutable substance, which is the true self of man…[and] is not a

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³² King, 1999, 128.
fundamental metaphysical difference the source of all other differences?" For Murti, an Indian Buddhist scholar, Buddhism could become the central defining quality of Indian civilization, which he, and others, believed was superior to European Philosophy and other forms of Asian Philosophy. This superior religion could then be claimed in relation to Advaita Vedānta Philosophy, in order to prove the social and cultural superiority of Indians following the end of British Colonialism.

Murti’s Buddhism was not the religion practiced by millions of Asians, but an essentialized core which was defined by its refined style of argumentation and philosophical thought. According to Murti’s view of Advaita Vedānta philosophy, Buddhism and Madhyamaka represented the genius of the Indian religious mind, as they are offshoots of the singular Hindu religion, rather than Buddhism being its own tradition. Often, the demarcation between Buddhism and Hinduism was viewed as a difference in degree, rather than one of kind. Murti is writing nearly eight years after the end of British Rule, which means a defining characteristic for a religion which he believed proved the superiority of the Indian religious mind in relation to the rest of the world, especially English Christianity, would be extremely useful. The connection between Buddhism and “Hinduism,” in the fashion portrayed by scholars during the Yellow Peril, was often imagined, as scholars posited a history of recursive philosophy which could be utilized within global colonial frameworks and the history of European universalism.

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84 Ibid, xxiv.
85 The theory is that all religions are emanations of one singular unity, therefore Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism are all representations of “Hinduism,” broadly defined. This view is fairly common, especially in post-colonial India, and is eventually used by Hindutva reformers [Beyer, 2006, 190].
A number of scholars argued that Buddhism had been mistakenly described as a separate religion and in fact, Buddhism was really just a branch of “Hinduism.” In his book, Jennings expressly claims that all “Hindu-related” passages in Buddhist texts were removed, because they represent the obvious degradation of Buddhism. Writing in the mid- to late-1940s, in the twilight of British rule, Jennings was likely not in a favourable position to “Hinduism” generally, and by arguing that Buddhism was really a closeted Advaita Vedānta, he could show that Buddhism was in many ways corrupted from its very beginnings in the Indian religious mind; according to Jennings, “Gotama rejected the personal deities of Hinduism…to the minds of his later followers, however, the gods and spirits of India, Hindu or otherwise, once more appealed,” which began the degradation of Buddhism. Jennings argued that the only original teaching of the historical Buddha was No-Self, while karma, rebirth, and heavens were later “Hinduizing” additions. In an expressly emic, or polemic, imagined history, Jennings argues that it was most likely the Buddha’s cousin, Devadatta, who created the Hinduized form of Buddhism which we know today. Jennings asserts that karma must be a collective process, rather than an individual

86 Jennings, 1947, xxiv.

87 Jennings, 1947, lxi.

88 Ibid, xxiv. Throughout his text, Jennings translates the original texts of Buddhism, but he relegates all passages regarding rebirth, karma, or Hindu gods to the footnotes. He claims that this is how the original texts would have appeared, despite having no historical basis for this assertion. Jennings imagined version of historical Buddhism is automatically assumed to be more correct.

89 Ibid, lix. Devadatta, the Buddha’s cousin, is generally portrayed as the “bad seed” within Buddhism. In various tales, Devadatta tries to murder the Buddha, he sews the seeds of discontent which result in the first schism of the Samgha, and ends up in hell. Johnathan A. Silk wrote Riven by Lust: Incest and Schism in Indian Buddhist Legend and Historiography, which explains how Devadatta became the symbol for evil (and sometimes forgiveness) within early Buddhist legends. The suggestion that Buddhism in its present form was the creation of Devadatta, which is made by Jennings, suggests that modern Buddhism is corrupted from its very base, as the real Buddha had little involvement in what we know today. For a very simplistic comparison, this would be the equivalent of saying that Judas Iscariot created what we now call Christianity today.
one because the Buddha taught the doctrine of \textit{anātman}, and thus karma represents a late addition to Buddhism.\footnote{As James P. McDermott argues in “Is there group Karma in Theravāda Buddhism?” (1976), the idea of collective karma is repudiated in Buddhist texts. However, some movements, such as Thich Nhat Hanh’s Engaged Buddhism have attempted to deal with ideas of collective karma during the 20th century. This may be due to scholarly assertions about the subject, such as we find in Jennings, or perhaps due to more social factors such as Japanese involvement in World War II or the experience of Vietnam.} In order to explain the workings of karma as collective, early scholars asserted that the Buddha must have believed in a “fundamental unity of all life and spirit… [therefore] from the very tenets of Buddhism it is evident that the theories of the Vedānta had reached their full development.”\footnote{Jennings, 1947, xxv.} In other words, Buddhism was not a new religion, but the final development of the Upaniṣads, and the argument that Buddhism must believe in a singular essence, or God, was proof of that fact.

Furthermore, Jennings argues that this “Universal Soul (\textit{Param-ātman}), and the need of the individual ego to attain re-absorption therein,” was taught to the Buddha by Ārāḍa Kālāma and Udraka Rāmaputra, the two ascetics who the Buddha studied with prior to his enlightenment, thus making the doctrinal basis of Buddhism thoroughly Hindu.\footnote{Ibid, lxvi.} Separating original Buddhism from the later Hinduized Buddhism is inherently a rabbit-hole as the entire teaching of Buddhism rests upon No-Self; for instance, Jennings argues that the structure of dependent origination falls apart, as everything associated with rebirth represents a later Hinduization.\footnote{Ibid, lxix. This means removing links ten, eleven, and twelve from the twelve-link chain.} Murti and Jennings are making almost the exact same argument; the difference between “Hinduism” and Buddhism relies entirely on the nature of the Self, that Buddhism has undergone periods of Hinduization, which means the religion is more characteristically “Indian” than a different religion, and that
Buddhism and “Hinduism” therefore represent one underlying unity. For Murti, a Vedāntist intellectual writing after British occupation, these factors show the genius of the Indian mind and the superiority of India’s religious tradition, while for Jennings, an English academic in the twilight of British colonial power, these same factors show that Buddhism is simply a polluted form of an already corrupt “Hinduism,” and the result of the negative collective karma of Indians. The romanticized Buddhism of the British, once an Aryan tradition, was now just another bastardized Hinduism following the end of the colonial era.

Murti argued that the Mādhyamika system represented the central philosophy of Buddhism, which is in contrast to previous scholars who asserted that the Mādhyamika represented the religion’s final fall into atheism. According to scholars such as Murti, Buddhism is not defined by the beliefs and practices of the religion which developed later, but the form of intense critical analysis which is typified by Mādhyamika philosophy.94 Scholars argued that it was this critical analysis which led to No-Self, which they define as the categorization of all that which is not the ātman rather than an absence of a personal entity. Critical analysis represents a mode of thought rather than a belief system, and it was this style of thinking which the Buddha meant to teach humanity, rather than any ritual practices. Despite the fact that the Mādhyamika system of Nāgārjuna was an historically later development of Buddhism, scholars believed that Buddhism was actually a system of dialectical philosophy rather than a religion.

Why did scholars in the early 20th century shift to argue that Mādhyamika was the central philosophy of Buddhism? The general characterization of early Buddhist Studies scholarship is that academics focused more heavily upon Theravāda Buddhism and attempted to

sift through that lineage in order to find the true Buddhism underneath, with the Mahāyāna less valued, or for some, representing a corruption of original teachings. According to Murti, Buddhism is so vast and complex, that it is necessary to delineate a central philosophy from which all others forms of the religion can be judged. Murti begins his text by outright stating that he is searching for a recursive philosophy of mankind, and it is actually the Mādhyamika which provides this as he argues that this system provides a form of religious devotion through dialectical criticism which influenced not only “Hinduism,” but all later philosophical thought. Furthermore, scholars at the time used the work of William James to argue that the Mādhyamika system represented a superior form of religion than original Buddhism. In fact, Murti creates his own hierarchization of Buddhist history which sounds strikingly similar to the Five Periods teaching of the Tendai school when he claims that Buddhism was first realistic and pluralistic (Theravāda), then found Absolutism (Mādhyamika), and finally Idealism (Yogācāra), with the first and third developments being provisional teachings for those of lesser intellect while Mādhyamika Absolutism is the most direct.

Mādhyamika is portrayed as the central philosophy of Buddhism for a number of reasons, both philosophical and social. First, Mādhyamika is portrayed as Absolutism, a philosophical system most associated with Hegel which claims that the only way a being, or individual, can function in the world is through their relationship to a central entity, or a form of philosophical

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95 Ibid, ix.

96 Ibid, ix. William James creates a hierarchy of religious experience: 1. Worship of the Absolute 2. Personal God 3. Incarnations (such as Buddha) 4. Ancestors, spirits, etc… 5. Worship of petty forces and spirits. This would mean that original Buddhism falls into category three while Mādhyamika is category one.

97 Ibid, 4.
monism. The association of Mādhyamika with Absolutism serves a number of purposes; first is the idea that Buddhism has a god and is actually monotheistic or monistic, second is the suggestion that Buddhism must have a Self, the third purpose is the suggestion that Buddhism and science are comparable as monism was viewed as scientific at the time, and finally the connection of Buddhism and India to a lineage of European philosophy. For Murti, this means that the entire development of world religious history could be traced to the genius of the “Indian mind.” So, if Mādhyamika is Absolutism then the universe cannot be emptiness as there must be something at the centre of this monistic projection of the universe, which creates a notion of god and Self. In fact, Murti claims, without caveat and with description closer to the Hindu Trimurti, that in Mahāyāna Sūtras the Buddha is the “Supreme God,” with Dharmakāya as the Buddhist “Godhead.”

Monism was considered a new form of philosophical science in the early 20th century, as will be seen in the work of Paul Carus in Chapter Four. By positioning Mādhyamika as the defining philosophy of Buddhism, scholars were able to bring together a number of disparate intellectual threads in order to propose an imagined history which unified preconceived beliefs about the development of world religions.

Portraying Mādhyamika as the essence of Buddhism allowed scholars to argue that Buddhism had a god and a soul because it was seen as a form of ur-Absolutist philosophy, which could then tie Western intellectual development to an imagined form of universal recursive religion. As Richard King argues, India was seen as the cradle of all civilization as far back as the late-19th century, and the Mādhyamika focus continues the narrative that the “East” is

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98 Ibid, 286. This assertion is repeated by Metaphysical Buddhists in The Golden Lotus, see Chapter 5, fn. 37. The use of broad comparison, without nuance, represents the recursive philosophy utilized by scholars and the religious alike.
inherently spiritual while also placing Western philosophy as the capstone of humankind’s intellectual thought. In other words, the imagined form of Mādhyamika serves as a “missing link” of sorts for a European Universalist genealogy of intellectual, philosophical, and religious development. This assertion can be made as long as scholars reread Mādhyamika texts “properly” with their own biases, such as Mādhyamika being synonymous with Absolutism. In suggesting that original Buddhism was “soul-denying” and “pluralistic” (polytheistic), while Mādhyamika was Absolutist, Buddhism can now fit within the evolutionary trajectory of religious traditions whereby humankind develops towards a Monotheistic relationship with the absolute. For an Advaita Vedāntist Hindu writing just after the end of British colonial rule, this monistic relationship of all religions to a singular absolute is the universalism which proves the superiority of the Indian religious mind and its contribution to human history. Indians were not the debased pinnacle of corruption, but the very fount from which human knowledge and spirituality sprung. Murti argues that it was the inherent connection of the Self of the Buddha, having emanated forth from the Dharmakāya, to the “Supreme Godhead” which allows him to intuit Truth, rather than the Theravāda portrayal of supra-human man overcoming and removing fetters through meditation and countless rebirths in order to attain nirvāṇa. This portrays the Buddha as the prophet of a singular god, coming to the earth as a semi-divine being in order to reveal a cosmic truth to the world, or far more similar to the story of Jesus Christ as religious founder, rather than the position of a buddha within an aeons-long chain.

99 King, 1999, 1.

100 Murti, 1955, 286.
This description of a Monotheistic Buddhist doctrine would also have a number of consequences for the nature of the Buddhist path, as the Buddha’s ātman-connection to the Dharmakāya would place him as a mediator providing salvation to sentient beings, rather than a teacher pointing to a path for others to follow by their own merit. The portrayal of the Buddha as a mediator between a supreme godhead and humanity fits Buddhism within preconceived notions regarding the beginnings and evolutionary development of religions which were considered fact by academics at the time. These arguments further portray Buddhism as a developing branch of “Hinduism,” and fit the religion within a stream of recursive philosophy which has evolved from earliest humanity up to present religious beliefs. This argument also proves that Western philosophy represents the final superiority of world thought, as Hegel finishes the Absolutist strand of Nāgārjuna’s development. Mādhyamika as the central philosophy of Buddhism allows scholars to reimagine history in Indian infancy up through modern Europe.

The second major reason for portraying Mādhyamika as the essence of Buddhism is social, as Buddhism could be portrayed as a “good religion” for audiences in the United States. Throughout the Era of the Yellow Peril, many intellectuals believed the world to be split between two sides, Christian and Buddhist, West and East, and a fear of Asian hordes and Buddhism was commonplace. This idea will be discussed further when dealing with popular sources, but academic claims that the essence of Buddhism is Absolutism, and that the religion had a god and soul, would help to alleviate fears about an oncoming clash of civilizations. Defining the singular essence of Buddhism allowed academics to present the religion as it “ought” to be in its purest

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101 Ibid, 287. If the Buddha was indeed the mediator of Nirvāṇa, would this not take away the possibility of Nirvāṇa for the rest of us? Or, at the very least, remove any efficacy for meditation and self-effort?
form, while also asserting that millions of Asian Buddhists did not know their own religion. The academic definition became “real” Buddhism, and all other forms represented the corruption of Asian culture. This may also explain why some scholars argued that Buddhism was originally not a religion at all, as Buddhism was viewed as Christianity’s only true competition. The writings of European and Asian academics engaged a process of imagined history oscillating between romanticization and rejection as they attempt to show that Buddhism is a Universal religion which either represents the Indian religious genius, or displays its corrupting influence.

Buddha was, and often still is, portrayed philosophically as a proto-Stoic, before the Greeks officially created this category. Like the Stoics, scholars viewed the Dharma as primarily social, which is what differentiated the Buddha’s teachings from “Hinduism.” Stoicism posits an impermanent universe with a reasoning substance, God or nature, as a unifying principle; it is this principle which allows humanity to know or judge through our innate capacity to reason. Buddhist Studies scholars like Murti and CAF Rhys Davids argued that Buddhism must also contain a singular unifying One, god or soul. The connection of the Buddha to the Greeks continues the Aryan myth. Similarly, Buddhism must not actually believe in the doctrine of anātman as it has been presented, because this goes against man’s logic and reason. Defining the singular essence of Buddhism allowed scholars to control the “real” doctrines of

102 Jennings, 1947, lxix.


104 Rhys Davids, 1903, 588.
This essentialization of Buddhism to find a singular “core” is also described in Almond, 1988, 7.

Buddhism, which was then combined with race science explanations of human development in order to create an explanatory narrative with supposed Aryan races at the centre of this development, while the Asian races only corrupted the Dharma by transforming it into idol-worshipping devotionalism. For Indians like Murti, positing the Buddha at the basis of the development of human history meant positioning themselves at that beginning in contradistinction to years of perceived embarrassment suffered at the hands of the British. For Murti, positioning Indians at the beginning of human development was a counter to years of colonialism, but for Europeans, they already knew that they, as Aryans, were at the centre of human development. This meant that Buddhism was already viewed favourably at the beginning, and therefore the metric by which Buddhism should be judged, lay at its historical end.
Popular Culture during the Era of the Yellow Peril

In this section, I will analyze popular culture writings on Buddhism from 1899-1957 in order to show the general public perception of Buddhism and its place as the religion of Asia, in opposition to the Christian “West.” One can also see the ways in which academic writings from the 19th century and during the Yellow Peril made their way into the popular discourse, including the theme of a corrupted Buddhism. My aim in this section is to provide a general overview of the tenor of the time from 1899-1957, including a developing focus on the Self which was coupled with race sciences and eugenics throughout the Yellow Peril. I will then argue that pop culture writers presented Buddhism as pessimistic, atheistic, and ushering in the end of Christianity, all of which contributed to the larger discussion of the oncoming clash of civilizations. News coverage of Buddhism and its history in Asia is combined with academic studies to create a national zeitgeist of fear of Asians and a dread of oncoming social catastrophe.

During the Yellow Peril, American culture was permeated by feelings of pessimism and dread, due in large part to two World Wars and the Great Depression. This represents a marked difference from the Victorian Era, which was characterized by optimism and activism. American culture adapted to this pessimism and dread through newfound commitments to science, especially race sciences, and an epistemological shift towards the Self and egoism. These changing views created an interesting space for Buddhists, as they attempted to bring a

106 Tweed, 1992, 133. Like Tweed’s characterization of the Victorian Era, this is a broad generalization of a tenor which I have witnessed throughout 1899-1957, which is not to say that these years were completely defined by pessimism and dread. However, I would point out that even in decades like “the Roaring 20’s,” race sciences and eugenics were popularized, which for some represented an optimism about humanity’s future through science, while for others, these scientific developments produced a pessimism and dread about the future relations of two halves of a supposed clash of civilizations.
religion of No-Self into a culture which was shifting towards egoism and was attempting to explain America’s place in history through the use of imagined history and Universalist ideals. This tension forged new presentations of Buddhism which eventually helped to create “Buddhism in the United States” as a separate entity or object of study. In other words, it was this very tension in cultural and intellectual history which allowed Buddhists to create lasting spaces within the American religious landscape.

Following the publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, academics such as Herbert Spencer began employing the biological natural selection of Darwin within the social realm as a way to explain the development of different races and cultures throughout history. By showing the origins and genealogies of human groups, race sciences could “explain” the entire course of human history, supposedly proving that the current state of global politics was biologically predetermined. Furthermore, race sciences could explain the need for programs such as Colonialism whereby the most “scientifically successful” race went to “help” the “lower races.”

Therefore, the search for origins helped to explain the present and to hypothesize the future. For instance, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), the famed biologist and anthropologist, described the sociocultural law of three stages whereby a society moved from their most primitive fetishism (worshipping inanimate objects) to polytheism to monotheism. One important example of this cultural shift is evidenced in the book *Might is Right*, by Ragnar Mike Hawkins. Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.

Hawkins, 1997, 82. Buddhism was often described as a religion of idol worship, whereby adherents worshipped stone statues as their god. See Chapter One, fn. 15. Theories such as this were employed by multiple disciplines, including Religious Studies (Edward Burnett Tylor and James George Frazer), and confirmed by the science of the day.
Redbeard. The book advocates for a form of psychological hedonism whereby only individual power is viewed as inherently good, thus calling into question other forms of morality and altruism. *Might is Right*, like the name suggests, is a rather shocking text, often racist and misogynistic, and generally promoting violence as the way to solve human problems. However, during the early phase of the Yellow Peril and the beginnings of race sciences, *Might is Right* found an audience with those who feared the coming onslaught of non-White races rising up to gain power. Although written during the Victorian Era, which has been characterized as a time of optimism, *Might is Right* represents a shifting culture beginning to fear an Asian “other” and support race sciences, leading to the book’s success following the Boxer Rebellion in 1899. In many ways, the text reads as a warning against impending globalism, as Redbeard writes, “if the all-conquering race to which we belong, is not to irretrievably dwindle into multitudinous nothingness, (like the inferior herds it has outdistanced or enslaved) then it is essential that the Semitic spider webs (so astutely woven for ages into the brains of our chiefs) be remorselessly torn out by the very roots, even though the tearing out process be both painful and bloody.”

This view of race, and the place of Caucasians within the world, was common in American society during the Yellow Peril.

According to many scientists in the Era of the Yellow Peril, one of the most influential developments in science was the rise of race sciences and eugenics. Many within the scientific

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109 Ragnar Redbeard, *Might is Right, or The Survival of the Fittest*, (Chicago: Auditorium Press, 1890), 1. The author’s name is a pseudonym.

110 Redbeard, 1890, 7.

community believed that evolutionary biology could explain the development of human races; this “science” became popularized through pseudo-scientific tracts and fictitious depictions of racial stereotypes. Race was a recently constructed categorization, as scientists separated human populations by phenotype, which was then combined with other sciences to explain racial differences and social-evolutionary trajectories. This erroneous positing of social characteristics and development from the predetermined science of race was considered the most progressive science of the day. The rush to reify science as essentialized truth helps to explain why the United States underwent its own “eugenics craze” during the Progressive Era, reaching its zenith in 1927 when states began legislating eugenic sterilization laws for “unfit” citizens.

The eugenics movement was en vogue amongst American intellectuals. Sir Francis Galton, a British polymath and cousin of Charles Darwin, is often credited with the creation of eugenics, or a “brief word to express the science of improving stock.” The eugenics movement argued that individual traits deemed negative for society could be eradicated by using biological evolutionary models, or that characteristics thought to be bad could be removed from human culture through the use of selective breeding practices.

Eugenics was not merely an intellectual abstraction, but influenced social policy and the state. The 1927 Supreme Court case, Buck v. Bell (274 U.S. 200) represents the most stark

112 Tchen and Yeats, 2014, 280. For example, the 1939 “pulp” magazine “Tomorrow,” which featured a Japanese soldier on the front cover with the words, “will your children walk in chains as slaves of the Yellow Horde?” [Arthur Leo Zagat, “Tomorrow,” Argosy Weekly (May 27 1939): 1-10]


example of the use of eugenics in American history. Carrie Buck was a poor girl in Virginia when she became pregnant at age sixteen. Virginia enacted a eugenic sterilization law in 1924 based on the idea that social defects like criminality and poverty were passed down genetically. As Buck’s poverty was evidence that she was a “moral degenerate,” her child born out of wedlock was categorized as “below average” in infancy. Therefore, she underwent forced sterilization at the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. The case was presented to the United States Supreme Court, with former president, Chief Justice, and active member of the national eugenics movement William Howard Taft presiding. Buck was sterilized by court decision. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote the majority opinion. In his infamous brief, Holmes wrote that Buck should be sterilized, “for the protection of the state,” before ending with the social lament that, “three generations of imbeciles are enough.” Major US newspapers applauded the ruling and over the next decade, more than a dozen states added eugenic sterilization laws.

The Yellow Peril represents an ambivalent relationship of romanticization with the “mystical East,” and fear of a barbarous “eugenic apocalypse” perpetuated by racially inferior peoples. Christian von Ehrenfels, an Austrian philosopher and one of the founders of Gestalt Psychology, believed that “East” and “West” were engaged in a Darwinian struggle for global superiority, and claimed that the militarily and economically advanced Japanese would mate with

116 Lombardo, 2008, x.

117 Ibid, x.

118 Ibid, xii. William Howard Taft and Oliver Wendell Holmes were both Unitarians, suggesting they believed that eugenics and race sciences represented a modernist approach to improving the future, rather than a backwards-looking protection of the past. Eugenics and race sciences could successfully function for both groups, as it could be used as a justification for racism and the protection of the nation, or a justification for the removal of supposedly-lesser elements to create a better future [William Howard Taft, “The Religious Convictions of an American Citizen,” American Unitarian Conference, posted 2003, accessed 6 March 2017, www.americanunitarian.org/taftconvictions.htm].
the hyper-sexualized Chinese in order to create a race of super soldiers capable of invading the United States.\textsuperscript{119} Throughout the Yellow Peril, Chinese people were viewed as hyper-sexualized due to their high population and popular depictions of Asians, especially women, as sexual tempters, combined with more widespread fears of miscegenation.\textsuperscript{120} Although anti-miscegenation amendments had been proposed in congress following the end of the Civil War and slavery in the 1870s, national laws were never passed; however, between 1913 and 1948, 30 of 48 states passed anti-miscegenation laws.\textsuperscript{121}

The fear of miscegenation and the supposed “eugenic apocalypse” influenced the Immigration Act of 1924 and the National Origins Formula, which numerically limited the number of Asians allowed into the United States. Race sciences influenced American international policy, as laws were enacted based on what was considered the most advanced thinking of the day. The Immigration Act of 1924, including the National Origins Act and Asian Exclusion Act, which were expressly for the purpose “to preserve the ideal of American homogeneity,” were signed by President Calvin Coolidge.\textsuperscript{122} The Act encountered very little opposition in Congress, with strong public support coming from the scientific community and the American Federation of Labor. The Immigration Act quotas effectively cut Asian immigration until they were repealed in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

\textsuperscript{119} Tchen and Yeats, 2014, 5.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 6.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, 274-275.
Race sciences and eugenics influenced popular culture in the 1920s. Lothrop Stoddard was a Harvard-trained historian, political writer, and eugenicist. Stoddard wrote *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* in 1920, which enjoyed great popularity and was referenced in *The Great Gatsby*.\(^{123}\) According to Stoddard, the superiority of the white race was the culmination of thousands of years of evolution, which was therefore biologically predetermined in modern times. Stoddard argued the white race was being threatened by the increasing number of births and immigration from the “hordes,” or “colored” races.\(^{124}\) The “horde” motif can be seen in many popular sources between the 1920s and 1940s, such as “The Marching Chinese” poster from Ripley’s Believe it or Not! in 1929, which claimed that if “all the Chinese in the world were to march 4 abreast past a given point, they would NEVER finish passing though they marched forever and ever.”\(^{125}\)

In the 1920s, industrialists were revered members of society. Henry Ford’s personal newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent*, published a series chronicling the supposed conspiracies of the world’s Jewish population.\(^{126}\) The articles were used to publish *The International Jew: The World’s Problem*, a four-volume series. Popular culture creates and reflects national social

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\(^{123}\) In chapter 1 of *The Great Gatsby*, Tom Buchanan says he is reading *The Rise of the Colored Empires* by “Goddard.” Tom claims, “well, it’s a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don’t look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged. It’s all scientific stuff; it’s been proved.”

\(^{124}\) Stoddard, 1920, 8.

\(^{125}\) Tchen and Yeats, 2014, 254. The same marching, faceless horde motif can be seen in the famous “Waiting for a Signal from Home…” cartoon of Dr. Seuss which appeared in a San Diego newspaper on 13 February 1942 [Tchen and Yeats, 2014, 255.]

consciousness, and race sciences were ubiquitous amongst intellectuals, thus creating a eugenics fad.

The Ku Klux Klan underwent a major resurgence beginning around 1915, which would have an impact on American culture throughout the early 20th century.\textsuperscript{127} By 1925, the Klan had thousands of members across the United States, and impacted politics, as the Indiana state legislature of 1925 became known as the “Klan legislature” due to Klan presence and policy influence.\textsuperscript{128} In fact, Kelly J. Baker attributes the eventual waning of popularity for the Klan to their own success, as the Klan actively promoted the Immigration Act of 1924 and the Asian Exclusion Act.\textsuperscript{129} The Klan, like many other powerful figures in the early 20th century, lamented the loss of nationalism, Protestantism, and the increasing number of ethnically diverse individuals present in the United States. The Klan, Stoddard, and others who shared the view of an oncoming “eugenic apocalypse” represented, “self-proclaimed guardians [who] sought to preserve an older, moral, and political order and to save an imperilled America from alien immigrants, foreign ideological systems, and interlopers in our midst.”\textsuperscript{130} Meanwhile, others believed that eugenic sciences meant the future development of an advanced form of civilization through selective breeding and scientific practices. The eugenics movement and race sciences represented a return to a past where national and racial purity were upheld for some, while for others, race sciences represented a utopian future where societies ills could be slowly removed.

\textsuperscript{127} Baker, 2011, 1.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid, 227.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid, 229-231.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, 235. Even today, many Ku Klux Klan websites claim that Calvin Coolidge was secretly a member of the organization, although there is no historical evidence backing this claim.
via the collective gene pool. The individual Self was seen as representing the corporate, or
national, “Self” and vice-versa, in this case resulting in a nationalistic focus on purity from
outsiders and a clash of civilizations.

By the 1930s and 1940s, American attitudes regarding the Self were beginning to shift,
especially in relation to the collectivism perceived in Communism and Asian society. Ayn Rand
was a Russian Jew who had moved to the United States after her parents experienced
discrimination. This led to her philosophy of Capitalism as a moral good, and a focus on the
individual ego as the last bastion of this morality against the immorality of socialism. The
philosophy, and literature, created by Ayn Rand has had a lasting impact on the culture of the
United States, proven by the fact that in 2008 her book sales topped eight hundred thousand, an
impressive number for books which are over fifty years old.\textsuperscript{131} Rand argued that the Self, and
therefore selfishness, was a virtue rather than a sin, claiming, “in the popular usage ‘selfishness’
is a synonym of evil...[Y]et the exact meaning and dictionary definition of the word selfishness
is: concern with one’s own interests.”\textsuperscript{132} Rand argues throughout her literary corpus that humans
should be selfish, as altruism in all forms is unnatural and promotes dependence and torpor. Her
philosophy has been very influential amongst conservatives and businesspeople since her first
book, \textit{We the Living}, published in 1936.\textsuperscript{133}

University Press, 2009), 2. Burns suggests that Rand’s book sales went up following the election of
Barack Obama. Rand’s books are especially successful in more conservative-leaning circles, including
Libertarians, Objectivists, and certain parts of the Republican Party, such as Congressman Rand Paul (R-KY)
[Steven Nelson, “Rand Paul Wasn’t Named After Ayn Rand, Dad Confirms,” \textit{US News}, August 23,
rand-paul-wasnt-named-after-ayn-rand-dad-confirms}].


\textsuperscript{133} Ayn Rand, \textit{We the Living}, (London: Macmillan Publishing, 1936).
There can be no doubt that American thought and culture affected change in Buddhist doctrine, presentation, and practice, but popular sources such as local newspapers and national magazines covering Buddhism display the ways in which Buddhism impacted the United States. In this section, I will use popular media sources from across America, both nationally and locally, which will show the broader cultural understandings of Buddhism from 1899-1957. Popular coverage of Buddhism shows misunderstandings of the religion, while also suggesting that some currents of thought which I have discussed previously were beginning to cross over into the majority population. In analyzing Buddhism, writers often divulge preconceived notions about religions and cultures, which reflected political and economic fears common during the Era of the Yellow Peril. Popular writers saw in Buddhism an antithesis of American Christianity, or more likely a perceived "West," creating an ambivalent position as Buddhism was simultaneously a rational alternative to Christianity and the worldview which may bring about the destruction of the world. Buddhism was a recursive philosophy of science and contemplation, as well as the religion of misery, stupefying the Asian populace into a nihilistic malaise. Buddhism represented the opposing half of a world which was seen as cleaved in two.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{134} "What is Buddhism?" \textit{The True Republican}, 13 October 1926, (Sycamore, IL), 3.

\textsuperscript{135} Prior to the Cold War and the “Clash of Civilizations,” Buddhism was the atheistic menace which retarded adherents into being mindless and violent slaves.
Buddhism was imagined as a recursive philosophy, a “mind culture” which predated conceptions of religion as devotionalism. The description of Buddhism in popular sources is reflective of academic sources, as even Daniel Pratt Baldwin from *The Indianapolis Journal* claims, “Buddhism is a badly deteriorated religion. Although there is no warrant whatever for it in his gospel, in the progress of 2,500 years image worship of the grossest kind has fastened itself upon this delightful system.” Popular sources across the United States agreed that Buddhism was a once great religion, corrupted over time by various forces which made the religion into a morass of “absurd dogmas” and “very hostile sects.” Dr. W. S. Marquis makes the connection of Buddhism and recursive philosophy the most plain, as he compares the philosophies of “Socrates, Plato, Epictetus, Confuscious, Marcus Aurelius…[Buddha], [Muhammed], and [Zoroaster]” before explaining that each of these characters failed in their goal to spiritually regenerate their “race,” while Jesus of Nazareth was able to preach to all “races.” The factor which separates these great thinkers of world history rests upon race, rather than culture, economics, or other factors, as the other religious founders are then blamed for “opium, foot-binding, widow burning, infanticide,” and any other number of perceived societal ills. According to popular sources, Buddhism was a once-great philosophy overtaken by the

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136 F.S. Weaver, “Understanding,” *Blue-grass Blade*, 6 March 1910, (Lexington, KY), 4. The idea that Buddhism as a “mind culture” predates Buddhism as a religion is still very prevalent today amongst the Vipassanā Movement (see Wilson, *Mindful America*, 43-44).


138 Baldwin, 1900, 3.


140 Marquis, 1910, 6.
racially inferior and moulded into a religion of idol-worship and despair. However, unlike academics who were studying Buddhism for the sake of knowledge advancement, why would newspapers from across the United States be so concerned with Buddhism in the first place?

The recursive philosophy of Buddhism was something to be admired, a rational system of mental fitness which shared affinities with modern science, while the Buddhism of today was something to be feared, a dark cloud hanging over half the world’s population. The number of Buddhists reported in newspapers was astronomical, with Buddhism said to represent anywhere between ten and twenty percent of the total population globally.\(^{141}\) If newspapers in America were attempting to explain Buddhism for their uninitiated readership, why would their population estimates be so drastically incorrect? One reason may be that the United States was less than a decade-removed from the Boxer Rebellion, during which Japan fought on the side of the United States against the sexually insatiable Chinese.\(^{142}\) The total population was drastically overestimated because of fears of China’s population and the oncoming clash of civilizations which they represented. Another article from 1906 describes the “poverty and squalor” of Burma, which has “nowhere the comfort and refinement which are general in the United States,”

\(^{141}\) Frank G. Carpenter, “Ashes of Buddha,” *El Paso Herald*, 21 May 1910 (El Paso, TX), 22. Tweed also discusses this issue in *The American Encounter with Buddhism*. In 1910, the population of earth was estimated around 1.5 billion, with Buddhism claiming anywhere between 1.5 million and 3.5 million adherents, according to American media sources [Population estimate from, “World Population: Historical Estimates of World Population,” *US Census Bureau*, accessed 6 March, 2017, https://www.census.gov/population/international/data/worldpop/table_history.php] [Range of Buddhist population from Carpenter, 1910, 22, and Marquis, 1910, 6]. A different source argues that Buddhists number 500 million, or roughly 50% of the global total [“Burma, Stronghold of Buddhism,” *The Salt Lake Herald*, 27 May 1906 (Salt Lake City, UT), Section Two, 5]\(^{11}\) In 2016, the world population is estimated at 7.3 billion, with approximately 7% (500 million) Buddhists [Willard G. Oxtoby & Alan F. Segal, eds., *A Concise Introduction to World Religions, 2nd ed.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 143; 376]. To give a correlation, today the world Christian population (the biggest religion) represents roughly 14%. Given the increased population of Buddhist countries between 1900 and 2000, this suggests that estimates of Buddhists in the early 20th century were wildly inaccurate.

\(^{142}\) Tchen and Yeats, 2014, 260-261.
a fact which is due to the ignorance of Buddhist masses despite the fact that “the more intelligent Buddhists know that it is a fraud.” Following the dire description of conditions in the Buddhist world, and a discussion of the doctrines of this “agnostic religion,” the author ends the piece with a warning about “Buddhist propaganda in Europe and America!” Buddhism and Asia represented poverty and backwardness, which could overtake the United States and Europe if population estimates are to be believed. In 1910, one of America’s most popular novelists, Jack London (1876-1916), wrote “The Unparalleled Invasion” for McClure’s (1839-1929) magazine, in which the Japanese give industrial technology to China which they need to support their unlimited population growth, resulting in the Chinese takeover of the world in 1975.

In the first decade of the 1900s, Japan was not to be trusted, but they were not necessarily the main concern, which can be seen in popular sources and the work of Jack London. The Japanese were modernizing and “Westernizing” during the Meiji Era, which ended in 1912, while the Chinese were murdering Americans and Europeans; this means that the Japanese may be accomplices to war as they were still considered racially inferior, but there were more immediate threats. However, by 1938, when the Japanese had attacked China and was increasingly aligning itself with the Axis Powers of Italy and Germany, Japan represented a bigger threat to the American psyche. In a piece titled “What the People Are Reading,” T.L. Brown discusses her latest book recommendation, The Menace of Japan, stating, “[the author] portrays a country that is corrupt from one end to the other…he tells authenticated stories of the

143 “Burma, Stronghold of Buddhism,” The Salt Lake Herald, 27 May 1906 (Salt Lake City, UT), Section Two, 5.

144 “Burma, Stronghold of Buddhism,” 1906, 5.

debauchery of the Buddhist priests of unutterable cruelty, of trafficking in human flesh.”

Brown presents a picture of citizens totally ignorant, and therefore mouldable to any form of propaganda, a serious danger as the population of Japan reaches “menacing proportions.” By 1938, the Japanese were now the country with a “menacing” population due in part to their insatiable sexual appetites. The language of the Yellow Peril changed very little, instead it was the subjects who were being attacked that changed over the decades. In other words, Buddhism represented the global “other” to Christianity and America, combined with Europe to form a perceived Christian West; Buddhism and Buddhists represented ignorant and violent masses who were set on the overthrow of Western Christianity.

The separation of the personage of the Buddha and the menace of Buddhism was often made clear; as T.L. Brown point out in the *Tulia Herald*, “next to Jesus Christ it seems to me that Buddha is the greatest religious genius the world has ever produced,” before claiming amongst purportedly inferior races, such as “the treacherous Malays” of Sri Lanka, Buddhism represent the worst of humankind. Other Buddhist nations were described in kind, such as the “unspeakable Chinese…[where] the grossest materialism, selfishness, and cruelty everywhere prevail. The truth is I cannot do justice to the Chinamen—they are so repulsive.” The teachings of the Buddha, one of the great religious thinkers of human history, were separated from the violent, impoverished despair of Buddhists across the globe, who reportedly represented


147 Brown, 1938, 63.

148 Baldwin, 1900, 3.

149 Ibid, 3.
anywhere between 10-50% of the world. This fear of the oncoming clash of civilizations was stoked by the idea that Buddhism was making its way to America, a creeping menace being actively propagated in the United States. Americans should ultimately arrive at a sympathetic disposition towards the Buddhists, despite their misguided religious views, as “their religion is such a mixture and held with so little seriousness as to be a joke, were their condition not so tragic.” The genius of the Buddha, an Aryan, was separated from the terrible squalor which was representative of the entire Buddhist world. Descriptions of Buddhists During the Era of the Yellow Peril are exceedingly similar to characterizations of Catholics in the past, and Communists and Muslims in the future. The “other” is represented by ignorant masses who live in squalor and abide by cruelty and violence, while simultaneously attempting to bring their creed to American shores.

The imagined othering of groups often involves the treatment of women within certain societies, as the masculine Self becomes the protector of women while the Other are those who mistreat women, thus playing upon stereotypes of American masculinity. Baldwin writes that womanhood in Buddhism has become degraded, as “the Japanese, like the French, are volatile.”

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151 Tchen and Yeats, 2014, 277-280. Tchen and Yeats compare a number of examples using popular culture imagery, such as the “marching hordes” which characterized the Chinese, then the Japanese, and then the Communists, or the mistreatment of women which was characteristic of Asians, Communists, and Muslims. They also compare the sexualized language of stories of Catholic convents (Rebecca Read’s Six Months in a Convent, 1835), to the sexualization of Asians and emasculation felt in result of the “superior breeding ability” of Asians (Stoddard, 27), and similar instances of sexualization and emasculation against Muslims [Tchen and Yeats, 322-323]. Another example in popular culture would be the movie, The Manchurian Candidate, which in 1962 told of a character being brainwashed by Chinese Communists, while in the 2004 remake, the character is brainwashed by Muslim Terrorists.

and untruthful and unchaste.”

Even more shocking is the way licentious Buddhist Priests apparently condoned and participated in acts of prostitution involving their own congregations. The treatment of women under Buddhism was always contrasted with American standards, where women were happy, free, and educated. This portrayal of helpless Buddhist women repressed under the yoke of pious males can be easily compared to portrayals of women in Soviet Russia and Islam. The “other” to the United States always treat their women poorly in comparison to America and Christendom, where women were perfectly content to fit their societal roles. When the world is viewed as being split between two clashing civilizations, the negative treatment of women is used to ensure that one side is wholly correct while the other is demonized.

Atheism, No-Self, and Buddhism in American Popular Culture

Popular sources in America presented a Buddhism whereby an individual soul endured rounds of rebirth, only to end this miserable existence with the promise of annihilation, which presents a rather negative picture versus the eternal-loving embrace of a Christian God. Popular sources state that Buddhism shares its belief in transmigration with “Hinduism,” where “one’s soul, like that of John Brown, is always marching on. The moment he dies he is born again, his

153 Baldwin, 1900, 3.

154 Baldwin wrote this article in 1900, 20 years before women in the United States had the right to vote.


soul passing at once into the form of a man, a dog or some other animal, or worse than all, into a woman.” Despite misunderstandings regarding the nature of the Buddhist ātman, newspaper coverage of Buddhism argued that the Self’s entrance into nirvāṇa was proof of the ultimate misery of Buddhism versus life-affirming Christianity. Popular coverage of Buddhism allowed the world to be essentialized and then split between a bipartite clash of civilizations, split between a god of love and the atheist annihilation of the Self. The coverage of Buddhism closely mirrored broader social fears of an Asian Other. However, it was through this presentation that Buddhism became more fully situated within the American religious landscape.

Buddhism was presented as a religion of “pure atheism,” a trope which was obviously so common as to be considered assumed in most newspapers. The contention of Buddhism as atheism was furthered by the assumption that nirvāṇa was equivalent to the permanent extinction of the soul. Presenting Buddhism as atheism allows the religion to be set against Christianity as a straw-man. In one article titled, “What is Buddhism?” in The True Republican (1869-1968), a semi-weekly pro-Republican Party newspaper from Sycamore, Illinois, the anonymous author suggests that because Buddhists have no permanent soul, Buddhism “is the surrender of life as misery…there is no God needed in Buddhism as this life has no ultimate meaning, thus it is pure atheism.” The article goes on to make clear the differences between Buddha and Jesus, stating:

Jesus said that the path of love is the way to peace and happiness. Buddha said, get rid of all your desires. Jesus instills in us the desire to live a more abundant life. Buddha suppresses the will to live. Jesus fills us with the consciousness of

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157 Carpenter, 1910, 22.

158 The connections between God and Self in Buddhism are more thoroughly analyzed in Chapter 4 on Japanese Buddhism.

159 “What is Buddhism?” 1926, 3.
infinite worth and of the spirit of a God who cares. Buddhism would rob us of this. Jesus tells us to create a social order based on love and harmony. Buddha said, what is the use? Buddhism is anti-social.  

Buddhism as atheism allows popular sources to split the world between the forces of god and those against. As the above quote makes clear, Christianity and the social order of “the West” were intimately tied, just as the depressing life-denying religion of Buddhism was identical to “the East.” Buddhism presented as atheism reinforces the idea of a clash of civilizations and sets Buddhism against Christianity, which displayed a fear common in the United States and Europe, which was the pending demise of Christianity.

The End of American Christianity and Buddhism as a Viable Religious Alternative

Some popular sources in the United States began to openly question past dogmas, instead supporting “science” as a path to increased societal understanding. Charles Milton Moore (1837-1906) was the editor of the Blue-Grass Blade, a Kentucky-based newspaper which advocated atheism, for which Moore spent time in prison in 1899. The Blade ran articles promoting a wide variety of radical positions, including atheism, women’s suffrage, and some aspects of Buddhism. Japanese Buddhist sources used “materialism” to mean all that was wrong with the United States and Europe, mostly focusing on greed, while articles in the Blade prescribe materialism, in this case meaning a “rationalist atheism.” Moore places articles which expound materialism next to articles which explain Buddhism as having no god, and being based

\[160\] Ibid, 3.
on the teachings of scientific rationalism. Obviously the materialism (atheism) of the Blue-Grass Blade and the materialism (focus on money) of Japanese Buddhists differ, but I argue that Moore represents a counter-cultural segment emerging in America which Buddhists were able to capitalize on throughout the Era of the Yellow Peril, and beyond. Buddhism was able to fit within the counter-cultural framework which was emerging in the United States, as underground newspapers and networks of religious seekers developed. As popular sources asserted the evolution which materialism represented, Japanese and Metaphysical Buddhists argued that their religion represented the culmination, or next move, following materialism, thus providing Buddhism with a perceived level of authenticity and superiority. Concordantly, this means that eugenicists in the United States saw race sciences as a way of either protecting America against outside threat, or as a way of ushering in an utopian future; Buddhists in Japan and the United States saw Buddhism as the next step in an evolutionary trajectory, thus countering charges of atheism and melancholy. All of this was taking place at a time when some American Christians believed that their religion was failing.

The worry of a failing Christianity came at a time of increased immigration and alternative religious traditions, thus creating a tenor of loss in media sources. In “Lack of Faith Among Christians,” R. H. Fitzhugh argues that materialism is spreading, as citizens focus only on self-pleasure while refusing to imitate the example of Jesus Christ. Fitzhugh compares the religiosity of other nations, saying that Buddhism, though “hard and hopeless,” has total influence over the minds of individuals Asians, making them compassionate and moral, while the

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161 R.H. Fitzhugh, “Lack of Faith Among Christians,” Blue-Grass Blade, 16 September 1906, (Lexington, KY). This article was originally published in the Lexington Leader. Fitzhugh is the son of George Fitzhugh (1806-1881), a social theorist and Sociologist in the Antebellum South.
“Mohammedan” nations live in a world of strict Fatalism and obedience; these two examples are compared to the United States where people are more apt to follow the ethical code of “Ben Franklin an infidel” than the example of Jesus.\(^{162}\) In summation, Fitzhugh echoes other popular culture writers by arguing that something was being lost within American Christianity, and therefore the moral centre of the nation may be shrinking away as well.

Religious newspapers similarly opined the loss of Christianity in America, as they saw a nation being lost to the corruption of materialism and pantheism. In *The Intermountain Catholic*, the editor argues that Christian belief in a singular god is being lost to the idea of god as an all-pervading essence, or pantheism.\(^{163}\) The author continues by saying that man’s self-centred nature fuels pantheism, as believers think “that they are like God himself—eternal, and with no beginning in space or time.”\(^{164}\) The self fuels pantheism, but this belief falls apart into atheism as “philosophy and science” show pantheism to be inconsistent, and therefore ends in materialism.\(^{165}\) The author argues that Americans are allowing their dual nature to push them away from god and to forget the soul. As a result Christianity is being lost. The author argues that those who forget the soul and attempt to embrace pantheism want to be superior to god, which will never result in “everlasting happiness.”\(^{166}\) In fact, this article regarding the loss of Christianity does fit within a larger cultural framework present during the Era of the Yellow

\(^{162}\) Fitzhugh, 1906.

\(^{163}\) “Primary Questions of Christian Doctrine,” *The Intermountain Catholic* 5 No. 20, 13 February 1904, (Denver and Salt Lake City), 1. These beliefs would be similar to discussions of a Buddhist “god” or Paul Carus’ Monism.

\(^{164}\) “Primary Questions of Christian Doctrine,” 1904, 1.

\(^{165}\) Ibid, 1.

\(^{166}\) Ibid, 1.
Peril. Some Americans were indeed embracing a religion which some classified as pantheism, at which point their soul would be lost (to No-Self). Christians saw the loss of tradition around them. At a time characterized by pessimism and dread, Christian Americans feared an oncoming loss of both status in the world, and spirituality. Christians in the United States often sought to rectify this fear with calls for a return to a primitive church, or Christianity as Jesus had theoretically intended. As I will argue, social and religious calls for a return to recursive philosophy unwittingly allowed Buddhists a new place in which to make a home in the American religious landscape.

Academics described Buddhism as a recursive philosophy based in science, functioning as a mind culture more so than a religious tradition, while popular sources portrayed Buddhism as a spreader of materialism, while covertly representing widespread fears of Asians and the need for colonialism; all of the aforementioned ideas created a web of ideas which allowed Buddhism to function as a viable religious alternative. Buddhism became a religion which was racially superior in the past, through an Aryan founder, and represents a superior scientific philosophy described by others as the harbinger of all global intellectual culture. As Christians argued that god may be better understood as an all-pervading entity, and that the church must return to its early beginnings, a religion which presented itself as a recursive philosophy with a god and soul, which could be reclaimed from its Asian religious accretions, became a viable religious alternative by the end of the Yellow Peril, as Buddhism was perceived as relating more closely to

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167 Japanese Buddhists also wrote that Christianity in “the West” was failing. However, they argued that Buddhism could be a stronger replacement, whereas groups in the United States like the Ku Klux Klan aimed to protect their perceived cultural heritage [“Dual Character of Americans,” The Young East 1, no. 9 (February 1926): 303].
the advanced scientific thinking of the time. The interplay of attraction and rejection, as well as projection, created a fertile enough soil for Buddhism to grow in the United States.

Conclusion

Academics during the Yellow Peril portrayed an original Buddhism which was barely recognizable to Buddhists, a recursive philosophy created by a racially superior founder, which was then lost upon his racially inferior Asian disciples. This perennial Buddhism either did or did not have a Self, was or was not based on agnostic nihilism, and is or is not a branch of “Hinduism.” This extremely confusing portrayal of Buddhism allowed academics to describe the religion as a recursive philosophy which could be divorced from Asian accretions. Race sciences further allowed North American intellectuals to remove one of the world’s great minds from his Asian roots as the religion could still be proven superior despite being from India.

Popular media sources conflated Asia, the East, and Buddhism at a time when the world was viewed as diametrically opposed, and many feared the final onslaught against North America and Christianity. By portraying the religion of a major portion of the world’s population as a religion of atheist gloom and melancholy, popular sources could justify their preconceived notions surrounding race sciences, and the need for protection against an oncoming horde. However, during the Yellow Peril, unlike the Victorian Era, Americans were more accepting of pessimism and dread, rising materialism, and a religion which was said to be based in science. This becomes especially true when some in North America and many in countries like Japan

argued that Buddha and Buddhism represented something superior to Western Christianity. This perception becomes even more viable when combined with race sciences, as Buddha was an Aryan while Jesus was Semitic, as Buddhism was portrayed as an acceptable perennial part of European universalism, comparable to Western philosophy.

This web of influences allowed Buddhists to capitalize on a social zeitgeist which allowed them to portray Buddhism as the recursive philosophy for mankind, racially, logically, and spiritually superior. Buddhism did not emulate the practices of Christians, or American culture, but fit itself directly within the intellectual framework. Scholars have been trying to pin down when an American Buddhism developed if it did at all, but by looking at intellectual currents from 1899-1957 we can see that Buddhist ideas were already involved in the intellectual culture of America, and it would seem that practice, including ordination, came later following the developments of intellectual understanding. Rather than focusing on changes in physical aesthetics within groups, such as the Jōdo Shinshū use of pews, intellectual history displays more Asian agency and a more longstanding tradition of utilizing, subverting, and adapting to developing intellectual frameworks. Buddhism, in many ways, has found success with a certain counter-cultural cache in the United States. Scholars from across the globe scattered the seeds of their ideas into the American religious landscape, but these seeds were native to other parts of the world; they combined with the domestic seeds of the American popular media to create new growths. These growths sometimes created a romanticized Buddhism of science, while others were a dangerous Buddhism of atheism and cultural backwardness. In either case, these developments also allowed space for Buddhists and sympathizers to grow the religion within a new landscape. Unlike The American Encounter with Buddhism, Buddhists during the Yellow
Peril were able to fit themselves within developing counter-culture limits of American culture, thus providing a sense of authenticity and superiority which would become extremely important in the 1950s and 1960s.
Chapter Three

The Japanese Self and Asian Universalism from the late-Meiji Era to the Beginning of the
Shōwa Period

“Piety to the past is not for the sake of the past nor for its own sake, but for the sake of a present so secure and enriched that it will create a yet better future”¹ - John Dewey, 1922

In his 1922 introduction to Social Psychology, John Dewey describes the role of an imagined history in buttressing our current socio-cultural mores with a perceived perennialism. Dewey was referring to a broad social convention relating to our general psychology, as re-imagined history was becoming a dominant trope across cultures. In the late-Meiji and Taishō Eras, Japanese Buddhists reinterpreted the Self especially using rationalist arguments in order to prove that Mahāyāna Buddhism was scientific and laid at the heart of world historical development. Japanese Buddhist used dominant tropes in the global discussion of Buddhism, race, and the Self in order to argue for their own superiority despite the realities of the Yellow Peril more broadly, and tensions faced domestically through perceived disparagement of Buddhism, and internationally through colonialism. As the following chapters will show, Japanese Buddhists were able to use larger discussions of race and science, not to decry race sciences or the Aryan myth, but to argue for their own superiority, thus subverting dominant racial tropes in the broader culture.

In this chapter, I analyze the publications of Japanese Buddhists, originating from Japan and the United States; I will also utilize Buddhist sources from Sri Lanka, in order to show the position of Japanese Buddhism within a larger global network. The sources utilized are generally

not affiliated with any particular sect of Buddhism, instead focusing on Japanese Buddhism as a whole and written with the express purpose of being read in the United States and Europe. Each of these disparate sources represent seeds which eventually find soil in the United States. These sources are all written in English. This is done for two reasons; the first being the Japanese attempt to reach a wider audience in the United States and Europe including *Nisei* (second-generation) Japanese and Caucasian Americans, the second is because the sources expressly claim to be using English as a modern language for young Japanese intellectuals.²

In this chapter, I will begin with *Nihonjinron*, usually translated as Japaneseness, which is based on defining characteristics of Japanese temperament and encapsulated discussions of race and Japanese superiority during the late-Meiji and Taishō Eras. This definition of a Japanese Self is then used to define the “other,” who are all that the Japanese are not, which contributes to imperial Japanese narratives in the 1920s and 1930s (beginning of the Shōwa Period). The “other” can even be an imagined straw-man, which can be seen in the anti-Semitism present in Asian Buddhist literature during the Yellow Peril. Next, I will then show the ways in which these discussions relate to the Japanese presentation of Buddhist ideas of the Self, and a call for Japanese Buddhists to retake their place as the rightful historical heirs to the racially superior Buddha Śākyamuni. These arguments will all show the way in which Buddhism was utilized in order to promote cultural triumphalism and political agendas.³ The socio-cultural situation of a Japanese nation within a globalized world influences views of Buddhist notions of the Self, and

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³ The focus of my chapter will be on Zen and Jōdo Shinshū (later BCA), as these represent the two lineages which produced the most as far as publishing. This is certainly not to detract from other groups involved in Japanese Buddhist introduction to North America, and as Richard Payne points out, other groups like Shingon-Shū and Nichiren-Shū certainly deserve further study.
would eventually create a foundation for the subculture popularity of Buddhism in the 1950s and 1960s.

Japanese Buddhists were the most influential groups in the movement of Buddhism into the United States before 1950. To this day, a great deal of how popular culture views Buddhism comes directly from Japanese interpretations, such as the works of D.T. Suzuki on Zen. However, Buddhism in Japan, and subsequently the forms of Buddhism presented to the United States underwent drastic changes in the years preceding and during the Yellow Peril. Tweed has created a typology for studying D.T. Suzuki, which shows the developing and changing views he held with regards to religion and Buddhism over time. Tweed defines the period from 1897-1909 as the “Rationalist Suzuki,” which overlaps in many ways with the “Experiential Suzuki” which Tweed posits between 1909-1936. Suzuki’s shift from rational and experiential to nationalist and mystical broadly mirrors the Japanese presentation of Buddhism in primary sources, which will broadly cover the proceeding chapters. This presentation, and Suzuki’s views, also relates to the “rationalistic wave” amongst liberal Japanese Christians and Confucians during the Meiji Era.


5 Jane Naomi Imamura describes the way in which Suzuki became an icon or figure for Zen Buddhism in America [Iwamura, 2011, 25]. In some ways I attempt to avoid reifying Suzuki as an icon for Japanese Buddhism, but in other ways, he was. The typology which Tweed describes, from rationalist to aesthetic, to mystical, broadly mirrors the trajectory of Buddhism’s domestication in the United States. Obviously this is a broad generalization which misses many of the back and forth flows involved in historical developments, but there is some comparison between the intellectual and religious development of Suzuki from 1897-1960, and the introduction of Buddhism to the United States during the same time.

The pre-World War II era in Japan saw the nation moving into other Asian nations as a colonial force, including Manchuria (China), Korea, and Singapore. This put the Japanese nation in a similar position to Western countries at the time. Furthermore, Japanese Buddhists engaged a typical colonial process by utilizing cultural norms, whereby history was reimagined to prove racial and cultural superiority, while using Buddhism as a dialectical tool to rewrite history and justify future ascendancy. Although comparable in many ways, Japanese Buddhists had to reimagine Buddhist history in such a way that it did not place the pinnacle in “original Buddhism” but instead presented an evolutionary trajectory utilizing both cultural theories surrounding racial development, but also emic Buddhist doctrinal discussions. The chapters relating to Japanese Buddhism are split chronologically between the late-Meiji, Taishō, and early Shōwa Period, while the second chapter focuses more specifically on the Shōwa Period and World War II. This chronological separation also follows a thematic distinction, whereby Buddhists during the Meiji and Taishō eras focused more strongly on the definition of Buddhism against the “Christian West” and rationalist scientific presentations of the religion. However, as Buddhism entered the Shōwa Period, writers attempted to mysticize and universalize the religion to include both a Self and a God. These presentations allowed Japanese Buddhism to become a superior religion for all peoples, removed from its historical cultural trappings. Japanese Buddhists first defined a Self, in relation to Europe and the United States, before mysticizing this understanding of Self in order to become a universal recursive philosophy. The present chapter and the proceeding one display a continual ambivalence towards the United States and Europe, as they simultaneously represent crass materialism and the goal of Japanese missionary efforts.
Nihonjinron, Kokugaku, and Defining the Japanese Self

In this section, I will trace the development of nihonjinron as a defining characteristic of Japanese identity and the ways in which this Japanese Self melded with international discussions of Buddhism and race sciences throughout the Era of the Yellow Peril. Discussions of

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7 There are a number of scholars who have previously written on the place of Buddhism in Japan during the lead-up to World War II, most infamously Brian Victoria and Robert H. Sharf. Unlike some previous scholarship, I will argue that Japanese Buddhists largely paralleled common intellectual discussions within Japan and America at the time, instead of being presented as violent fundamentalists. This is not to say Japanese Buddhist language was not chauvinistic and sometimes violent in nature, but that these discussions were common, and represent a form of Buddhist “just war” theory, rather than a violent call to arms. For his part, Sharf’s single article on “Zen and Japanese Nationalism” places more focus on the development of how North Americans came to define Zen through the works of D.T. Suzuki, who was caught up in a nationalist fervour in pre-war Japan. Sharf’s work uses Suzuki’s presentation of Zen in order to show the complex way in which religious writers are also products of their time period and often, wittingly or unwittingly, contribute to that very cultural tenor. In this case, Suzuki lived in a time of nationalism and war fervour, leading him to promote his own jingoistic zeal. Sharf is rather careful however to place Suzuki within a larger framework, still regarding him as a father of modern Buddhism. The works of Brian Victoria present a rather different picture as he argues Buddhists were active in the rise of nationalist fervour and participants in the “Japanese War Machine.” Victoria’s claims that Buddhism engaged a concerted effort to propagate war through “religious-inspired fanaticism” seems to me rather drastic. Victoria’s studies almost exclusively focus on a small handful of elite leaders within the Zen community. These elites had the most to gain by actively supporting the government and their nationalism, and the most to lose by failing to do so. Economic tensions, even at a personal level, are often a driving force in decision making. The claims made in Victoria’s studies may initially seem totally outlandish, such as accusing Japanese Buddhists of anti-Semitism, but he is correct in his assertion that these ideas are present in primary sources during the early 20th Century. Other scholars have pointed out the biases and questionable scholarship within some of Victoria’s works, including cherry-picking quotations. My personal critique of Victoria relates to his seeming blind spot regarding the network of historical interactions which provided for the use of nationalistic language. Victoria does not take into account the theoretical frameworks of post-colonialism and multiple modernities when pointing out what was an undeniable nationalistic tone in Japanese Buddhist writings. By focusing on ideas contained within these primary sources we can obtain a more nuanced picture of the historical situation and the network of interactions between Japanese Buddhists, the government, Buddhists and non-Buddhists in the United States, and others. For instance, Victoria draws great attention to the anti-Semitic language of Yasutani Haku’un and others; however, if we consider this problem through the lens of intellectual history, we can see the ways in which race sciences played a great cultural role in North America, Europe, Japan, and the rest of Asia. This is just one example where I believe Victoria over-simplifies his argument. Therefore, throughout this chapter I will be discussing similar issues as those detailed by Sharf and Victoria, stemming from the study of Japanese Buddhists in the pre-World War II time period; however, I wish to make clear that I will be analyzing a complex web of networks, showing the way Japanese Buddhists were sometimes complicit in a time of nationalism, but often reacting to various interactions between powerful players. By analyzing intellectual history, I will show Japanese Buddhists were not outside the mainstream acting as ‘violent fundamentalists calling for the blood of infidels’ (to facetiously use the “Holy War” language of Victoria in Zen War Stories), but were comfortably within intellectual norms prevalent not only in Japan, but North America as well.
nihonjinron do not begin in 1900, or the Meiji Era, but connect to the Tokugawa Era (Edo Period, 1603-1868) focus on kokugaku as defining Japaneseness. The essentialized definition of a Japanese Self allowed Japanese Buddhists to assert their own prominence, especially during times of increased social tension and the disparagement of Buddhism, as well as to reverse dominant ideas of European and Christian superiority. In other words, by defining oneself or an essentialized version of a nation, an “other” can also be imagined in contradistinction.

An era which is characterized by an overarching zeitgeist of pessimism and dread produces increased amounts of religious change and adaptation, which can be seen throughout Japanese history, such as during the Kamakura era. In *A History of Japanese Religion*, Kazuo Kasahara describes the way in which the negative aspects, marked by pessimism and dread, of the Kamakura era in Japan (1185-1333) effected the development of new forms of Buddhism.\(^8\) The war, famine, and disease which characterized the age contributed to a new focus on salvation, the inability of sentient beings to practice the precepts or create merit, and a synthesis

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of Buddhist belief and practice into a single figure or object.\textsuperscript{9} Jōdo Shinshū, Jōdo Shū, and Nichiren Buddhism all underwent substantial development during this time period.

The study of Japanese distinctiveness is not a new phenomenon in the 20th century, but it has been similarly employed during times of national upheaval, such as in the case of \textit{kokugaku} during the Tokugawa shogunate.\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Kokugaku} means “national learning,” and it was a major Shinto revival school.\textsuperscript{11} This school of thought developed mainly during the 18th century, when public perception of Buddhism was low with the monks considered corrupt and out of touch, and it also provided an outlet to criticize the Tokugawa regime without directly attacking Shinto, which was directly tied to the personage of the Emperor.\textsuperscript{12} The movement advocated the removal of all foreign elements from Japan, including Buddhism and Confucianism, and instead argued for imperial rule and a return to the practice of ancient Shinto. \textit{Kokugaku} philosophers like Kamo Mabuchi (1697-1769) argued that by returning to a simpler form of Japanese life, a nation of

\textsuperscript{9} Similarly, Korean Buddhism underwent vast changes during times of pessimism and dread. During the Silla Dynasty (ca. 300-935) Korea underwent turmoil between warring states as well as natural disasters. The Silla Kingdom propagated the Hwaeom School as a means of including the various lineages and cults prevalent throughout the country, including deities of the indigenous shamanic religion. Korean Buddhists adapted the philosophies of existent schools in order to better fit the Korean sociocultural situation and developed a new form of Buddhism which included all of the various schools available in Korea at the time. The Hwaeom School is the Korean version of the Chinese Huāyān, or Flower Garland School (Jap. Kegon). This school is based on the \textit{Mahāvaiśuddha Barnavatsākṣa Sūtra} (\textit{Flower Garland Sūtra}). McBride argues that the philosophical position of the interpenetration of all existence which characterizes the Hwaeom School was utilized by government officials to suggest that all forms of Buddhism, and therefore all kingdoms were valid within the Korean landscape. McBride uses the term “cult” to describe the various devotional practices and groups devoted to singular Bodhisattvas such as Mireuk-Bosal (Maitreya) or Kwan Seum Bosal (Avalokiteśvara) [McBride, 2008, 6].


\textsuperscript{11} McNally, 2005, 260.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 2-3.
virtue would naturally arise. This movement vitalized the study of Japanese history and marked the first time that some ancient Japanese texts were edited and made publicly available, such as *The Tale of Genji* (11th century). In 1825, Aizawa Seishisai, a prominent figure in the *kokugaku* movement, argued that Christianity was evil, and that if the “western barbarians” ever reach Japanese shores, then they should be exterminated; however, he also suggested that the Japanese should study Christianity in order to find out what makes it so powerful in Europe. The *kokugaku* movement was a Shinto intellectual school which focused on the unification of Japan through the strong personage of the emperor and the study of Japanese history, combined with a philosophical model that a return to that imagined historical simplicity would yield a positive future for the people of Japan. This mode of thought provided foundations, in some ways, for the movements which would come during the Meiji and Taishō Eras, when Japanese Buddhists began to reinterpret Japanese history in order to unify what they viewed as a fractured Japan.

For Japan, much of its nationalist narrative during the Yellow Peril was shaped by its military conquests and the growing perception of imperialism this spawned in the international community. Japan was emerging on the world stage, asserting the nation’s newfound power in opposition to Western powers and taking a more dominant role in Asia. During the Yellow Peril, Japan was represented by two parallel histories, one of which formed as the Japanese nation defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and then the Russian Empire between 1904-1905. These two major victories during the changes of the Meiji Era fuelled patriotism, 

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14 Ibid, 201.

and a sense that Japan was a mighty nation, especially within the sphere of East Asia. The
Japanese heralded the Russo-Japanese War especially as a major victory, defeating a European
power which was considered technologically superior. However, in 1905 the Japanese were also
forced out of part of their conquered territory in Sakhalin Island (off the coast of Russia) by the
United States and Theodore Roosevelt who brokered the peace agreement. Just a few years prior
in the 1898 Treaty of Paris, the United States had gained control over the Philippines from
Spain. These two historical events combined to lead Japan to believe that the United States was
attempting to take greater control of Asia while denying them control of the region they felt they
deserved. Beginning with the Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese spent the next decades moving
from one military victory to the next, gaining control of parts of the Korean Peninsula (Japan-
Korea Treaty 1910) and Manchuria (China 1932). These events combined with an invigorated
Japanese nationalism following their military victory, especially coalescing in the Shōwa Period
(beginning 1926). Eventually, this culminates in the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere,
whereby the Japanese laid colonial claims to areas ranging from Southeast Asia to East Asia.\textsuperscript{17}

The second parallel history during this time period involves Japanese immigration to
North America. Japanese Jōdo Shinshū ministers established the Honpa Honganji Mission of
Hawaii (HHMH) in 1889 and the Buddhist Mission of North America (BMNA) in San

\textsuperscript{16} Steinberg, 2008, 8.

\textsuperscript{17} The Japanese laid colonial claims to the following nations: Manchuko [modern China] (1940-1945),
Mengjiang [modern Mongolia] (1940-1945), Reorganized National Government of China [modern
Taiwan] (1940-1945), Burma (1943-1945), Philippines (1943-1945), Vietnam (1945), Kampuchea (1945),
Francisco, California in 1899. Emyō Imamura, born Ejitsu Imamura, became the first Bishop of the Shin Buddhist Mission in Hawai‘i in 1898. Imamura trained with Buddhist Modernist Yukichi Fukuzawa, who was very influential in calls for Japanese Buddhist Priests to become more socially engaged. Imamura joined an association called Hanseikai which promoted Temperance and lay-Buddhist education. While in Hawai‘i serving as Bishop of Hawai‘i’s Shin Buddhist Mission (1900-1932), Emyō Imamura wrote *Democracy According to the Buddhist Viewpoint* (1918), in which he argues that neither democracy nor autocracy, the United States or Japan, had an absolute value and that true value could be found only in the Dharma. The Jōdo Shinshū missions, of course, were not the only forms of Buddhism entering the United States during this time period as Richard K. Payne has pointed out, but they were the most institutionally established while also leaving behind a print culture. In 1907, the first Anti-Asiatic Riot was started by the Asiatic Exclusion League in Vancouver. Subsequent riots spread

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18 Ama, 2011, 1. The first Abbot, Sōryu Kagahi arrived in Hawai‘i in March of 1889 and immediately began construction of Hilo Honpa Hongwanji, completed in April 1889. In 1899 Bishop Yemyō (Emyō) Imamura arrived in the islands and saw to the final construction of Honpa Hongwanji, thus institutionalizing Jōdo Shinshū in the United States. The Jōdo Shinshū temples incorporated as the Buddhist Churches of America and started the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA) [Hunter, 1971, 20].


20 Ama, 134.


throughout the West Coast, resulting in racist laws curtailing Japanese immigration as well as economic opportunity. The riots resulted in a great deal of property damage, but no loss of life. Changes to immigration policy in North America represent the most lasting result of the riots. In North America, people of Japanese ancestry, Issei and Nisei, found themselves in a rather liminal state, sometimes mistreated and victims of systemic racism, while they also adapted outward appearances, such as the implementation of pews and organs in the BCA, which made them appear more Christian and North American. However, as often happens, Japanese Americans and Canadians were living out their lives and becoming more localized within their new homes. The adaptations of their religious organizations allowed them to literally “cross boundaries and make homes.”  

The Japanese in Hawai‘i, and along the West Coast of the United States and Canada, faced discrimination from the time of their arrival; suspicions about the new immigrants played into Yellow Peril fears of the Caucasian Americans and Canadians, which is why they were already considered suspect when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941.

By asserting an essentialized definition of a singular group of people, delineated lines are created between insiders and outsiders, thus encapsulating an in-group altruism between members and to the exclusion of outsiders. Japanese Buddhists were rather liminal figures in the late-Meiji and Taishō periods, marginalized and neglected by their own government, emigrating to the United States, and their religion openly considered a corruption by scholars of Buddhism. The story of the differing forms of Japanese Buddhism entering North America is necessarily multi-sited as has been pointed out by Michihiro Ama.  

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24 Tweed, 2006, 73.

Buddhist lineages, such as Jōdo Shinshū, were adapting themselves to changes within Japan simultaneously to their new cultural situation within North America. In other words, changes in religious forms and doctrinal understandings were not simply “Western” encroachment, but active and purposeful changes partially mirroring Japanese reforms. The preceding years of the Meiji Era placed Buddhists on the defensive, forcing them to justify their own existence during a time of profound social change. Japanese Buddhists within North America and Japan continued to imagine history in order to create an imagined community in light of current tensions between the United States and Japan, such as the 1892 treaty revision.26 Buddhists utilized some Western critiques against the Japanese in order to further their own agenda. The Meiji Government of Japan criticized Buddhism as an anti-social, foreign religion, which had lost its historical roots and was only concerned with superstition, sectarianism, and ritualism. In some ways, these critiques mirror those of the kokugaku movement during the Tokugawa shogunate. It was these charges, coming from both the government as well as foreign missionaries during the Meiji Era, which were the catalyst for the reforms of shin bukkyō (New Buddhism) and Buddhist Modernism beginning in the Taishō Era, including a denigration of superstition and ritual, but also the beginnings of Buddhist publishing efforts and the missionary effort outwards to the rest of Asia and North America. This mass publication boom represents a new movement in the effort to missionize Buddhism globally. Following the outright persecution of the early-Meiji Era, Buddhists were able to use doctrinal discussions, debated within a global network, in order to first show their “Japanese-ness” in discussions of nihonjinron, then to define themselves against

a perceived “West” during the Taishō Era, before using these arguments to Universalize Japan, both spiritually and politically, during the Shōwa Period.

Western academics asserted that Japanese Buddhists had completely degraded Buddhism to a form barely recognizable. In his magnum opus, Eugène Burnouf said of Mahāyāna doctrines, “the pen refuses to transcribe doctrines as miserable in respect of form, as they are odious and degrading in respect of meaning.”27 Japanese Buddhists needed to justify their own social and religious stature on multiple fronts, and they did so by reimagining their history, thus redefining their current and future status.

Part of reimagining history is based on controlling definitions, and often essentializing one’s own group as well as a perceived “other.”28 For the present discussion, this process began between Japan and North America during the Columbian Exposition in 1893. In a letter remembering the Parliament, Shaku Soyen wrote:

> The Parliament was called because the Western nations have come to realize the weakness and folly of Christianity, and they really wished to hear from us of our religions and to learn what the best religion is. The meeting showed the great superiority of Buddhism over Christianity, and the mere fact of calling the meetings showed that the Americans and other Western peoples had lost their faith in Christianity and were ready to accept the teachings of our superior religion.29

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27 Eugène Burnouf, Katia Buffetrille and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., trs. *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, (Introduction à L’Histoire du Buddhisme Indien), (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010/1876), 497. “la plume se refuse à transcrire des doctrines aussi misérables, quant à la forme, qu’odieuses et dogradannes pour le fond.”


However, following the Parliament, Japanese Buddhists continued to construct an imagined history both for Japanese readership as well as those in North America. In the late-Meiji Era, Japan was scientifically and economically behind the United States, a point the Meiji government had focused on changing. However, even after the death of Emperor Meiji, this was still considered a fact. An alternative view of national strengths had to be imagined. First, Japanese writers asserted that “the more science advances, the more the moral attitude of society degenerates.” Japanese writers questioned whether “science” as conceptualized broadly in North America was inherently positive. Hutchison has noted that during this time period, Modernist Protestants considered science an inherent good as it proved the immanence of god through natural works.

As far back as the Columbian Exposition in 1893, Japanese delegates were already discouraged by perceived mistreatment at the hands of American diplomats regarding international treaties. Japan was being treated as an underdeveloped nation in international matters, while their customs, religion, and race were insulted, leading to widespread resentment and a desire to assert their equality, if not dominance. The ambivalent relationship which the United States and Europe held with Japan provides space through which the Japanese were able to argue against their supposedly disparaged place in history, and for their own spiritual superiority. Snodgrass describes Japanese Buddhists using *Buddha No Fukuin*, Paul Carus’

31 Hutchison, 1976, 4.
Gospel of Buddha to teach children, and providing indirect confirmation of Japanese Buddhist superiority as an American (German-American) would write such a work about the Buddha.\textsuperscript{34}

The Japanese presenters at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago utilized a two-pronged approach in order to portray Japanese Buddhism not as inferior, but actually superior to other forms of Buddhism as well as Western philosophy.\textsuperscript{35} The presenters portrayed Buddhism as the predecessor to Western notions of Idealism while also using emic Buddhist discussions derived from Tendai Buddhism’s Five Periods teaching to argue Japanese Buddhism represented the pinnacle of Dharma teachings. In Western philosophy, Idealism is the notion that reality is mentally constructed and phenomenon can never been known independently without this formation. Idealism suggests human ideas construct society, rather than the inverse. Buddhists argued Mahāyāna philosophy predated this philosophical movement, popularized by writers such as Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx, by centuries. Prior to the turn of the 20th Century, this assertion of predating Western Idealism was as far as many Japanese writers went; however, during the Yellow Peril, especially leading up to the Second World War, Japanese publications utilized this argument to prove that Buddhist intellectual culture represented the genesis of a globalized recursive philosophy. This would place Buddhism at the centre of global historical development.


\textsuperscript{35} Judith Snodgrass, “Publishing Eastern Buddhism: D.T. Suzuki’s Journey to the West,” in Casting Faiths: Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia, ed. Thomas David Dubois, (New York: Palsgrave Macmillan, 2009), 46. There were six Japanese Buddhist speakers; four scholarly priests and two laymen who acted as translators. The presenters represented the Pure Land and Zen schools; the Nichiren representative had their paper published, but was not invited to speak due to their claim that Nichiren represented all Buddhism in Japan. There was also a Shinto priest [Snodgrass, 2003, 279, fn.3].
Japanese Buddhists engaged emic discussions to counter North American assertions regarding the supposedly devolved state of their Buddhist doctrines. The imagined history employed by Japanese Buddhists in the 1890s reflects the similar reinterpretation of history posited by the Aryan myth, as both ideas represent the importance of placing one’s own group at the centre, or pinnacle, of development. The Five Periods classification scheme of Tendai Buddhism tells that following the Buddha’s enlightenment, he first taught the *Mahāvaipulya Buddhāvatamsaka Sūtra (Avatamsaka Sūtra)*. This Sūtra was so advanced and complete, those around him of lesser mental capacity could not understand. To counter this problem, the Buddha utilized his *upāya-kauśalya* (“skillful means”) in order to better tailor the teachings to his audience, beginning with the Āgamas, or the *Nikāyas* of Theravāda Buddhism, followed by the early Mahāyāna, *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, and finally culminating in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* and *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. These final Sūtras represent the pinnacle teachings due to their focus on *Ekayāna*, or “one vehicle,” meaning all of the differing doctrinal representations of Buddhism are all of “one taste” leading ultimately to the views of Mahāyāna and especially Tendai. As Snodgrass has asserted, this created a narrative of Eastern Buddhist superiority. The Columbian Exposition could have easily represented the end of the story for Japanese Buddhist presentation within North America. In the years following, Japan gained an ever-larger foothold

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36 Snodgrass, 2009, 51. Sometimes called the *Flower Garland Sūtra*, the text describes the Buddha in the moments following his enlightenment. The *Avatamsaka Sūtra* is the seminal text of the Huayan (Hwaom/Kegon) school.

37 Ibid, 52.

38 Snodgrass, 2003, 198. Eastern Buddhism was the term Japanese Buddhist presenters at the Columbian Exposition coined in order to separate themselves from the traditional bifurcation of Southern and Northern Schools of Buddhism.
on the world stage, creating a turning point for Japanese views of themselves, as well as Buddhism.

The criticisms being levelled against Japanese Buddhists, from within Japan as well as internationally, included the foreignness of the religion, its superstitions and rituals, and the degeneration of Buddhism from its “golden age” during the time of Śākyamuni. Each of these criticisms reveal issues in current Japanese Buddhism which have roots deep in an imagined past. Buddhism is indicted as a foreign religion, despite residing on the archipelago for over 1,300 years, suggesting there was a core of Japanese principles and characteristics which had existed far longer than that, in some ways a remnant of the kokugaku movement. This imagined historical core was inherent in the people and culture of Japan, and quite simply could not be bought into, despite the antiquity of Buddhism. During the Meiji Era, Shinto history was actively being reimagined in order to create a state-religion by creating an imagined community with a single historical core. Buddhism was forced, in relation to Shinto, to reinterpret its own history in order to place itself within this new historical framing. Beginning in the Meiji, and continuing through the Taishō Era, Buddhists were able to reinterpret history in order to place themselves at the centre of development in order to show their own superiority against criticisms of devolution. This tactic of historical reinterpretation, forged in Japan, will be utilized again in the United States and Europe in the Shōwa Period (b. 1926), leading up to World War II. The criticisms regarding Buddhist superstition, ritual, and its supposed golden age are intertwined. This accusation assumes an imagined past for Buddhism, whereby Japanese government officials and
foreign scholars and missionaries all claimed Buddhism’s degeneration until its current state in Japan.\textsuperscript{39} Correcting this view began early in the Meiji Era.

\textit{Nihonjinron} is the belief in a defined core characteristic for Japanese-ness which was promoted during the Meiji Era in order to separate a unified Japan, with Buddhism and Shinto together, against perceived outsiders, including China, the United States, and Europe. According to Kwōyen Otani, Lord Abbot of the Higashi Honganji Temple, in \textit{The Eastern Buddhist}, the Japanese race will naturally “enjoy peace, no warlike demonstrations take place, the virtuous are respected, the benevolent are honoured, and the rules of propriety are observed.”\textsuperscript{40} D.T. Suzuki and others often claim that every Japanese is imbued with a “Samurai spirit” of selflessness, respect, and honour.\textsuperscript{41} Even Lala Har Dayal, an Indian polymath and social revolutionary who fought against British colonial rule is quoted in a Japanese magazine in 1927, claiming that “the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Kwōyen Otani, “The First Step Towards the Realization of World-Peace,” \textit{The Eastern Buddhist} 1, no. 4 (November-December 1921): 257. The \textit{Eastern Buddhist} was originally published in Japan by D.T. Suzuki from 1921-1958.
\item The descriptor of the Japanese as self-less is most predominant in historical vignettes, presented in numerous publications, describing the extraordinary acts of historical Japanese citizens. These vignettes represent perhaps the most obvious example of historical reimagining for the purposes of paralleling modern social biases. These historical pieces sometimes involved military heroism, as in “Self-Effacing Life of the Late General Nogi” who died a “Noble Death” in the Russo-Japanese War, and displayed “noble deeds before the eye of the world’s powers [proving] what the sons of Yamato are capable of.” The article even makes the bold claim that “the letters written by the late General Nogi prior to his death show that he had attained enlightenment and had been fully prepared to meet death.” M. Mita then describes the officer’s conduct at home, his modesty and simplicity, and his patriotism and devotion to the Emperor; all signs of his self-less attitude and Yamato spirit [M. Mita, “Self-Effacing Life of the Late General Nogi,” \textit{The Young East} 4, no. 2 (July 1928): 51-54]. Through characterizations of selflessness, ideal qualities of Japanese-ness could be asserted for all citizens with the Buddha and the Emperor situated atop as representatives of innate spiritual connection. On the page following General Nogi we find “A Representative Woman of Japan” by Hanso Tarao, who describes a generic Japanese woman and how she can live a “self-less life” by engaging in the “samurai spirit bequeathed to her both by her parents and husband” when she does her motherly-duties of sending her children to war. Her devotion to the Emperor and the Buddha, each encompassed within her selflessness, is what makes her “A Representative Woman of Japan” [Hanso Tarao, “A Representative Woman of Japan,” \textit{The Young East} 4, no. 2 (July 1928): 55].
\end{enumerate}
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Japanese are great in every sense of that word—great because of their patriotism, their love of progress, their earnestness, their energy, their tradition of art, and their deep religious view of life.”42 I will return to this point below, but Japanese Buddhists forged close relationships with South Asians, during the first decades of the 20th century, creating an alternative network of discussion against the threats of a perceived “West.” During the Taishō Era, Buddhists in Japan occupied a liminal state between their own government, outsiders, Japanese expatriates living in North America, and the Caucasian Americans and Europeans whom they encountered and attempted to proselytize. Throughout the late-Meiji and Taishō periods (1890-1912), a focus on Nihonjinron allowed Japanese Buddhists to reverse dominant tropes regarding their people and their religion within a globalized network of actors; Japanese Buddhists reimagined their history in order to argue that Buddhism was a rational religion of science, but that it was the Japanese, not Europeans and Americans, who would take “true Buddhism” to the rest of the world.

### Defining Japanese Buddhism in the United States

In order to define oneself, a strategy of defining and essentializing the “other” in contradistinction is often employed, which is evidenced in the writings of Japanese Buddhists defining themselves against the United States and Europe.43 Rev. K. Kino, a Shin Buddhist

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43 According to Theodore W. Allen, the “white race” was defined against African-Americans as they related all negative behaviours to the “other” while Caucasians related themselves to respectability and nobility. This relationship, like all processes of othering, requires continual reinvention in order to perpetuate itself and explain the historical trajectory of new events in light of past explanations [Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume One: Racial Oppression and Social Control*, (London: Verso, 2002/1994), 1].
Priest, analyzes Socialism as an economic and political form against Buddhism; in his article, Kino refers to the rich capitalist as the “so-called noble,” before arguing that economic inequality is proof that “the true noble are very scarce.” Kino continues to disparage those who hoard wealth at the expense of the poor, claiming “the poor will not have a dime or a nickel while the rich will have vast stores of gold and silver.” The only way to stop these extremes is for a new ideal to rise, whereby humanity can work together for the betterment of all, a goal which will remain unrealized between the poles of capitalism and socialism. Kino argues that Buddhism provides the “middle path” between these two extremes. Kino’s religious argument is not surprising as a Shin Priest, but there is more to his writings than a simple argument for the merits of Buddhism. The “so-called noble” referenced in this text is the “Aryan,” rich in wealth and materialism, which represents the United States and Europe.

The notion of a Self was connected to material prosperity and therefore a perceived “West” through the association of a Self with an assumption of greed; this was a common trope of Buddhist literature during the time of the Yellow Peril. In “Animism and Law,” the Sri Lankan


45 Kino, 1904, 215.

46 The discussion of spirituality versus materialism represents Buddhist debates regarding the nature of Self. Japanese Buddhists were engaging American intellectual-historical traditions within their attempts to domesticate themselves in the United States. Brian Victoria has pointed out similar parallels between the use of spirituality versus materialism in the years preceding World War II, especially in relation to the rise of nationalism. However, “spirituality” used in this form has its roots in the tradition of American Transcendentalism. Beginning in the late 1820s, American Transcendentalists were generally favourable to Asian religious traditions, and attempted to portray religious traditions as differing paths all pointing towards the same ultimate reality. Transcendentalists labelled this view as “spirituality,” representing an individual search for Truth in opposition to “materialistic” institutional religion which smacked of ritualism, dogma, and economic indulgence. In other words, spirituality represented a code for an individual and unmediated experience with a divine reality. According to Transcendentalists, this ultimate existence was directly connected or even identical to an individual’s mind, and was best experienced through solitary contemplation or mystical experience. Spirituality becomes a code for individualism, freedom, and connection to ultimate reality, while materialism represents a monolithic set of rules meant to hold an individual back and provide mediation between the divine reality. [McMahan, 2008, 71].
monk Anando Maitriya (Balangoda Ananda Maitreya, 1896-1998) argues that despite the United States and Europe’s material prosperity, the Dharma gives Asia “incomparably far more,” as a spiritual power, “beyond all lesser Laws.” Kino argues that it is only through Buddhism, not socialism, that the ideal of equality may be recognized. This argument displays the future place of Buddhism as the religion of equality, and redefines the superiority of the “so-called noble” against the spiritually enlightened worker, further reinforcing the ambivalent relationship of Buddhism and the United States, as Buddhism simultaneously represents utopian ideals and the loss of economic prosperity for the elites (“the West”).

In the first decade of the 1900s, Japanese Buddhists used the writings of academics to argue that Buddhism created the foundations for European society, which is an argument analogous to the Aryan myth posited by other scholars at the time. An Italian professor of geography, Giueseppe de Lorenzo (1871-1957), argues that European uses of Buddhist ideas in the past “show that the fundamental conceptions of Buddhism do not constitute an old Indian or new Asiatic abnormality (as some even to-day believe), but are universal and eternal truths, some of which were likewise perceived by one or another of the greatest men of Western lands, pagans or Christians.” Professor de Lorenzo goes on to say that Shakespeare, the “greatest of all the

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47 Anando Maitriya, “Animism and Law,” *The Light of Dharma* 4, no. 3 (October 1904): 223-224. T.W. Rhys Davids argued that Animism was the opposite of the Dharma and represented the corruption of Buddhism (see “Pāli Text Society” in Chapter Two).

48 The connection between Buddhism and Socialism would continue to be an issue for Buddhism in Japan. For instance, Kita Ikki believed that Socialism and could be combined with evolutionary theory in order to create a future Buddhist utopia. He was later executed following the 1936 coup d’état. Kagawa Toyohiko was a Christian Socialist in Japan who argued that Socialism and Christianity could combine to usher in the Kingdom of God [G. Clinton Godart, *Darwin, Dharma, and the Divine: Evolutionary Theory and Religion in Modern Japan*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2017), 5].

poets of the earth, who, with perfect objectiveness and unsurpassed ideality…reveals to us much of that knowledge, which forms the foundation of the teaching imparted by the Tathagata.”

This work by an Italian professor, published in a Japanese Buddhist magazine, displays the ambivalent relationship between the United States, Europe, and Buddhism. On the one hand, de Lorenzo reinforces the Aryan myth as he directly ties the genius of Shakespeare to the Aryan personage of the Buddha, even giving them equal assessment by saying “the multitudinous pearls from the sea of Shakespeare’s creations,” were “not indeed unworthy to shine in the great ocean of the Teaching of Gotama Buddha.”

On the other hand, Japanese Buddhists were equally motivated to publish this article, as it placed the Dharma, and the Buddha, firmly at the beginning of European development. In this way, Shakespeare is not a European Aryan genius, but an Aryan Buddhist, utilizing the timeless teachings of the Buddha. Comparisons of Buddhism and European culture were, and are, popular in many Buddhist publications, theoretically for comparative uses, but they also reveal the underlying ambivalence of the relationship between Buddhism and “the West” as each group simultaneously uses the religion to assert its own superiority.

Throughout the majority of this work, I have referenced ideas, posited not only by Americans and Europeans but also Japanese and Sri Lankans, that Buddhists had largely fallen into a system of superstition and idolatry; this was simultaneously the critique of European academics, American popular writers, Sri Lankan Buddhist reformers, the Meiji government, and Japanese Buddhists, who created the shin bukkyō movement. Japanese Buddhists, such as...

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50 de Lorenzo, 1905, 242-243.
51 Ibid, 246. Italics in original.
Reverend Kino, wrote that “superstition is the offspring of ignorance, a relic of the primitive state of man and the general character peculiar to savages.” Kino argues that the most “savage” of superstitions is not with Buddhists, as others argued, but those who “apply to God, for the fulfilling of their many unreasonable desires, such as…to be free from punishment for whatever they have done, are doing, or should do, following the erroneous principles of selfishness, egotism, immortality, and injustice.”

The Buddhists of Asia are not the idolatrous peoples of superstition posited in European academic assessments; instead, the Christians of the United States and Europe are backwards and egotistical. In *From Stone to Flesh*, Lopez shows that European Christians encountering Buddhism often described the idol-worship of Buddhists as akin to demonic, or satan-worship. By 1905, Kino reverses this assessment to say, “if Almighty God, be there such a personal being as set forth in Christianity, listen to such prayer, and bestow upon him the blessing asked, then he has deviated far from the divine nature, and is but a demon or satan.” In fact, Kino then argues that the doctrine of forgiveness in Christianity is degrading, claiming that if beings with sin are allowed into heaven, then “Christianity is nothing but a false doctrine to enforce immorality and injustice to man, and instead of leading him to the higher existence, it will drive him to the lower life of the beasts, namely lead him gradually to degenerate.” Luckily, Buddhism “has more intellectual constituents and no less emotional portions than Christianity…”

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53 Kino, 1905, 248.
54 Lopez, 2013, i.
55 Kino, 1905, 249.
56 Ibid, 249.
America...is free from all the corruptions or superstitions.”\textsuperscript{57} It is not Asian Buddhists who are mired in superstition and in need of the helping hand of European and American powers, or missionaries, but Christianity that is idolatrous and waiting “as the sun of civilization appears in the eastern sky, with its brilliant and dazzling light of knowledge and intellect.”\textsuperscript{58} For Japanese Buddhists, the reimagination of history often involved the reversal of previous misconceptions, tied to notions of the Self, science, and race, in order to assert Japanese Buddhist superiority against a Christian “other.”

Throughout the Era of the Yellow Peril, Asians were portrayed as barbarous savages, especially in comparison to the perceived atrocities of the Boxer Rebellion.\textsuperscript{59} In “The Treatment of Russian Prisoners and Wounded by the Japanese,” Baron Kencho Suyematsu, Minister of Interior for Japan during the Ito government and one of the leaders of the Constitutional Party, describes the extremely respectful treatment which Russian soldiers enjoy as a result not of “Geneva and Hague Conferences,” but the application of “Bushido, the code of honour for Japanese knighthood,” which is “at all times manifested by the soldier of Japan.”\textsuperscript{60} In order to prove this point, Suyematsu quotes Thomas Cowen’s book \textit{The Russo-Japanese War}, which

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, 250.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 247. Kino uses the metaphor of “the sun” to represent the brilliance of Buddhist teachings dispelling global ignorance. This metaphor is certainly not foreign to Buddhism, especially in relation to Amida, who is sometimes likened to the sun himself. For Kino, the “dazzling” sun most likely meant the “Land of the Rising Sun,” pictured most notably on the Japanese flag. However, it is also interesting that the sun represents Aryanism in \textit{völkisch} thought, as well as in the writings of Jung. This may have been a useful metaphor for Buddhists, especially when encountering modes of European thought which expressly searched for recursive philosophy.

\textsuperscript{59} Tchen and Yeats, 2014, 166. See also, “The Yellow Peril” in Chapter One.

\textsuperscript{60} Kencho Suyematsu, “The Treatment of Russian Prisoners and Wounded by the Japanese,” \textit{The Light of Dharma} 5, no. 1 (April 1905): 3-4. The war was still going on in April 1905. The Russo-Japanese War ended in September of that year.
illustrates, literally and figuratively, the sombre treatment given by the Japanese.\textsuperscript{61} The article goes on to describe the philanthropic efforts of private Japanese societies alongside the exemplary decorum of Japanese soldiers.\textsuperscript{62} This article provides another example of Japanese Buddhists using European scholars to argue against common misperceptions about the Japanese during the Yellow Peril. Beyond that, Suyematsu claims that it is not “the West” which provided this civilizing effect, but the very essence of Japanese-ness found in the Bushido code. The Japanese are not “savages,” but models of decorum, a fact which is not due to the civilizing influence of European rationalism, but a notion inherent within the “soul” or Japan.

The first decades of the 1900s represented a period of Rationalism, where Buddhists and academics focused on the scientific and non-dogmatic elements of Buddhism. Throughout \textit{The Light of Dharma}, articles remind readers that Buddhism has no god, no soul, and no hell. Although the focus on Buddhism as scientific never goes away during the later years of the Yellow Peril, I will argue that the discussion takes on a slightly different tone, becoming more mystical and Universal during the Shōwa Period and into World War II. In this section, Japanese Buddhists attempted to define the Self of Japanese Buddhism against the perceived encroachment of Europe and United States, and in relation to other Asian powers. Writers also accomplished this task by re-defining the Buddhist notion of \textit{anātman} from a doctrinal standpoint.

\textsuperscript{61} Suyematsu, 1905, 3. [Thomas Cowen, \textit{The Russo-Japanese War: From the Outbreak of Hostilities to the Battle Liaoyang}, (London: Edward Arnold, 1904). This historical text was published a full year before the war ended.]

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 7.
The Self and Japanese Buddhism in the United States

Japanese Buddhists based their definitions of *Nihonjinron* and Mahāyāna Buddhism around reinterpretations of the Self, thus influencing Buddhism in North America for generations. In *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot*, Shaku Soyen states, “I firmly believe that what makes Oriental culture so unique is due to the emphasis laid upon patriotism, filial piety, faithfulness, and abnegation of self.” Sources from Japanese Buddhist groups tend to be less explicit regarding explanations of Self than North American sources. The Self, or nature of the soul, is in many ways a particularly American focus. Historically, the Japanese view of an individual has been one of corporate social responsibility, with an individual’s own needs placed within the framework of society and allegiance to the nation, including ancestors. This would be different than the American understanding of the Self as an individual striving for personal happiness. Therefore, Japanese sources contain fewer basic descriptions regarding Buddhist notions of the Self. However, doctrines of *anātman* regularly colour Japanese ideas of Buddhism and society, as Shaku Soyen stated that for Buddhism in North America, “it seems, everything depends upon the conception of the soul.”

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63 Soyen, 1906, 104.
64 Bercovitch, 1975, 2.
66 Taylor, 1989, 12.
67 Ibid, 34.
There were also Japanese Buddhist writers who used North American belief in a soul to provide a cautionary tale. Shaku Soyen is careful to declare Buddhism’s absolute denial of a separate ego-soul. He even goes on to criticize Metaphysical spiritualists as “crass materialists, the designation they wanted so much to hurl upon others” by claiming that no matter how ethereal and astral they may conceive the soul, it is still a material and individual entity. Shaku then describes the ego-soul as an “old-man,” a term he also uses for the Christian God, before saying that one should “crucify him…destroy this chimerical, illusory notion of self; get convinced of the truth that there is no such creature dwelling in the coziest corner of our minds.” The language used here is pointedly Christian in tenor, and could easily be substituted for a discussion of Christian God. He calls the Self a “self-imposed prison,” connecting the ideal of spirituality to freedom to the Buddhist notion of anātman, mirroring the historical narrative of the American Transcendentalist movement. Keeping in mind the connections made previously between North America and Christianity as proponents of a view of a permanent ego-soul, consider the following quotation from Shaku Soyen,

Why, then, do we fight at all? Because we do not find this world as it ought to be. Because there are here so many perverted creatures, so many wayward thoughts, so many ill-directed hearts, due to ignorant subjectivity. For this reason Buddhists are never tired of combating all productions of ignorance, and their fight must be to the bitter end. They will show no quarter. They will mercilessly destroy the very root from which arises the misery of this life. To accomplish this end, they will never be

68 Soyen, 1906, 21.
69 Ibid, 22.
70 Ibid, 25.
71 Ibid, 25.
afraid of sacrificing their lives, nor will they tremble before an eternal cycle of transmigration. Corporeal existences come and go, material appearances wear out and are renewed. Again and again they take up the battle at the point where it was left off.  

Soyen then describes a number of examples of Japanese war-heroes who disavowed their Self to put the emperor and the Japanese people before themselves. It is the inherent selflessness of the Japanese which is the source of their strength and superiority, and it is for this reason that the “root of self misery” which is the ego-soul must be fought against. It is the self-less nature of the Japanese which makes them more spiritual, as opposed to materialistic, courageous, patriotic, and all of the other epithets used to describe the Japanese. Each of these descriptors were also used to characterize Mahāyāna Buddhism, thus essentializing an extremely diverse religious tradition as concordant with Japanese historical culture.

Japanese Buddhists emphasized the rationalistic aspects of Buddhism by arguing that the religion had no soul, no god, and aligned with science. The Japanese nation was increasing its presence on the world stage during the Meiji and Taishō Eras, and using the discussions outlined above to argue for their own place against the perceived superiority of Europe and the United States. By 1912 and the “Three Religions Conference” in Japan, Buddhism was no longer considered a foreign threat to Japan, and was seen as supporting the “national morality.”

It was also during this time period that Japan, and Japanese Buddhists, increasingly looked “West,” not to Europe and the United States but to India and Sri Lanka. As Japanese and South Asian Buddhists called for international Buddhist unity against the perceived threats of a newly

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72 Ibid, 114.

73 Godart, 2017, 121.
invented “West,” descriptions of Buddhist doctrine and its relation to world history take on a more imagined and mystical tone; in similar ways to the Aryan myth Universalizing the world through a re-creation of history which placed European Christianity as the pinnacle of historical development, so too did Buddhists argue that a Universalizing myth positioned Buddhism at the centre of human social evolution.

**Eugenics in Japan and the Creation of the Yamato Race**

The United States was not the only nation to experience a eugenics movement in the 1920s, as some in Japan also believed that racial ideals of “pure-bloodedness” could promote a utopian vision of the future in which a singular Japanese race could promote cultural unity. Eugenic ideas were spread across the globe in the 1920s, as they were promoted by scientists, progressives, and even Unitarians, who had close contact with Japanese Buddhists at this time. In the January 1927 issue of *Yûsei Undô* (Eugenic Exercise/Movement), Ikeda Shigenori’s personal journal, he wrote of the “shared heredity” of the Japanese Yamato Race and the need for “ethnic-national endogamy” in chaotic times. During the Three Kingdoms period in China (220-280 CE), Chinese officials referred to the inhabitants of Japan as *Wa* (*Wō*), which was later translated as Yamato. In Japan, the supposedly “pure-blooded” Yamato designation was used to

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75 Wilson and Moriya, 2016, xviii. See also: Chapter Two, Popular culture and the Yellow Peril.

76 Robertson, 2002, 191.

77 Ibid, 192.
separate the other indigenous races in Japan. Shigenori argued that the shared ancestry of the Yamato Race bred certain racial characteristics, including cultural and religious affinities, which could then be used for “race betterment through customized procreation.” The Japanese media increasingly popularized this idea from 1910 to 1940, as the rise in popular kagaku (science) magazines displays. Popular media in Japan ran numerous stories about yûseigaku (science of superior birth), and jinshukaizengaku (science of race betterment), between 1920 and 1940, eventually leading to the Eugenic Protection Law of 1948, which was designed to prevent “the birth of eugenically inferior offspring,” that was only replaced in 1996 with the Maternal Protection Law. Shigenori argued that the national body, metaphorically likened to a physical human body, must remain pure and protected against the “polluting” threats of miscegenation posed by burakumin (outcastes) and spirit-animal possessors. Eugenics in Japan became a way of disparaging “outsiders,” including those who did not fit certain ideals of national unity, and tracing those differences to biology. In Our Primitive Contemporaries, George Peter Murdock, Professor of Anthropology at Yale University, describes the Ainus of Japan as being closely related to the Caucasian races of Europe, proven by their “large heads of medium breadth (cephalic index 76)” and their “intermediate or mesorrhine (nasal index 82)” noses. These

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78 Ibid, 192.
80 Ibid, 194.
81 Ibid, 194-195. In the Tokugawa Era, homes which controlled, or were controlled by, spirit-animals were believed to be “infectious.” During the eugenics movement in Japan, these traits were considered inheritable genetically.
descriptions are in opposition to the “yellow” skin and “Mongolian fold” of the Yamato people in Japan.\textsuperscript{83} Eugenics, and race sciences more broadly, become social power delineations as groups use “science” to create in-groups and out-groups. The Japanese wanted to create a national unity which shared a common heredity and ancestry, and therefore justified biological-race descriptions of the Japanese. Murdock, and other American scientists, attempted to destabilize this imagined history by claiming that the Ainus were actually superior to the Yamato race in Japan. In this particular case, science becomes a tool to define and justify power dynamics as being biologically predetermined.

It was also in the 1920s and 1930s that Japanese intellectuals began to combine aspects of evolutionary theory, Socialism, and Buddhism to create utopian ideals of the future.\textsuperscript{84} Kita Ikki (1883-1937) wrote that through a combination of Socialist evolutionary progression and Buddhism, humans could become a “Divine Species (\textit{shinrui}).”\textsuperscript{85} According to Kita, “if evolution has no peak and the human race is not the endpoint of evolution, then we, the human race, are a temporary creature which occupies a position halfway between the animal species from which we have evolved and the gods into which we will evolve.”\textsuperscript{86} Kita’s theories on evolution reflect his engagement with the \textit{Lotus Sūtra} and its discussion of universal enlightenment, which Kita believed posited an evolution towards Buddhahood.\textsuperscript{87}

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\textsuperscript{83} Murdock, 1934, 163.
\textsuperscript{84} Godart, 2017, 136.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 137.
\textsuperscript{86} Godart, 2017, 139-142 [Kita Ikki, \textit{Kokutairon oyobi junsei shakaishugi} (Tokyo: Shashi shinshui, 2005/1926), 350].
\textsuperscript{87} Godart, 2017, 142.
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science, and race sciences were being combined to produce a prescriptive program for the future, resulting in utopianism. Evolutionary theories and utopianism represent some of the seeds which were travelling across global networks of Buddhist thought. This international network included Japanese relations with South Asia, which were also influenced by American and European interactions.

**The South Asian Connection and the Buddhist Relationship with Theosophy**

Beginning in the Meiji Era, and continuing through the Taishō and Shōwa periods, Japanese Buddhism underwent reconstruction as Buddhists faced criticism and pressure internally and externally. The most dominant trope in scholarly literature suggests that Japanese Buddhists felt pressure from external sources, including missionary critiques and the rise of science in Japan, and therefore reconstituted themselves to fit more easily with American and European models and modes of thought. Following the declaration of the Charter Oath (Gokajō No Goseimon) by Emperor Meiji, which said the Japanese should seek knowledge throughout the world, Japanese Buddhists began travelling to India and Sri Lanka in order to study Theravāda Buddhism and the Pāli scriptures. This created a mutual relationship between Buddhists of South Asia and Japan, with Japanese monks sometimes taking ordination in a Theravāda lineage, and Theravāda Buddhist ideas and people travelling to Japan, as well as the interpersonal interactions which would have inevitably taken place. More importantly, this travel created

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another node within a global network of Buddhist adaptation, and by showing connections between South and East Asia I can display the ways in which Buddhism in the United States also involved inter-Buddhist connections forged in Asia. Discussions of Buddhism in South Asia connected to both American Metaphysical presentations and Japanese Buddhism, which is why these discussions are presented in this chapter as well as Chapter Five. These connections are also displayed in the fact that Japanese Buddhists and Sri Lankan Buddhists cited each other within their publications, further reinforcing a globalized network of influence. The Maha-Bodhi Society began publishing the *Journal of the Maha-Bodhi Society* in 1892, which was renamed *The Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World: The Journal of the Maha-Bodhi Society* in 1901, and renamed again as *The Maha Bodhi: A Monthly Journal of International Buddhist Brotherhood Founded by Anagarika Dharmapala* in 1924. This means that during the same time when European academics travelled to India and Sri Lanka to find true Buddhism and export it through the Pāli Text Society, the Maha-Bodhi Society represented Asian Buddhists in South Asia exporting their own emic Buddhism. *The Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World* focuses quite a bit on the subject of racial and spiritual pride, especially in the form of Aryanism, and a sense of chauvinism against Europeans and Jews, all of which was created in direct competition with the Pāli Text Society. In other words, the Pāli Text Society and the Maha-Bodhi Society represent two Buddhisms being exported from Sri Lanka during a period of dual character in a colonized land. The other interlocutors in this international network were the members of the Theosophical Society, as Anagarika Dharmapala met Olcott and Blavatsky in 1886, and travelled with them to Japan in 1903 and 1913. In 1886, Blavatsky and other Theosophists would have undoubtedly explained some of the tenants of Theosophy to
Dharmapala. These tenants included the evolutionary development the Aryan race towards self-deification, while the less-evolved races attempt to progress by refining their own souls towards their eventual rebirth as Aryans, a doctrine which will be covered more fully in Chapter Five.\textsuperscript{90}

South Asian Buddhist writers used their own emic ideas of Aryans, in this case meaning noble, combined with Theosophical ideas about Aryan racial evolution to argue for their own place of superiority within a cultural milieu of British colonialism. By 1905, Dharmapala had completely disavowed the Theosophical Society, and became increasingly antagonistic to their beliefs, including penning articles titled “Theosophical Falsehood,” where he claims that the new head of the Theosophical Society is, “chief among theosophic charlatans is [Annie] Besant, who deliberately misrepresents Buddhism.”\textsuperscript{91} Theosophy is increasingly dislodged from Sri Lankan Buddhism during the first decade of the 20th century, but the focus on Aryanism, Buddhist superiority over Christianity, and the unification of the Buddhist world, all originally supported by the Theosophical Society, remained prominent in Buddhist literature from South Asia.

Buddhists in South Asia were in a period of cognitive dissonance, as the island which they had once ruled had been colonized by the British (beginning 1817), missionaries taught Christianity in schools, and Buddhism was increasingly denigrated by outsiders. Dharmapala cites these problems and the loss of societal stature as some of the reasons for reclaiming the Maha-Bodhi Temple at Bodhgaya, in order to unite the Buddhist world around a singular

\textsuperscript{90} Peter Stoddard, “The Origin of Man and the Lower Kingdoms,” \textit{The Theosophical Forum} 20, no. 2 (February 1942): 65.

\textsuperscript{91} Anagarika Dharmapala, “Theosophical Falsehood,” \textit{The Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World} 17, no. 1 (January 1909): 7. Annie Besant became president of the Theosophical Society in 1908 and moved the society’s focus away from Theravāda Buddhism and towards Hinduism and Esoteric Christianity.
location, which he expressly compares to Mecca. The unification of the Buddhist world was, in part, a call for the whole of Asia to come together against the tyranny of imperialism, but beyond that, it represented a reconstituting of the delineations between peoples which Europeans and Americans had created in the Aryan myth prior to 1900. In “Who are the Aryans,” Dharmapala argues that philologists separate world languages into categories of Aryan and Mleccha, the Sanskrit word for barbarian. He goes on to say that the completeness of a language is exemplified by the number of letters it contains for expression, meaning that European and Dravidian languages are mleccha, which also explain why Europeans follow a religion of “Semitic animism.” Dharmapala has thus reconstituted the world by denigrating the exalted status which Europeans had given themselves. He then argues that Aryan, in the scientific sense, is only a designation of genes and biology, while the true meaning of Aryan is a “purity of character” in “an ethical and psychological sense,” or a biological predisposition reinforced by behaviour which makes an Aryan “abstain from cruel deeds.” To be an Aryan, therefore, is a racial designation which Europeans do not fit, and a spiritual ontology which also excludes Europeans. Dharmapala is utilizing the language of the Theosophical society and race sciences, to create a mystical-biological Aryanism which posits Buddhists as the superior race against the

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93 Anagarika Dharmapala, “Who are the Aryans,” The Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World 28, no. 7 (July 1920): 123. Scholars generally separated the world into Aryan and Semitic [Olender, 1992, 5]. Dharmapala’s, and others, anti-Semitic language is a recurring theme in Asian Buddhism prior to World War II.

94 Dharmapala, “Who are the Aryans,” 1920, 123.

95 Ibid, 123.
Semitic-Dravidian Europeans; a strategy which was created within the crucible of British Ceylon.

The creation of imagined communities often involves the separation of an “outsider” from those inside the created social structure. Dharmapala refers to the British in India and Sri Lanka as “White Brahmins” throughout the 1900s. Brahmins, and Brahmanical culture, have been blamed many times for the destruction of Buddhism in India. In the previous chapter, I argued that Hinduization became synonymous with the corruption of Buddhism through the works of C.A.F. Rhys Davids and others. Buddhists in Sri Lanka had good reason to distinguish themselves from the Hindus in India, as this would separate a group which was perceived as backwards and corrupting from themselves as noble Aryans. This also means that Hindus were being simultaneously degraded by Buddhists in Asia and Europeans and Americans. This displays the effects of imagined communities on societal perceptions.

In the 1920s, race sciences were considered the pinnacle of modern thinking; simultaneously, Buddhism was considered a “religion of science” by religious liberals like Paul Carus and Theosophists, as well as academics like the Rhys Davids’. Dharmapala was able to mutually enforce these two points by showing the ways that science explained the superiority of Buddhism, while also denigrating the position of Christianity. Dharmapala quotes the British-American scientist John William Draper to argue for the “destructiveness of the Christian religion,” which they both attributed to the Jewish roots of the religion, especially in the


97 The Sri Lankan Buddhist focus on Aryanism and racial and spiritual superiority may have combined with negative views about Hindus in Asian, European, and American publications to contribute to the post-colonial civil war in Sri Lanka, but these “seeds” would require further study.
personage of Paul, who lived amongst “low class Greeks and Jews” before he “declared himself a preacher and by sheer force” took over the thought of Christianity. Evolutionary theory is used to scientifically describe the negative position of Europeans, as “the originators of the barbaric religion were Hebrews” which explained the sad state of Europe going back to the beginning of man as, “it is this religion fit for the apeman that European Christians want that Buddhists should accept, and annually millions of money are being spent to preach this tribal religion of a wild Semitic tribe to the Aryan people of Ceylon.” The Aryans (Europeans) and their religion were not superior but debased, and this argument could be proven scientifically. Not only that, but science proved that there was a religion of science, namely Buddhism. Europeans and Americans often justified colonialism as a way of helping races which had fallen behind to catch up with the progress of civilization. South Asian Buddhists used scientific arguments and their own racial superiority to argue that this “help” was actually disastrous, a form of poison, because European society was corrupted from its beginning, with its Semitic roots, or corrupted by the end, through wanton materialism. Dharmapala seems to be openly reuniting the colonial agenda when he writes,

Bestialism, alcoholism, and bastardism were the adjuncts of the sensual civilization that was forced on the helpless races. Whisky, rum, opium, syphilis, were the gifts of the European civilization that the non-European races received from the unmoral pioneers of piracy. Primeval forests were cut down with ruthless destructiveness, aesthetic beauty had no attraction to the vandals who went to

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98 Anagarika Dharmapala, “The Reconciliation of Religion and Science,” *The Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World* 28, no. 7 (July 1920): 116. He also says, “Paul was against progress, philosophy was taboo,” and calls Constantine a “degenerate.” Dharmapala also refers to the “Semitic Bible.”

exploit distant countries. The spirit of destructiveness is ingrained in the western mind, being the result of their having imbibed the spirit of Jahwehism of the Old testament of the Jews of Canaan. The unmoral civilization of the Semitic tribes of Palestine became the only panacea for all ills of the European before the dawn of science.¹⁰⁰

Dharmapala uses the place of superiority given Buddhism spiritually by Theosophists and scientifically by Buddhist Studies and race sciences, combined with ancient doctrines of the Aryan already present with Buddhism in order to reframe the place of Buddhists in world historical development and in the colonial era. This superior “Arya Dharma” could be used as a protest against colonialist agendas and Orientalist scholarship, while also creating a mystical unification of the Buddhist world at a time when Dharmapala was attempting to physically unite the Buddhist world around the singular location of the Maha-Bodhi Temple.

The mystical, or imagined, unification of the Buddhist world was most directly linked to Japan, as it represented the only “country [that] escaped from the cunning of the European diplomat…Japan isolated herself for nearly three hundred years from European contact, and that had been her salvation” against the “demoralizing methods of the western aristocrat.”¹⁰¹ Dharmapala focuses on the spiritual Aryanism of the Japanese when he says Japanese children “were superior in patriotism to all other races on earth. European cunning could not bring the children of the land of the rising Sun into the darkness of European immorality. Alone Japan stood as a beacon of light to the degenerate peoples of Asia…the superior morality of the Japanese gave them strength to defeat the Russian bear.”¹⁰² This sense of spiritual and racial

superiority was something to be lauded at a time when, “the independence of Burma, Siam, Ceylon, was destroyed by political chicanery…China was reduced to imbecility…India is now a starving skeleton.” However, the Japanese, and their “Religion of Peace” are now under threat from “Western materialism and Christianity,” which are “built on the foundation of semitic barbarism and…like a parasite praying on other religions.” According to Dharmapala, the Japanese did not represent a corrupted Buddhism as T.W. Rhys Davids asserted, and they were not a race of violent barbarians as proposed in popular sources from the United States. Instead, Europeans were the barbarians, and the Japanese had become Aryans.

Far from the island of Sri Lanka, Japanese Buddhist publications quoted Dharmapala to solidify this connection. In “An Appeal to Japanese Buddhists” Dharmapala argues that, “with the introduction of Buddhism…Japan became Aryanized,” placing the nation and its religion in a superior position to those who adopted the lesser “semitic creeds” of Islam and Christianity.

103 Ibid, 4.

104 Anagarika Dharmapala, “The Future of Buddhism in Japan,” *The Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World* 29, no. 3 (March 1921): 98-99. In a philosophical or metaphysical sense, the existence of a soul may be only an object of intellectual analysis, but can a soul produce violence? In “Why do we Fight?” (also written in 1921) Suzuki argues that the evil of men is actually rooted in the ego-soul or soul-substance, as it is this belief which separates peoples and causes the devaluing of the lives of others. He claims that the assertion of a soul is akin to “moral violence,” and without *pratītyasamutpāda* there cannot be total justice. This would suggest that Christians, and others who believe in an individual ego-soul are less moral and more prone to “barbarous” actions, as their worldview is based upon the separation of sentient beings from oneself [D.T. Suzuki, “Why do we Fight?” *The Eastern Buddhist* 1, No. 4 (November-December 1921): 270].

105 The Anagarika Dharmapala, “An Appeal to Japanese Buddhists,” *The Young East* 3, no. 6 (November 1927): 192. Less than a decade later, Adolf Hitler would also grant the Japanese the title of “Honorary Aryans,” stating, “I have never regarded the Chinese or the Japanese as being inferior to ourselves. They belong to ancient civilizations, and I admit freely that their past history is superior to our own. They have the right to be proud of their past, just as we have the right to be proud of the civilization to which we belong. Indeed, I believe the more steadfast the Chinese and the Japanese remain in their pride of race, the easier I shall find it to get on with them” [Christian W. Spang and Rolf-Harald Wippich, eds. *Japanese-German Relations, 1895-1945: War, Diplomacy, and Public Opinion*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2].
Dharmapala creates a union of Buddhists, in some ways similar to the imagined union of Aryans proposed by European scholars, which directly reverses the position of those who “call themselves Aryan.” Instead, he argues that Asians themselves can restore the “pure Aryan form of Buddhism from the Japanese storehouse,” against the encroachment of Theosophists, Imperialists, and Christianity. Buddhists were attempting to create a unified global Buddhism during the Era of the Yellow Peril, and this development did often involve interactions with European and American powers and thought, but it also involved anti-colonialism, race sciences, and anti-Semitism being used to reconstitute the dominant thinking of the time to posit a Buddhist world of racial and spiritual superiority.

Japanese Buddhists openly reimagined history in order to place themselves firmly at the roots of modern practices, and even the culture of what was considered “the West” itself. In “An Important Evidence of Buddhist Contact with the West,” Sital Chandra Chakravarty argues that the English word “therapeutic” comes from the Pāli “Thera” and “putta,” roughly translated to “sons of Thera,” or Theravāda Buddhists. Stuart Chandler described the 19th Century assertion that Chinese Buddhists had travelled to South America in “Chinese Buddhism in America.” However, according to Shujiro Watanabe, there is no evidence of that, but “almost

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108 Sital Chandra Chakravarty, “An Important Evidence of Buddhist Contact with the West,” The Young East 2, no. 9 (February 1927): 307. To my knowledge, this argument is not credible in philology circles. My focus is not the philological argument being made, but the imagined history which places the development of Buddhism at the centre of the evolution of European civilization.

every vessel found adrift or stranded on the coast of the Americas, or on the Hawaiian or adjacent islands has on examination proved to be Japanese.”\textsuperscript{110} Watanabe goes on to say that there proceeded “a slow, but constant infusion of Japanese blood,” into the indigenous Americans and therefore the original inhabitants of the United States are racially and genealogically Japanese.\textsuperscript{111} This argument actively reimagines the historical record in order to make the Japanese as the original inhabitants of North America, and Hawai’i. Claiming to be the rightful heirs of the land and intellectual trajectories of North America allows Japanese writers to be able to directly criticize social issues in North America.

\textsuperscript{110} Shujro Watanabe, “Ancient Japanese in America and their Descendants,” \textit{The Young East} 2, no. 1 (June 1926): 17.

\textsuperscript{111} Watanabe, 1926, 17.
During the later-Meiji and Taishō periods, Theosophy also made inroads in Japan, and by extension, to Japanese Buddhism in the United States. Beatrice Lane Suzuki (1878-1939) was a devout Theosophist and writer from New Jersey, who also happened to be the wife of D.T. Suzuki. In 1920, Suzuki, Lane, and Lane’s mother Emma Eskine Hahn joined the International Lodge of the Theosophical Society-Society-Adyar in Tokyo. In 1924, Suzuki left Tokyo to

112 There are numerous examples of mutual influence and overlap between the Theosophical Society and Japanese Buddhism. One such person is William Montgomery McGovern (1897-1964), who became a Jōdo Shinshū Priest in 1915. McGovern’s mother belonged to the Krotons Institute of Theosophy in Los Angeles and edited the journal of the Oriental Esoteric Head Center in Washington, D.C. Following his ordination in Japan at Anryūji Temple (Nishi Honganji), McGovern met with M.T. Kirby to start the Mahāyāna Association in the Spring of 1915. Mortimer T. Kirby (1877-?) an English-Canadian who moved to Japan and became a Zen monk at Engakuji in 1915. Between 1916 and 1926, Kirby propagated Buddhism in Canada, California, and Hawai’i, but his outspoken style and heavy criticism of Christianity alienated many, so he moved to Sri Lanka and lived in a hermitage there. While in Japan, Kirby was also active in metaphysical religion, as in 1919 when he met Samuel L. Lewis and taught him Zen practice. Lewis would later go on to become Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti, also known as Sufi Sam. Kirby ended up denying the Dharma as well as, “he abandoned Buddhism…cursing the Dharma as fit only for the ‘dirty Niggers’ of Ceylon.” [Shin’ichi Yoshinaga, “Three Boys on a Great Vehicle: ‘Mahāyāna Buddhism’ and a Trans-National Network,” in A Buddhist Crossroads: Pioneer Western Buddhists and Asian Networks, 1860-1960, ed. Brian Bocking, Phibul Choompolpaisal, Laurence Cox, and Alicia Turner, (London: Routledge, 2015), 53-55]. Kirby and McGovern started the Mahāyāna Association and edited its publication, Mahayanist, in Japan. The Mahāyāna Association included many who were also members of the Mahāyāna Lodge of the Theosophical Society based in Kyoto. The Mahāyāna Association was influential in the promotion of a trans-sectarian concept of Mahāyāna, in contradistinction to the numerous lineages which had existed in Japan beforehand, thus imagining an essentialized history of Buddhism, superior to Christianity and North American materialist society. Within the pages of Mahayanist, writers first wrote pieces suggesting Buddhism was actually panentheistic monotheism, while Christianity was transcendental monotheism, a trope that would be repeated by Shaku Soyen, D.T. Suzuki, and others [William McGovern, “Editorial,” Mahayanist 1, no.6 (January 1916): 2]. In Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot, Soyen writes that Mahāyāna panentheism inspired Baruch Spinoza and Paul Carus’ conception of god [Soyen Shaku, tr. D.T. Suzuki, Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot: Addresses on Religious Subjects, (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1906), 26]. Utsuki Nishū (1893-1951) was a Buddhist Priest who, in 1917, travelled to the United States to settle some issues in the Los Angeles Buddhist Church. While in Hollywood, he joined the Theosophical Society and Krotona Institute, currently headed by A.P. Warrington who was general secretary of the American Section of the Theosophical Society-Adyar. Utsuki was introduced to Warrington by McGovern, and actually lived at Krotona Institute during 1917. Later, Utsuki was appointed chairman of the publishing bureau of Nishi Honganji, placing him in charge of publishing English texts on Buddhism. Utsuki was also close with Ruth Everett, who would later marry Sokei-an and become of the pioneers of Zen in America; her daughter would later marry Alan Watts [Yoshinaga, 2015, 59].

assume a teaching position at Ōtani University so Lane and Suzuki started a new lodge of the Theosophical Society in Kyoto on 8 May 1924 (White Lotus Day). Lane wrote articles for *The Eastern Buddhist*, *The Young East*, and other publications, often focusing on the esoteric aspects of Shingon Buddhism. She was also an enthusiastic supporter of the Order of the Star in the East (1911-1929), a messianic branch of the Theosophical Society based on the prophecy of Jiddu Krishnamurti. Suzuki was actually rather critical of the Order of the Star, an opinion which Lane claimed was due to the vast similarities between the Theosophical Order and Japanese Buddhism.\(^{114}\)

Buddhists actively utilized doctrines, organizations, and prominent figures in Metaphysical circles popular in North America to help spread Buddhism across established global networks. In the “Book Reviews” section of *The Eastern Buddhist* from 1931, Suzuki includes many Metaphysical sources, including a review of *The Real H.P. Blavatsky* by William Kingsland.\(^ {115}\) Within the review, Suzuki states, “there is no doubt whatever that the Theosophical Movement, made known to the general world the main doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism,” and “undoubtedly, Madame Blavatsky had in some way been initiated into the deeper side of Mahāyāna teaching, and then gave out what she deemed wise to the Western world as Theosophy.”\(^{116}\) Although Suzuki’s views of Theosophy shift over time, it seems quite appropriate for Japanese Buddhists to utilize the Theosophical Society in spreading their own ideas.

Theosophy acknowledges the superiority of Buddhism, which was reinforced through race


sciences, and the Japanese relationship with South Asia, which were then combined and utilized by Buddhists in Japan and the United States beginning before World War II.

During the Taishō Era, Japan had fought on the side of the victorious Allies in World War I, and in the postwar period underwent a democratic movement which led to the full realization of a two-party system (although the two-party system had been developing since 1900). However, in 1923 Japan experienced the Great Kantō earthquake, which killed well over 100,000 people, and was the largest single disaster in prewar Japanese history. Similarly, economic problems plagued the governments which held power in the Diet throughout the 1920s. In 1925, Japan granted universal suffrage to its citizens, but due to pressure from the right to curtail the rising tide of leftists and communists, the Peace Preservation Law was also signed in that year, which outlawed any ideas or groups which sought to alter the system of government. Within this cultural milieu Emperor Taishō dies, and Prince Hirohito is named as the Emperor Shōwa in 1926. The Japanese citizenry faced tension due to the loss of perceived societal status resulting from economic turmoil, natural disasters, foreign relations, and other factors. It is in this period that a rising zeitgeist of militarism and nationalism take hold, ostensibly for the protection of the state and the re-establishment of Japanese greatness.


118 Hammer, 2006, 100.
Japanese Buddhism in Asia during the Early Shōwa Period

“The West” was not the only geographical location to be essentialized and blamed for degeneration in the writings of Japanese Buddhists. Writers decried the devolution which had taken place in India and China, as they had theoretically forgotten the greatness of their Buddhist history. The Western nations of India and China, after all, represented Buddhism’s ancestral homeland for Japanese Buddhists, and combined with Korea, marked the path by which the religion entered Japan in the first place.

If Buddhism did represent a high point for modern thought, why would the Japanese denigrate the very homeland of Siddhārtha Gautama? How could Japanese writers argue that they owned the best form of spirituality, while also admitting that they had obtained this spirituality from India, China, and Korea? The answer to these questions comes in a number of forms. First, one must view culture and religion separately, then it can be argued that Buddhism helped India and China, but only up until the point that their respective cultures began to negatively influence Buddhism. This would mean that Buddhism, as a religion, was great, but it was the cultures of India or China which had corrupted the tradition. In many ways, this allows the Japanese to separate those of lesser societal stature from themselves. Domestically, this would mean that Buddhism is not a “foreign religion,” as the Buddhism which comes from China and India no longer exists; simultaneously, the Japanese could separate themselves on the international stage, as the Chinese and Indians were both considered barbaric in the literature of the Yellow Peril. Second, one must argue that Japan and Buddhism had the opposite reaction whereby Japan was already great and Japanese culture aided Buddhism, which was done through
the assertion of a superior Japanese culture, Nihonjinron, and a superior form of spirituality which is timeless and beyond Buddhism itself, namely in the form of Zen. This means that although Buddhism is great, the Japanese made it even better. Each of these arguments reimagines history in order to place a specific culture at its forefront. Once this is accomplished, the door has been opened for a re-creation of future events.\textsuperscript{119}

In order to utilize history to influence future events, Buddhists needed to start with the very roots of the issue, as far as ancient India, the cradle of Buddhism. In “An Incomplete Picture of India,” the anonymous author argues that India was entirely without a history until Buddhism gave the ancient Indians history.\textsuperscript{120} Fabio Rambelli described the process of popular practices moving from the periphery, including India, to the elite members of Japanese society in premodern Japan, allowing them to claim ownership of these ideas which would result in the erasure of Indian history.\textsuperscript{121} Buddhism gave India government, art, architecture, and general civilization. In “Civilization Without History,” J. Takakusu similarly argues that India has only

\textsuperscript{119} Jan Nattier, \textit{Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline}, (Freemont, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), 127. Nattier analyzes the Kauśāmbī story, which is in the Theravāda and Mahāyāna canons, to show that Buddhists predicted the decline of Dharma resulting from foreign invasions, excessive state control, and the decline of the Sangha. She goes on to argue that Buddhists used macro-historical narratives coupled with ideas of circular time in Buddhism, to turn narratives of decline into future prophecies [127-131]. This process is similar to the broader trends within the present study, as a theory of decline is reinterpreted to become a prediction, but in this case the prediction is one of future power and utopia.

\textsuperscript{120} “An Incomplete Picture of India,” \textit{The Young East} 2, no. 11 (April 1927): 384.

\textsuperscript{121} Fabio Rambelli, “‘Just Behave as you Like; Prohibitions and Impurities are not a Problem:’ Radical Amida Cults and Popular Religiosity in Premodern Japan,” in \textit{Approaching the Land of Bliss: Religious Praxis in the Cult of Amitābha}, ed. Richard K. Payne and Kenneth K. Tanaka, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 189. By the time popular practices moved from the periphery to the elite, the Japanese Buddhists would claim that the practice originated in Japan, not on the periphery, thus erasing Indian Buddhist history.
literature, but no actual history.\textsuperscript{122} Takakusu argues that “Buddhism must be said to be the prime factor that purged ancient India of its dirt and filth and brought out a new India,” which simultaneously degrades India as a country while prioritizing Buddhism.\textsuperscript{123} In fact, an article written by an Indian author, Ganga Charan Lal, directly blame Brahmans who “cruelly smothered” Buddhism in order to maintain their class power.\textsuperscript{124} For an Indian writer, this would place the blame for the destruction of Buddhism with Hindus, a religion which was viewed negatively by many in Europe and the United States, and increasingly, Buddhists in Asia. For the Japanese quoting this Indian author, blaming the Brahmans would be further solidifying the position of Japanese superiority against the rest of Asia.

According to Japanese sources produced in the 1920s, India devolved drastically, both religiously and culturally, as “the rulers forsook Dhamma and became tools in the hands of the vindictive Brahmans.”\textsuperscript{125} In “A Discussion of the Origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism,” Robert Cornell Armstrong (1876-1929), a Methodist Missionary to Japan, re-imagines Buddhist history as well as he claims that it was the reaction to Brahmanism which accounts for the idealistic and metaphysical elements which Armstrong argues are definitive of the Mahāyāna, adaptations

\textsuperscript{122} J. Takakusu, “Civilization Without History,” \textit{The Young East} 2, no. 4 (September, 1926): 111. The idea of a civilization with literature, but no history is a common trope in non-Academic Orientalist writing. One example of this is V.S. Naipaul’s 1964, \textit{An Area of Darkness}, where he describes the disillusionment experienced as an Indian who read the literature of his homeland before travelling to the actual country. Naipaul’s description of “the beggars, the gutters, the starved bodies, the weeping swollen-bellied child black with flies in the filth and cowdung and human excrement,” was so extreme that the book was banned in India [V.S. Naipaul, \textit{An Area of Darkness: An Experience of India}, (London: André Deutsch, 1964), 65].

\textsuperscript{123} Takakusu, 1926, “Civilization,” 113.

\textsuperscript{124} Ganga Charan Lal, “Buddhist Renaissance in India: II. ‘Why we Lost India,’” \textit{The Young East} 4, no. 5 (October 1928): 161.

\textsuperscript{125} Lal, 161.
which later “crept into Hinayāna Sūtras.” Armstrong, a Christian missionary, is quoted in a Japanese Buddhist magazine to show the corruption of “Hinduism” in India. This would suggest that not only is Buddhism the true heartwood of Indian thought and culture, but Mahāyāna Buddhism particularly; this allowed Japanese Buddhist writers to argue that Mahāyāna Buddhism lay at the beginning of Indian historical development and represented the true genius of the "eastern mind." It was the corruption of “Hinduism” and Indian culture, not Mahāyāna Buddhism, which allows the Japanese to separate themselves from other Asians during the Yellow Peril, but also to re-create the Aryan myth to no longer place Europeans at the centre of historical development, but in a mystical way, the Japanese, as the harbingers of the pinnacle of Mahāyāna thought. These similarities, rather than pointing to an historical chronology where parts of the “original” doctrine were taken and corrupted, suggests that Mahāyāna developed faster earlier, and that this evolution “crept” (notice the unsettling term-suggesting it was unwanted and had to sneak) back into the “Hinayāna” afterwards. The historical chronology is flipped as the Mahāyāna becomes original; if Mahāyāna is the original Buddhism, then that which makes Theravāda a Buddhist tradition was slyly taken from the greater vehicle and placed into the Theravāda, which is really closeted Brahmanism, in order to make it seem Buddhist. In other words, all of that which makes Theravāda a good Buddhist tradition is copied from the Mahāyāna because the Greater Vehicle was the original teaching of Śākyamuni.

Japanese Buddhist authors similarly argue that Mahāyāna Buddhism, as the intellectual genesis of Indian culture, represents the true civilizing program, rather than capitalist colonial regimes. Takakusu finishes his article with the assertion that “the Indian people can never be

made contented and happy only by policies of reconciliation, for they are blind to economic interest...Buddhism and Buddhism alone will bring permanent peace not only to India but to the whole world.”127 Here we see the reimagination of history through its total erasure, as the historical Buddha is used as a polemical tool to explain the perceived superiority of Japanese Buddhism. The pattern of historical reimagination and erasure is common in post-colonial societies, as one group places themselves at the centre of historical development.128 In an era of colonialism, Japanese Buddhist authors argue Indians are blind to economic interest and therefore will not “colonize” in the way the British would expect; instead, the culture of India should return to its original greatness, which was the creation of Mahāyāna Buddhism. However, China has become corrupted and backwards, which means India should look to the country that developed the Mahāyāna to its ultimate end, otherwise known as Japan. It would seem that Japanese Buddhists sometimes utilized religious arguments about Buddhism in order to further colonial narratives, simultaneously against the British and promoting Japanese Buddhism.

Japanese Buddhist writers regarded China as a once great harbinger of Buddhist thought which had degenerated. Chinese Buddhism, they claimed, had become only a bastion of ritualism and superstition, completely forgetting Chinese Buddhist spirituality.129 The Eastern Buddhist contained numerous briefs within the “Notes” section at the end of each publication; Japanese


128 Janet McLellan, Cambodian Refugees in Ontario: Resettlement, Religion, and Identity, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 15. For instance, the Khmer Rouge who reimagined Cambodian history in order to suggest that their own revolutionary style had coloured the position of Cambodian people for centuries.

129 During the kokugaku movement, Shinto scholars attempted to find core Japanese characteristics which existed prior to contact with China, which suggests that China was seen as a corrupting influence even then. This narrative is picked up again by Japanese Buddhists in the late-Taishō and Shōwa Periods.
writers reported on Buddhist activities in China focusing on its degeneration and lack of progress. Further articles discussed items like Buddhist Monuments, which writers claimed had been allowed to fall into disarray, due again to Chinese mismanagement.

Japanese Buddhists used race as a way to explain how a religion whose adherents “are not believers in fiction, superstition, or mythology” might come to contain such large numbers of supernatural beings and complex rituals. Japanese Buddhist writers claimed that differences between the Yamato race (Japanese) and the Chinese explained the expansion of devotionalism and cosmological beings. Not only are Japanese writings about the Chinese important to show the colonial aspirations of the Japanese, which suggests that American and European powers were not the only countries with imperial endeavours, but also to show how Buddhism and a reimagined past were utilized in order to present Japanese racial and spiritual superiority. Buddhists were able to capitalize upon the reimagined past and race sciences within a global network in order to show Japanese Buddhists superiority against the Chinese and Indians, both of whom were the subject of discrimination in the United States. In other words, race sciences and prejudice in the United States and Europe essentialized all Asians in a negative light, while Japanese Buddhists attempted to show the superiority of their religious tradition by also disparaging the contributions of China and India, even within Buddhist history. Japanese Buddhist writings on China and India display the ways in which Buddhism was utilized to

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130 “Buddhist Activities in China,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 3, no. 3 (March 1924): 274. These include dilapidated temples, licentious and ignorant monks, and total reliance on ritualism.


132 Soyen, 1906, 125.
counter colonial narratives and simultaneously assert Japanese Buddhist superiority during a period of Japanese imperial expansion.

However, a certain change in language begins to enter various publications between the Taishō and Shōwa Eras. In the 1920s, writers like D.T. Suzuki credited China for bringing Buddhism to Japan, and acknowledged that much of Japanese Buddhism had borrowed from Chinese forebears. Throughout the publications of Japanese Buddhists during the late-Taishō and early Shōwa Periods, ritualism is disparaged as a non-Buddhistic practice which crept into the religion. This is displayed especially in articles about the Chinese.133 In the 1930s, as Japan begins to make greater inroads within China and starts to assert power throughout Asia, the tenor of this language takes on a slight change. In “Religious Features of Manchoukuo,” Mock Joya claims that Mahāyāna was too foreign to Chinese temperament, and therefore China never actually became Buddhist.134 Joya asserts the “Chinese are fatalists…their sense of religion had no opportunity of developing in the past, religions having mostly been regarded as only means of gaining power.”135 He even uses a generally Western argument when he claims that “Lamaism” grew out of the rubble which the Chinese had reduced Buddhism to, and so at this point “it can be said that the people of [China] have no religion,” but that “with proper guidance…they will

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133 In “Religious Features of Manchoukuo,” Mock Joya explains that the Buddhism of China underwent a long process of degeneration, in which the religion was adapted by “savages” and monks who “are now mostly ignorant and unlettered…[and] do not know even the most simple of the teachings of Buddha.” [39] Joya then asserts that one of the most telling examples of the inferior Chinese religious temperament is their belief in external heavens and Pure Lands as opposed to an internalization of these particular Buddhist teachings [Mock Joya, “Religious Features of Manchuokuo.” The Young East 4, no. 11 (July-September 1934): 38-45].


135 Joya, 1934, 45.
embrace true religion.” In other words, China has become so lost that they may only be helped by the intervention of another Buddhist nation, namely Japan. Buddhism and religion were being utilized in conjunction with a network of dominant tropes in order to further the Japanese colonial agenda, and to place themselves, not the Chinese, at the centre of Mahāyāna, and therefore world historical development.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, I have detailed the ways in which doctrinal ideas of the Self have been repositioned by Japanese Buddhists at a time when Japanese Buddhists were also asserting their own position in geopolitics and world history. Each of these points involved utilizing dominant tropes and debates surrounding Buddhism to reimagine history. I argue that Buddhists used notions of the Self, or lack thereof, in Buddhism to reimagine past events in order to place more suitable narratives in the past which could then be brought into the future, thus creating an argument of temporality. Japanese Buddhists defined themselves using historical discussions of *nihonjinron* and *kokugakua*, against a perceived “West,” and then used those doctrinal discussions to further their own quest for recognition and superiority. By reversing narratives regarding Japanese Buddhist corruption and East Asian racial inferiority, Japanese Buddhists were able to place themselves firmly at the beginning of world historical development rather than European Aryans, and to argue that this genesis provided Japan with an important opportunity to unify Buddhist Asia against European colonialism and Christianity.

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136 Ibid, 44-45.
The adaptation of Buddhist presentation was accomplished through the prism of redefining the Self. This essentialized “Self” included a defined notion of Japan against a perceived “West,” as well as a reified notion of Buddhism with a singular core which lay at the beginning of human historical development. These new interpretations of a Buddhist “Self,” become increasingly mysticized, and individualized, during the Shōwa Period as Japanese forms of Buddhism are increasingly able to “make homes” within an American religious landscape. The Self was chosen following a period of negative assessments of the Buddhist ideal of nirvāṇa, as the Self fits far more comfortably within the limits of cultural acceptability in the United States. Redefining Buddhist notions of the Self also came during a period where American notions of selfhood were being assessed broadly across cultural and religious distinctions.

Japanese Buddhists utilized a global network of Buddhism, race sciences, the Aryan myth, and colonialism, coupled with internal pressures from the state, in order to reinterpret the position of Mahāyāna Buddhism, to which they held an exceptional relation, and therefore the unification of Buddhist Asia. In so doing, Japanese Buddhists posited a Universalist argument, whereby Buddhism could be used as a tool for the reinterpretation of all world history, and to advocate for Japanese superiority. From the late-Meiji Era to the beginnings of the Shōwa Period, Japanese Buddhists fought against dominant tropes which disparaged their religion by first defining their own Self through nihonjinron, which then allowed them to define the “other” against that essentialization; this delineation of the Japanese Self was then reinforced through modern science and the writings of outsiders, such as Sri Lankan reformers and Theosophists, allowing the Japanese to posit their own global and historical superiority, which puts them in a unique position to truly unify Asia. In the following chapter, I will focus more strongly on the
Shōwa Period and the years preceding World War II, during which time Japanese Buddhists reshaped the created Japanese Self to become a more mystical-Universalist entity, allowing Japanese Buddhism to take on certain utopian elements. The positivism of utopian ideas, coupled with the strength of the language of superiority and mystical interpretations of a transcendent past contributed to the domestication of Buddhism in the United States.
Chapter Four

The Mystical Self and Japanese Superiority in the Shōwa Period

“In more general terms, the society in the East is solidly based upon the family or community unit, while the individual is the keynote of the Occidental social life…individual freedom versus submission to authority; the spirit of domination, interest in mass and speed and so forth, versus the receptive attitude, meditative mood, inclination towards repose and serenity and so forth; the spirit of search and experimentation versus the attitude of faith.” ¹ - M. Anesaki, 1935

“It is a fact, now recognized by religious and scientific students in America and Europe, that the knowledge of this Divine Law is slowly but surely penetrating and permeating the sincere, deep-thinking minds of the West, and the time has now come for the Buddhists from the so-called Buddhist countries of the Orient to meet with the intellectual and spiritual demands of the Occident of the present age” ² - Anonymous, 1904

These two quotes present the ambivalent relationship of Japanese Buddhism towards “the West,” as they show the essentialization of Japanese and American culture as well as the drive for Buddhist success in missionizing Americans. Japanese Buddhist adaptations of anātman simultaneously reflected the tenor of society through the notion of an individualized Self and an utopian Buddhism of superiority, as well as perpetuating a continued language of strength in order to create more success for Buddhism in the United States. The imagined history being created in Japan prior to World War II was one of perennial strength and superiority, which was also the presentation of Buddhism for American audiences during the same time period.

Globalization creates a situation in which Japanese people could gain new ideas from the United States and Europe, mix them with Japanese culture and thought, and then bring that same intellectual thread back to the United States. Social and religious thought were becoming

¹ Anesaki, 1935, 18.

increasingly globalized between “East” and “West,” with each aspect reflecting all of the others back onto themselves.

In this chapter, I will analyze the ways in which Buddhist notions of the Self, and therefore god, were mysticized in order to make the religion more inclusive of a range of beliefs which people may have held. The mysticization of Buddhism involved further defining the Self of Japan through discussions of materialism versus spiritualism, which allowed Japanese Buddhists to argue that what was perceived of as a source of strength for the United States, its economic success, was in fact the nation’s biggest detriment. This mysticization is represented as a dual process between external presentation, through the assertion of a Buddhist god, and internal polemics, through the reinterpretation of *jiriki* and *tariki*. These two interconnected arguments fuel continued debates regarding the level of relationship between modern science and Pure Land Buddhism. These developments were all shaped within the larger cultural framework of the Shōwa Period in Japan and internment and World War in the United States. I do not wish to argue that Buddhism somehow started or contributed to the Second World War, but the militaristic language employed by Japanese Buddhists prior to World War II helped to create a vocabulary of superiority which would eventually contribute to further Buddhist success in the United States in the later 1950s. Buddhism was a direct reflection of the social situation in the years prior to World War II, which gave Buddhists a new vocabulary which was utilized with great success following the end of the war.
The Mysticization of Japanese Buddhist Forms in the United States

Around the turn of the Shōwa Period, Japanese Buddhism increasingly focused on mysticism as a Universalizing force which could create a “basis for brotherhood” in humanity. Dwight Goddard (1861-1939) was a Christian missionary to China who then spent 1928 living in a Japanese Zen temple before returning to the United States to create “The Followers of the Buddha, An American Brotherhood,” a Buddhist study and practice group for Americans in 1934. Goddard was the editor of the magazine, *Zen: A Magazine of Self-Realisation*, before writing the *Buddhist Bible* and working with D.T. Suzuki on his translation of the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*. *Zen* was published in Vermont in the United States; although it is not the only Japanese Buddhist source published in the United States, *Zen* is notable in that it is a magazine on Japanese Zen written and published mainly by a Caucasian American in the United States, which displays the global network of influence which helped create Buddhism in the United States during the Yellow Peril. For the present study, it should also be noted that separating each article in *Zen*, there is a swastika, an ancient Indian symbol of peace and wisdom commonly used in

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3 Ernest Kaundinya Shinkaku Hunt, “A Soliloquy,” *The Golden Lotus* 14, no. 5 (June 1957): 54. Although this quote is from *The Golden Lotus* in 1957, it is a fairly common phrase amongst Buddhists throughout 1899-1957. Similarly, Hunt had been a Shin minister, and in 1957 was still a Sōtō Zen monk.

Japanese Buddhism, but also the symbol of the Aryan race, later used by the Nazis.\(^5\) I do not suggest that Goddard was connected in any way with National Socialism, but I do argue that the Aryan, meaning a person of nobility, is present on nearly every page of the magazine. To clarify, Goddard was using the swastika as a symbol of Buddhism and nobility, but for many reading Zen in the United States and Europe, the swastika was a ubiquitous symbol of the Aryan race.

Rudyard Kipling, who will return below in Chapter Six, used to place swastikas above his signature, as well as on his personal letterhead until it was adopted as a symbol of the Nazis.\(^6\) For some reading Zen, this symbol of superiority would have been very apparent, and theoretically an enticement to Buddhism. Those who wished to see the Aryan race within Zen, and Buddhism more broadly, could find it fairly close to the surface.

Buddhism portrayed as mysticism becomes a major trope in the writings of Japanese Buddhists during the Shōwa Period. In the “Salutatory” article of Zen, Goddard compares the rise of Christian and Buddhist mysticism following World War I.\(^7\) Goddard defines mysticism as “a volitional denial of the reality of the finite self and the acceptance of, and the integration into,

\(^5\) The swastika has been used by Japanese Buddhists for centuries, suggesting that there is nothing particularly novel about its usage. However, the Swastika was being used to represent racial Aryanism even in 1905 [T.K. Nakagaki, *The Buddhist Swastika and Hitler’s Cross*, (New York: Toshikazu Kenjitsu Nakagaki, 2017), 35]. Hitler published his first book, *The Germanic Revolution*, in 1905 and 1913 with a Swastika on the cover. Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874-1954) was an Austrian journalist and former Catholic monk who founded the esoteric anti-Semitic organization, the Order of the New Templars (“Ordo novi templi”) in 1907 in Germany. Lanz created the magazine *Ostara* in 1905, which was based on anti-Semitic and völkisch theories. Other Metaphysical groups in Germany and Austria regularly used the swastika as an Aryan symbol of runes [38]. The swastika was used across Europe in the early 20th century as a symbol of power and energy, such as the Swastika Laundry in Dublin, opened in 1912.


a Universal Self-hood.”

He asserts that “there is no denying the fact that modern European civilisation and culture is characterized by extreme materialism…distractions and excitement for the mind, and balm and intoxicants for the ego.” Christianity and its transcendent God may not be solely responsible for this sad state of civilization, but they are “at least unable to overcome it, and [are] obliged to stand helpless and impotent before its accelerating evils.” The failure of Christianity is then tied to a failure of race as,

Christianity has failed to hold back a very serious breakdown in the moral and religious culture of the times…it is natural that a race that has had unlimited confidence in Christianity for two thousand years, can not easily give up its faith…very possibly the Pauline Greek dogmatics of an exclusive and transcendental theism may wisely be given up.

Christianity is failing, and it is due to the hubris of the Aryan race. Goddard argues that the more rational and positivistic solution can be found in Buddhism, where “Truth itself become[s] merged into the One Unity of the Buddha-Nature.” The editor argues that European civilization’s basis in the Self is failing under the weight of materialism, but respite can be found in the rational religion of the One Unity. Buddhism is at once a mystical unification with Truth

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9 Ibid, 2.

10 Ibid, 2.


and a scientific rationalism, thus Universalizing the religion for all times and ages. Rather than a worldview which has developed over centuries in various times and places, Buddhism becomes a transcendental truth underlying all human existence, a recursive philosophy for all ages.13

Buddhist mysticism was expressly compared to the biological theory of evolution, as rebirth could be seen as a continual process of spiritual development.14 According to Goddard, biological evolution allows all previous karma and “intellectual life” to coalesce within a new fetus prior to its birth, setting the being’s path upwards to develop “higher potentialities of the spiritual life.”15 It is only through the “self-less” practice of “Za-Zen” that one will realize full enlightenment, which is “an insight into the true nature of reality and of essential Selfness… one’s true being is of one identity with the Suchness of Buddhahood.”16 The mystical merging of a singular being with a cosmic entity is directly tied to the Self, as “the little unified consciousness that we call soul, merges into the All-inclusive Consciousness of Universal Mind.”17 In the next article on “Satori,” Goddard claims that Zen and Satori are one and the

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13 This “mystification of Buddhism” also follows the narrative of two Buddhisms, as it allows Buddhism to be a religion without dogmas or rituals for some (as Buddhism is a transcendent union for all times), while also being a corrupted religion of dogmatism and rituals (as Buddhism is an Asian religion) [The “mystification of Buddhism” language is largely inspired by Wilson, *Mindful America*, 2015].

14 To be clear, in this description, evolutionary rebirth becomes a path from “point A,” meaning a being’s first existence, to “point B,” meaning enlightenment, where each rebirth results in a new stage of spiritual life.


same, for without Satori there is no Zen.\(^{18}\) The Buddhist enlightenment is directly tied to the Self, because “unless it grows out of your self it is of no value.”\(^{19}\) This “mysticized” version of Japanese enlightenment combines the Self with science in order to create a mystical merging of Self and Buddhahood, a self-deification process.

Mysticized Buddhism was utilized to counter Christianity, even though Christian thought was developing its own “mystical” theological understandings with the development of Neo-Orthodoxy.\(^{20}\) In “The Word, God,” Goddard quotes Rev. John Haynes Holmes, a Unitarian, who wrote “A Humanistic Interpretation of Prayer,” in which Holmes questions the efficacy of prayer in the modern world.\(^{21}\) Goddard says that neo-orthodox theologians have removed the idea of a personal god, but continue to think of a singular figure which is God. He claims the Buddhist Dharmakāya represents the “undifferentiated Ultimate Principle,” which is a much more scientific and rational definition for the underlying spirituality of the world. Goddard has managed to reposition Buddhism as superior to Christianity, suggest that Buddhism has a “god,” and to argue that Zen has the real, rational, and scientific god. Mysticized Buddhism furthers

\(^{18}\) Dwight Goddard, “Satori,” *Zen: A Magazine of Self Realisation* 5, no.1 (January 1930): 11. “There is no Zen without Satori, it is the Alpha and Omega of Zen Buddhism. Zen devoid of Satori is like the sun without light and heat. Zen may lose all its literature, all its monasteries and all its paraphernalia, but so long as there is Satori in it, it will survive to eternity.”


\(^{20}\) Hutchison, 1976, 226.

\(^{21}\) Dwight Goddard, “The Word, God,” *Zen: A Magazine of Self Realisation* 5, no.1 (January 1930): 14. “He used phrases such as these: ‘Contact with the Universe,’ ‘Prayer, in its ultimate and highest meaning, is desire to identify ourselves with cosmic destiny,’ “The spirit of men is akin to the spirit of the Universe in itself,” “The conscious and deliberate attempt to gain contact with the Universe…to merge our lives in the life of the Whole and there with to identify ourselves with the cosmic destiny.” Reverend John Haynes Holmes represents another Unitarian presence within the current narrative. Unitarians were involved in the creation of shin bukkō [Ketelaar, 1993, 200], by giving Buddhists meeting spaces, and were also active in the eugenics movement. Connections between Buddhism and Unitarianism deserve further study, especially focusing on their interconnected intellectual histories during the early 20th century.
both social and spiritual goals, as Buddhists argued their superiority of religious thinking in opposition to Christianity, and a spirituality which is timeless and beyond a single culture.

Portraying Zen Buddhism as having a god allows Buddhists to posit ideas of superiority for specific cultures. In “Zen in Japan,” Goddard claims that a Zen adherent would never personify the supreme being, but that they “recognize for certain minds personification is necessary.”

He even compares Zen to other Buddhists, who worship Amida, or focus on the Tripitaka, as “the formation of a canon leads to loss of charity.” Zen, on the other hand, “has no list of Sacred Books,” and “accepts no infallible guide but his own enlightened conscience, which is one with the enlightened conscience of the universe.”

Despite being one with the universe, Zen was founded in the “solid quietude of the Zen monasteries” of Japan, which is ultimately the same as the “Omnipresent Heart of Buddha.” Goddard further displays the ambivalent paths which Buddhism took to “cross boundaries,” as Zen is simultaneously a religion of Self-evolution, and monism, as well as being a timeless transcendental unity of all beings, which has its heart in Japan; the presentation of a mystical Zen allows Buddhism to be simultaneously transcendent and immanent.

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24 Ibid, 14.

“Western Materialism,” “Eastern Spirituality,” and The god of Japanese Buddhism

The mysticization of Japanese Buddhism allowed Buddhists to simultaneously assert conflicting viewpoints regarding doctrinal adaptations to Buddhism; rather than being underhanded, in many ways Japanese Buddhists display the concept of upāya as they declare that shifting notions of the Self also mean that Buddhism has “a god.” Confusion regarding the Buddhist notion of a creator god has coloured a great deal of interaction between Christians and Buddhists throughout history, such as the story of St. Francis Xavier travelling to Japan and using Dainichi, the Japanese name for Vairocana, to mean the Christian God, which later caused confusion amongst Japanese-Christian converts.26 The idea of a Buddhist “god,” in the monotheistic sense, represents some of the ambivalence of Europe and the United States towards Buddhism, as some academics and religious liberals applauded Buddhism’s supposed agnosticism against dogma, while others believed this same agnosticism amounted to a melancholy nihilism and proved that Asians were backwards idol-worshippers. Similarly, ideas of universalism and social evolution posited that the human religious mind had developed from a time of supposed infancy, defined by animism and idol-worship, up to a position of monotheism, represented by European Christianity. D.T. Suzuki particularly criticized Christian Theology for being too dualistic and not capturing the interdependent characteristic of Buddhism; eventually, Suzuki used this view of mysticism to criticize the very category of “religion,” choosing instead

to use a more inclusive framework. In claiming that Buddhism does have a god, but one which
is more scientifically plausible and rational to the human mind and therefore different than
Christianity, Buddhists were able to mysticize the notion of god in order to make Buddhism more
culturally acceptable globally. Buddhists did not claim that their religion “has a god” in order to
mirror Christian beliefs, per se, but instead used the particularities of a new notion of god to
reinforce the ideas of Buddhism and science, and claim their own superiority against the
academic thinking of human development at the time.

Japanese Buddhist writers attempted to fit within limits of cultural acceptance by
asserting that their religion had a god, although not necessarily the same as Christian
understandings of this figure. In a famous newspaper clipping from San Francisco in 1899, it is
announced that Shūe Sonoda and Kakuryō Nishijima have come to America to “teach that God is
not the creator, but the created,” making it appear as if Buddhism was the atheist “other” to
Christian monotheism. Buddhism portrayed as closeted-atheism was a dominant trope in
popular media throughout the Era of the Yellow Peril. This public perception presents another
reason for Japanese Buddhists to reevaluate the idea of god in Buddhism.

The theory of Buddhist atheism relates to discussions of spiritualism versus materialism,
as European and American writers had charged that the Buddhist Abhidharma amounted to
materialist atheism in the sense that the physical phenomenon of the world represented all of
existence; European and American writers argued that Buddhist beliefs in anātman and the

27 Wilson and Moriya, 2016, xviii. Suzuki claims, “[Dharmakāya] is different, however, from the
[Christian God] in that it does not stand transcendentally apart from the universe, which is on the contrary
(1902): 11-14].

28 Ama, 35.
classification of all phenomenon found in the Abhidharma represented atheism. Japanese Buddhists during the time of the Yellow Peril reversed these historical tropes to argue that “the West," meaning Europe, the United States, and Christianity, were the real materialists, as they focused only on economic prosperity at the expense of religious belief. Japanese Buddhists utilized these American tropes in order to counter a charge which had been laid against them numerous times in the past. They claimed North Americans only knew Theravāda Buddhism, which is why they believed the religion was atheist, while in Eastern Buddhism, which was the Ekayāna encapsulating all other forms of Buddhism, there was a god, while Americans and Europeans were actually materialists. In other words, the economic success which Europe and the United States enjoyed, and claimed was proof of their racial evolutionary superiority, was actually a hindrance in comparison to the abundance of spirituality which Asian nations possessed. The distinction between negative materialism and positive spirituality represents a reversal of notions of devolution and corruption amongst academics and characterizations of the feminized “East” in psychology.

The discussion of spirituality versus materialism represents Buddhist debates regarding the nature of Self. Japanese Buddhists were engaging American intellectual-historical traditions, and reframing colonial narratives which posited that economic success was proof of moral certitude and evolved civilization. “Spirituality” used in this form has its roots in the tradition of American Transcendentalism. In the American Transcendental movement, materialism represented the code word for physical things which were not related to god, while spiritualism was anything that served god. Beginning in the late-1820s, American Transcendentalists were generally favourable to Asian religious traditions, and attempted to portray religious traditions as
differing paths all pointing towards the same ultimate reality. Transcendentalists labelled this view as “spirituality,” representing an individual search for Truth in opposition to “materialistic” institutional religion which smacked of ritualism, dogma, and economic indulgence. In other words, spirituality represented a code for an individual and unmediated experience with a divine reality. According to Transcendentalists, this ultimate existence was directly connected or even identical to an individual’s mind, and was best experienced through solitary contemplation or mystical experience. Spirituality becomes synonymous with individualism, freedom, and connection to ultimate reality, while materialism represents a monolithic set of rules meant to hold an individual back and provide mediation between the divine reality. Materialism became a counter against an assertion which had begun centuries before. Eastern Buddhists were not atheists or materialists because their Buddhism has a god and were therefore spiritual, whereas Americans, Europeans, and Christianity represented the real materialism. Japanese Buddhist assertions of a god were not simply new inventions created in a moment, but represented the culmination of arguments dating back through the centuries of Buddhist interactions with Christian worlds. Japanese Buddhists used 19th Century American Transcendental terminology to change an argument started by Francis Xavier in 16th Century Japan in order to better represent themselves in the United States and Europe during the Yellow Peril. Japanese Buddhists attempted to reposition their religion through the use of recursive philosophy.

In order to further solidify an argument based on the questioning of metaphysical assumptions, such as the inherent good of science, Japanese Buddhists essentialized “East” and

29 McMahan, 2008, 71.

30 Ibid, 71.
“West.” To accomplish this task, they used language similar to Western academics, including Carl Jung, who claimed that “the East” was naturally more spiritual and feminine compared to “the West” which is more materialistic and masculine. Japanese writers across denominational lines, across various publications, and across oceans defined the United States as “materialist” and Japan as “spiritual.” Within periodicals, these essentialized definitions are used to make the argument against imperialism and domination, and for Japanese religious and cultural superiority. A quote from *The Eastern Buddhist* displays the way in which these definitions are juxtaposed:

> Recently, the material progress of the world has been really overwhelming to such an extent even as to overshadow the significance of the spiritual side of human life; but the latter can never be ignored or silenced, for when the time ripens it is sure to raise its head and unmistakably express its will. And there is no doubt that we are now approaching such a time; do we not hear the cry: “Enough with materialism and naturalism?” To be rich, to be comfortable, to be powerful and overbearing,—this does not cover the whole field of human aspirations. Far from it; but let us now be more humane, more considerate of others, more brotherly to one another, and let the strength of a nation be measured by these virtues and not by the number of battleships and thoroughness of military equipments.  

Buddhists from multiple lineages, including Jōdo Shinshū, argued that the material prosperity of the United States and Europe, and the philosophy of “naturalism” common amongst völkisch movements and race sciences, were not something to be envied, because the Japanese were rich in the far superior resource of spirituality.

Japanese Buddhists attempted to de-couple connections between material prosperity and spirituality, as prominent European scholars in the early 20th century argued that material wealth

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31 Otani, 1921, 258.
naturally followed from monotheism (theoretically the best form of religion), as well as racial and cultural superiority. In “A Deeper Aspect of the Present European Situation,” William Stede argues that Europe and North America have lost their ideals, sacrificing them all for materialism.\(^{32}\) Stede argued that materialism had caused intellectual and moral degeneration in “the West,” but all of this may be thwarted if Europeans, and Americans, accepted Buddhism.\(^{33}\) Sources are quick to point out the imminent downfall of morality and religion in North America, such as reporting on diminishing Christian Church attendance.\(^{34}\) The author claims that although materialistic needs are met, spirituality is lacking, a resource which Japan has in abundance.\(^{35}\)

In many ways, spirituality and materialism became buzzwords for a sense of cultural superiority and triumphalism sweeping Japan, and other nations, prior to World War II. Lily Adams Beck was a British-born author and Buddhist who lived in Canada. In *The Garden of Vision*, she wrote, “Europe has a religion which satisfies her heart but not her head and a philosophy which satisfies her head but not her heart. We have a religion and a philosophy which can do both.”\(^{36}\) This quotation is used in “The Challenge of Buddhism to the World,” by Shigeo Stede, 1924, 154.

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\(^{33}\) Stede, 1924, 154.

\(^{34}\) H.A. Giles, “Professor Takakusu on Christianity,” *The Young East* 3, no. 1 (June 1927): 9.

\(^{35}\) These are very similar to the assertions about India and the United States made by Swami Vivekenanda (1863-1902), a Hindu reformer and missionary. This would make sense as Japanese Buddhists and Indians were in close contact (Jaffe, 2004, 65). Similarly, this would suggest common intellectual trends happening in the United States and the reach of American culture in global society. Alternatively, comparison of Vivekenanda and Buddhist reformers may shed further light on the ways in which religions are utilized in colonial situations.

Takeda, who argues that the wave of modernity is washing away spirituality in “the West,”
leaving only materialism.\textsuperscript{37} Takeda points to American Buddhists such as Ernest Shinkaku Hunt,
who was actively propagating the Dharma and initiating new members to the HHMH in Hawai’i,
as a prime example of the superiority of Japanese spirituality over the materialism of North
America.

Japanese Buddhists used their new publishing power in order to openly criticize United
States policy, and even the very supposition that American views were synonymous with
modernity. For instance, one anonymous article critiques the “dual character” of America, as the
United States supports Korean Independence, but imperialism for the Philippines or Hawai’i, or
that the Ku Klux Klan continues to exist while the nation promotes tolerance.\textsuperscript{38} On the following
page of this issue, another article titled “Inconsistency Observable in Things American,”
describes the dissonance between American notions of slavery and freedom.\textsuperscript{39} Throughout issues
of \textit{The Young East}, authors criticize the racial situation in the United States, such as quoting
lynching statistics or implying that African-Americans are not “children of God.”\textsuperscript{40} However, the
same article assures readers that the “racial problem [is] solved by Buddha” already.\textsuperscript{41} As
religious and cultural outsiders, Japanese Buddhists were able to be critical of American social
issues within their own publications. Japanese Buddhists used their liminality to assert their

\textsuperscript{37} Shigeo Takeda, “The Challenge of Buddhism to the World,” \textit{The Young East} 4, no. 10 (March 1930):
\textsuperscript{38} “Dual Character of Americans,” 1926, 303.
\textsuperscript{39} “Inconsistency Observable in Things American,” \textit{The Young East} 1, no. 9 (February 1926): 304.
\textsuperscript{40} S. Yonemura, “Solution of Racial Problem and Himalayan Civilization,” \textit{The Young East} 2, no. 1 (June
1926): 3.
\textsuperscript{41} Yonemura, 1926, 2.
position against their own government, other religions, and other nation-states. They defined
their own Buddhism against American, and European, commentators who attempted to denigrate
Japanese forms.

Buddhist writers used Metaphysical ideas from the United States to reinterpret their
doctrines, such as the Over-Soul, for a new audience which lent credence to ideas of Mahāyāna
perennialism. This shows the cross-cultural flows as Japanese sources used Metaphysical
language and ideas to explain Buddhist concepts for new audiences, in many ways supplying a
tacit agreement with the ideas presented. Buddhist writer Masatoshi Gensen (M.G.) Mori was
very interested in synching the words of the Buddha with Western scientific and philosophical
thought. Mori was very willing to reinterpret traditional understandings of Buddhism in order to
prove their comparison to science and philosophy, which displays the adaptations taking place
throughout the Era of the Yellow Peril. In June 1928, Mori wrote an article in *The Young East*
entitled “The Over-Soul,” in which he claims that Buddhism is in “perfect accord with…the
Universal Soul” and Buddha was in “accord with…any other philosopher who has attained
communion or reunion with the Universal Soul.”

Mori’s use of the Over-Soul shows Buddhist uses of American Metaphysical language to
help the religion fit within its new home, even if the understandings of these concepts are not
necessarily the same. However, in the 1930s, during the Great Depression, the emerging
globalized culture was one of pessimism and dread, with a strong belief in the devolutions and

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42 M.G. Mori, “The Over-Soul,” *The Young East* 4, no. 1 (June 1928): 11. *The Young East* was a Japanese-
Buddhist publication created by the Young Buddhist Association. The magazine ran from 1925-1944.

43 Mori, 1928, 9.
evolutions of certain social-scientific edifices, such as the evolution of races and the devolution of religions. Mori directly refers to this devolution, writing:

All forms of religion and ethical philosophy tend to become stereotyped by time, lose their virility as moral and social forces, and then barely retain their fossilized edifices as colossal relics of the past. To protect them from such decay and degradation, or when that has already begun, to breathe a new life into them by reinterpretation or by the restoration of their pristine vigour, is the duty of those who, in each generation, are blessed with enough time and energy to devote to such efforts.

Japanese Buddhists used ideas of an Over-Soul and god, providing less of a specific lineage or understanding, as much as a globalized Buddhism, with specific cultural biases. This point is actually rather important, as these groups claimed to be creating a global Buddhism devoid of sectarian divisions, but they were doing so by using Buddhism to prove their own superiority. In attempting to create a global Buddhism, it was the sectarian and nationalistic biases of specific writers which allowed this to happen. Through condemning the materialistic “West” or the backwards “East,” the two sides melded to create a more singular and mysticized Buddhism, which was also the goal of Buddhists in the Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World journal.

The belief in the superiority of a singular god had become a globally hegemonic ideal due in large part to Colonialism. Peter Beyer discusses the web of interactions which allowed “Hinduism” to be redefined as a “Monotheistic” religion in reaction to British colonialism in order to assert a sense of superiority by similarly utilizing strands of thought already present

44 Japan began to truly feel the global economic depression in 1928, as Japanese exports decreased 50% and unemployment skyrocketed [Kasahara, 2001, 200].

45 Mori, 1928, 11.
within the religious tradition combined with the philosophy and history of the “Western” intellectual tradition.\textsuperscript{46} Japanese Buddhists, however, did not attempt to define themselves as Monotheistic necessarily, but merely to claim that they had a god. I argue that the history of colonization is responsible for this distinction, as Japan was never directly colonized in the same way as India. Japanese Buddhists were not directly colonized by a nation which claimed to follow a Monotheistic religion; they were attempting to spread their religion in another land, rather than defending themselves against an outside power. Another explanation, however, may be that Buddhists had heard accusations of atheism many times throughout the centuries, and when Japanese Buddhist intellectuals began to write in publications, they were already looking to counter this argument, versus Hindus in India who were being more closely threatened by an Imperialist government.\textsuperscript{47} In interactions with Imperial Powers, Hinduism has never had a problem being labelled as atheistic, quite the opposite in fact. Therefore, the Buddhists, who had been accused of having no god, suddenly have a god, while the Hindus, who had too many gods, now only had the one.\textsuperscript{48}

The assertion of a god in Buddhism does not represent merely a case of blind religious osmosis, but a calculated and active assertion regarding the status of Buddhism in the perspective of global religions. Buddhist doctrines of \textit{anātman} and the lack of a creator god have often been


\textsuperscript{47} Meynard, 2011, 6. Meynard claims that the Jesuits labelled Pure Land Buddhism as a form of superstition, while Chán became atheism in the 17th century. Jesuit missionaries also wrote of the Buddhist theory of “two truths,” and argued that this was proof that the Buddha was a liar.

\textsuperscript{48} The tale of Goldie Locks and the gods. How many gods is “just right?” We can also see examples of this change in Tisa Wenger’s \textit{We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom} as Pueblo peoples used the definition of “religion” to argue for government recognition.
used by non-Buddhists to assert the nihilism of the religious tradition. In articles such as

“Buddhist ‘Void’ Theory is Not Nihilism,” Sital Chandra Chakravarty, a Bangladeshi follower of Swami Vivekenanda, argues that doctrines such as Śūnyatā were misinterpreted as Buddhist nihilism. D.T. Suzuki similarly argues that the Buddhist conception of god counters arguments of atheism and nihilism in “Passivity in the Buddhist Life.” In the late-1920s and early-1930s, the rise of Communism in Russia made charges of atheism even more critical as the Japanese attempted to separate themselves from the “scourge” of Red politics. These articles suggest that my argument is correct in that Buddhists were not simply mirroring Christian institutional practices in North America, as asserted many times regarding the changes undertaken by the BCA. In fact, Japanese Buddhists were countering an assertion which had been hurled at them repeatedly throughout the centuries. Many Americans believed in an evolutionary trajectory of religion more broadly, culminating in Monotheism, but Buddhists used this evolutionary trajectory to their own advantage by asserting that Buddhism has one god, simply understood differently than in Christianity. By countering assertions of nihilism and atheism, Buddhism actually becomes the more dominant religion as it has one god, adheres to science, and was founded by a man of racial superiority. Buddhists used recursive philosophy to reposition Buddhism for means of anti-colonialism and racial-national superiority. A Buddhist god allows


51 K. Nakajima, “Sino-Japanese Dispute and the Japanese Buddhist,” The Young East 7, no. 3 (Autumn 1937): 2. Even though this piece was written in 1937, it details the historical development of Chinese and Japanese tensions, and he details the fear of Communist takeover. The Communist Party in China was also gaining power throughout the 1920s, leading to major uprisings and the beginnings of Civil War in 1927.
the religion to take on a positive tone, as opposed to atheism and nihilism, while also claiming ownership of the historical trajectory of the development of science and religious evolution.

The connection of god to a Self may seem rather tenuous, especially in a religion which posits anātman. Firstly, the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, or Nirvāṇa Sūtra, clearly relates the Dharmakāya with a being's True Self as the Tathāgatagarbha. Dharmakāya and Tathāgatagarbha are not synonymous with god and soul, but throughout the Era of the Yellow Peril, they were presented as similar enough to be almost indistinguishable. In the Meiji Era, Shaku clearly makes this connection when he explains that Tathāgata is synonymous with Dharmakāya, and Tathāgatagarbha which represents our innate sameness, thus making Dharmakāya the transcendent and positive aspect of Śūnyatā while Tathāgatagarbha within our Selves represents the imminent and the doctrine of anātman becomes the negative aspect. In other words, the connection of Dharmakāya to our sense of Self may have existed for millennia, but the connection of Self to god, was being actively imagined in the Meiji Era, but became increasingly mysticized in the Shōwa Period. In fact, this connection is stated most clearly by D.T. Suzuki, who writes, “[Dharmakāya] and [Tathāgatagarbha] are interchangeable,” because it is the Tathāgatagarbha through which “the historical Buddha turns into a transcendental Buddha.”

Although Tweed cites Suzuki’s mystical phase as beginning in 1957, we can see the


53 M.G. Mori, “The Mystic Side of Buddhism,” Hawaiian Buddhist Annual 2 (1931): 89. Mori says the Dharmakāya and Tathāgatagarbha are “the relationship... of the individual to a Whole.” Mori is clear that this union with the “spirit of the Universe” is “mysticism.”

54 Soyen, 1906, 26.

55 Suzuki, “Passivity in the Buddhist Life,” 1930, 142. Scholars of Religion in the early 20th Century were quick to point out the similarities between Suzuki’s interpretation and Advaita Vedānta, most clearly in J.G. Jennings The Vedāntic Buddhism of the Buddha (1947).
beginnings of this shift starting in the 1930s. The mysticization of the Buddhist god and Self Universalized Buddhism to be more palatable to Europeans and Americans, as well as placing the religion more firmly at the base of human development.

The *Hawaiian Buddhist Annual* was published by the International Buddhist Institute (Hawai‘i Branch), part of the Hongwanji Buddhist Mission (HHMH), and edited by Emyō Imamura and Ernest Shinkaku Hunt. Like Zen, the *Hawaiian Buddhist Annual* prominently features the swastika symbol, which would have been common in Japanese Buddhist motifs; however, I would argue that the swastika was a pervasive global symbol by the 1930s, a sentiment which Buddhists likely capitalized on in order to imagine themselves as the historical Aryans, in this case meaning noble. It is impossible to tell what was intended by the inclusion of the swastika in Buddhist magazines produced in America, especially given that they do not feature as prominently in the *Young East* or *Eastern Buddhist*, but given that in the 1930s, people across the globe were using the swastika to assert their own “purity” and “nobility” through science, I would argue that Buddhists capitalized on this same sentiment. In any case, the racial symbolism of the swastika certainly would not have been lost on Ernest Hunt, one of the editors, who wrote the Aryan racial past of Śākyamuni into the bylaws of the Western Buddhist Order. Through the utilization of science and the mystification of Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism became Aryanized.

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56 Tweed, “American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism,” 2005, 264. Tweed explicitly says that his typological phases of Suzuki overlap and develop within each other, so I do not imagine that he would disagree with my assessment.

57 Nakagaki, 2017, 35. See also fn. 5 of the present chapter.

58 Hunter, 1971, 154.
Japanese Buddhist writers emphasized the mystical aspects of Buddhism, which allowed the religion to become that which its audience wanted it to be. In “Primitive Buddhism,” T. Kimura argues the Buddha was not a scientist, as claimed by Western academics, as he was not a materialist and focused instead on humanity’s spiritual life.\(^{59}\) This would seemingly run counter to depictions of Buddhism as a religion of science, especially when focusing on rationalistic depictions of Buddhism; however, through the mysticization of Buddhism, authors could argue that the very definition of “science,” created by “the West,” is the real problem. In “The Mystic Side of Buddhism,” M.G. Mori analyzes Buddhism as simultaneously a religion, a science, and a philosophy, before claiming that Buddhism is none of these.\(^{60}\) He traces this development to the “thinkers of ancient India, those intellectual leaders of the most philosophical people known in history,” or the Aryans who moved human evolution forward.\(^{61}\) Mori then claims that the goal for all Buddhists is Perfect Enlightenment, which he defines as the “very antithesis of Ignorance,” before claiming that the goal of science and philosophy is likewise the eradication of ignorance.\(^{62}\) Buddhism is no longer ‘the religion which accords most closely with science,’ as in previous literature, but the end goal of science and philosophy themselves; Buddhism is no

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\(^{60}\) Mori, 1931, 88.

\(^{61}\) Ibid, 88.

\(^{62}\) Ibid, 88.
longer comparable to science or philosophy, it is science and philosophy. Mori then goes one step further to say that Buddhism has an active knowledge and creative power, making Buddhism superior to both science and philosophy. Mori claims, “the Buddha Dharma is all this plus something else, and that something else is what makes it a religion. It is the spirit of Buddhism.” Buddhism is a religio-philosophic-science which can be traced back to the most renowned philosophic thinkers in history, the Aryans.

From where did Buddhism get this extreme position of power? A Buddhist, “does not acknowledge a personal Creator like the Christian God, nor any ‘original sin’ for which a Saviour must descend from Heaven to redeem mankind.” According to Mori, the god of Buddhism is the Dharmakāya, “the spirit of the Universe in the primary state of pure Buddhahood,” but also manifestations such as Amida, as well as human embodiments, and even those only visible to “his mind’s eye.” This view of a Buddhist god, claims Mori, is mysticism, “the relationship of the Self to the Not-Self,” and the “quintessential core of religion.”

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63 In “The Search for Religion: Some Ideas and Suggestions,” Arthur C. March (Editor of Buddhism in England), argues that the definition of science is a rational search for Truth, which he argues is also the defining quality of Buddhism. Therefore, Buddhism should be taught as science first, which will make it a Universal Religion for all. This is in opposition to Christianity, which has only served to hold back humanity, claiming “if we study with absolute impartiality the history of Christianity down the ages, we shall see that it has ever stood as a barrier to progress, and that civilization has advanced in spirit of Christianity and not because of it.” [Arthur C. March, “The Search for Religion: Some Ideas and Suggestions,” Hawaiian Buddhist Annual 2 (1931): 13-14, Italics in original].

64 Mori, 1931, 89. Italics in original.

65 Ibid, 89.

66 Ibid, 89. I do not claim that these doctrinal interpretations are “correct,” but they were being asserted by Buddhists during the Yellow Peril. Generally in Trikāya theory, Amitābha is sāṃbhogakāya, while human embodiments such as Śākyamuni are nirmāṇakāya [Paul Harrison, “Is the Dharma-kāya the Real ‘Phantom Body’ of the Buddha?” The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies 15, no. 1 (January 1992): 44-96.] In Shin thought, Amida Buddha is mostly identical with the Dharmakāya, differing only in function.

67 Ibid, 89.
Buddhism, not Christianity, has thus become the beginning, or first cause, of all human development, which is all the result of the Buddhist god. Mori is also able to counter delineations between the supposed devotional Buddhism and “original” Buddhism, as he argues that all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who are disparaged in writings from Europe and the United States are from one source. Mori even claims that this is why “Western science” has failed to progress further, as they separate “matter” from “spirit,” without knowing that both are simply the “well-ordered movement” of the Dharmakāya. Buddhism is therefore the fount of all human development, beginning with the advanced Aryans, but in focusing on mysticism, Mori has made Buddhism human development itself; in other words, Buddhism does not necessarily have a god, because Buddhism is god. Buddhism becomes everything in all times; the religion of an Indian sage and the cells of our bodies, a religion of science and science itself. Through the mysticization of the Dharmakāya, Japanese Buddhism did not have to convert others, or enter new lands, because it already had. The Dharmakāya becomes the answer for all the tensions which Japanese Buddhists faced, both domestically and internationally, because it allowed Buddhism to become all things.68

By 1940, in the United States Buddhists presented the doctrines of anātman and Dharmakāya in comparison to the metaphysical belief in an Over-Soul. Sokei-an, the Zen missionary, also utilized these terms, describing the Over-Soul as, “soul knows all that we

68 Japanese Buddhist writers during the Shōwa Period utilized the concept of Dharmakāya for mysticization to broaden the religion and counter critiques. On the domestic side, Buddhism was not a foreign religion because it had always been there, and internationally it was not a corruption of idolatry, because everyone is worshipping the same god in differing forms.
know…it is the great soul.”\textsuperscript{69} He further mirrors the language of the Theosophists when he ends the article saying, “go with the soul, which is not yours, back to that original state whence you have come!”\textsuperscript{70} In the late-Meiji and Taishō Eras, a rationalist wave made it prudent for Japanese Buddhists to emphasize the scientific aspects of Buddhism, and the perceived agnosticism of Śākyamuni. However, by the 1940s in the Shōwa Period, Sokei-an could use the mystification of a Buddhism designed for all persons in all places to baldly state that, “yes, Buddhism is a religion and Buddhism has a God.”\textsuperscript{71} This Buddhist god, rather than being understood as a capitulation to the norms of Christianity, should be viewed as a utilization of the scientific vocabulary of the day, which allowed Japanese Buddhists to reverse Orientalist tropes regarding their degraded form of Buddhism, and assert their superiority against a perceived “West;” and through this mystification of Buddhist doctrines, allowed Buddhism to simultaneously be a singular monism and agnostic science, and include the practices and figures of more popular forms of Buddhism, thus unifying the Buddhist world (although this goal never actually came true).

The mysticization of Buddhism, developing broadly throughout the Shōwa Period, used both emic and etic referential frames in order to make Buddhism as broad and open as possible, making it all things to all people. This became increasingly necessary as by the 1920s American culture was shifting to view the Japanese, rather than the Chinese, as the true enemy within the

\textsuperscript{69} Sokei-an, “Concerning Soul,” \textit{Cat’s Yawn} 1, no. 4 (October 1940): 13. \textit{Cat’s Yawn} was a periodical produced in New York during World War II by Sokei-an. \textit{Cat’s Yawn} was Sokei-an’s personal magazine, financed by the First Zen Institute of America. The publication ran from 1940-1941.

\textsuperscript{70} Sokei-an, “Concerning Soul,” 1940, 13.

\textsuperscript{71} Sokei-an, “What is Buddhism?” \textit{Cat’s Yawn} 1, no. 7 (January 1941): 28.
Yellow Peril. Chiang Kai-shek converted to Methodism in 1927, leading some Christians in the United States to view him as a Christian saviour against the idolatrous Japanese, as well as the Communists and Buddhists within China itself.\textsuperscript{72} Perhaps in response, the leaders of the two Honganjis in Japan, Son’yū Ōtani and Kōen Ōtani consistently pressed for peace. Son’yū Ōtani wrote, “when the hard shell of the ego, put away and isolated from others, is crushed and merges itself in the oneness of things, that is, in the idea of universal brotherhood, the earth will really become a peaceful, comfortable place of abode.”\textsuperscript{73} They continued these calls until the end of the Washington Conference in February 1922, when Japan felt itself poorly treated by the international community. In the 1930s, this broad sense of fear became slightly more specified as the China Lobby of Businessmen formed in the United States in order to pressure government officials to help Chiang Kai-shek in China in his fight against the invading Japanese. However, Japanese Buddhists were active participants in the World Fellowship of Faiths in 1933 which continued to “build bridges of understanding across the chasms of prejudice,” for the “realization of peace and brotherhood.”\textsuperscript{74} Throughout the early-Shōwa Period, Japanese Buddhists utilized etic discussions of a Buddhist god to counter predominant views about Japan. They also used emic discussions of jiriki and tariki to continue this mystification of Buddhist doctrine.

\textsuperscript{72} John W. Dower, \textit{War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War}, (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 159. Chiang Kai-Shek (Pinyin: Jiang Jieshi) is the most common transliteration in the sources I used. As he is a rather peripheral figure throughout this chapter, I have decided to simply use the spelling which my sources employ.

\textsuperscript{73} Ama, 2011, 172.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 173.
Japanese Buddhists faced increasing pressure from internal sources as well, as a wave of nationalism increasingly gripped the nation prior to World War II. Japanese Buddhists therefore utilized new interpretations of the relation between Self-Power and Other-Power to further mysticize Japanese Buddhism in order to create a timeless tradition which was described as being beyond Buddhism itself. Writers attempted to collapse historical differences between Jōdo and Zen forms of Buddhism, which in many ways followed along lines of social debate between the United States and Japan.\footnote{Imamura, 1918, 15.} In “Pure Land or Pure Mind?: Locus of Awakening and American Popular Religious Culture,” Richard Payne argues that by focusing on the “locus of awakening” within Buddhist schools as a lens for analysis, scholars may be provided with an alternative
explanation for the successes and failures of Buddhist schools in the United States. This may be true as an explanation regarding the success of certain schools in an American religious landscape, but the issue becomes confusing when looking at Buddhist sources just prior to World War II. The locus of awakening for Zen, at least in the polemic and popular imaginations, is generally considered internal, or as one ‘polishing the mirror’ of their own mind. The distinction between Jiriki and Tariki was most famously defined in the Japanese Buddhist tradition by Hōnen, founder of Jōdo, who claimed that no sentient being could hope to attain Nirvāṇa in the current mappō age of degenerate Dharma. This locus of awakening has traditionally separated the Self-Power of Zen from the Other-Power of Jōdo Shinshū, a distinction further

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76 Richard K. Payne, “Pure Land or Pure Mind?: Locus of Awakening and American Popular Religious Culture,” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 16, (2015): 16. Payne asserts that by analyzing the “locus of awakening” in Buddhist traditions, scholars may be provided with an alternative view for analyzing the success of Buddhist schools in the United States. Therefore, the internalized “locus of awakening” of Zen may help to explain Zen’s success. Payne also asserts that by analyzing the “locus of awakening” scholars may be able to move beyond traditional separations between Asian and American forms of Buddhism. I am largely in agreement with Payne and believe that his form of analysis could be useful; however, I argue that my study utilizing emic doctrinal discussions accomplishes similar ends while adding alternative views which similarly obfuscate the perceived separation of Asian and American forms of Buddhism.

If scholars follow the traditional narrative and polemics of the Zen school, the assertion of a Buddhist God may be rather confusing, especially in light of Payne’s “locus of awakening.” How can Zen claim an internal locus of awakening versus the external Pure Land schools, while also claiming to have a god? In Zen, the locus of awakening may initially and theoretically be internal, but it is upon this moment of awakening that one realizes their ultimate connection to Dharmakāya, a fact which remained true all along, it was simply our own ignorance which prevented us from seeing things as they really are. If each of us was actually a fully enlightened Buddha, the Dharmakāya, all along, then is the locus of awakening really internal for Zen? I do not have answers to these questions. However, one can see the way in which considering emic Buddhist discussions complicates our scholarly historical narratives. I certainly do not wish to discredit the argument of Payne, who has provided a useful lens for the analysis of Buddhism in North America, simply to say that considering emic discussions and questioning the typical Zen historiography, especially during the time of Yellow Peril, complicates our picture of Buddhism in North America.

77 Hōnen, ed. and tr. *Senchakushū English Translation Project*, *Hōnen’s Senchakushū: Passages on the Selection of the Nembutsu in the Original Vow (Senchaku hongan nembutsu shū)*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1998), 2. Hōnen focuses on “selection” and “sole practice” in times of degenerative Dharma. According to Hōnen, any practice of Self-Power is an example of the corrupting attachment to Self, and this is why “only those who practice the nien-fo [Jap. nembutsu] are embraced in [Amida’s] light” [Hōnen, 1998, 98]. Scholars of Buddhism in North America tend to focus more heavily on Shinran, likely due to the historical presence and influence of Shin Buddhism in North America.
solidified by academic studies of Buddhism, such as Natalie E. F. Quli and Scott A. Mitchell’s recent “Buddhist Modernism as Narrative: A Comparative Study of Jōdo Shinshū and Zen.” As Quli and Mitchell point out, this distinction has also come to define Zen as modernist while Shin remains traditional, a classification which Payne claims influences the rate of success and public popularity of these two schools. An analysis of Buddhist literature between 1899-1957 nuances these traditional classifications. Japanese Buddhist authors often agreed on the non-dual nature of Zen and Jōdo, despite historical precedent of these separate schools. Even Soyen, a Zen monk writing during the Meiji Era, writes that *tariki* and *jiriki* “both are one and the same,” and that the path “all depends upon our spiritual condition.”

D.T. Suzuki was increasingly interested in mysticism of all forms between 1899 and 1957, especially following his introduction to Swedenborgianism from Albert J. Edmunds. Scholars have analyzed Suzuki’s use of terms like mystical and timeless when describing Zen, a worldview which Suzuki claimed went beyond the boundaries of Buddhism and represented the first universal religion. Suzuki’s mystical focus began developing following his reading of William James’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), and continued with his study of the medieval Dominican mystic, Meister Eckhart, which precipitated Suzuki’s desire to find a


79 Soyen, 1906, 68.

80 Wilson and Moriya, 2016, xxii. This assertion is also made in Tweed, “American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism,” and Yoshinaga, “Three Boys…”

81 Snodgrass, 2003, 266.
definition of “religion” which could encapsulate Buddhism.\(^{82}\) Previous scholars, like Sharf and Victoria, argue that Suzuki’s representations of Zen contributed to Japanese nationalism and their entrance into World War II. However, throughout *The Eastern Buddhist*, beginning just before the start of the Shōwa Era, Suzuki describes Buddhism broadly, and specifically Jōdo, as mystical timeless traditions also. One common phrase which Suzuki uses to compare mystical Buddhist traditions to non-mystical traditions is to claim that Buddhism is a religion of Enlightenment and not one of Salvation. In other words, Buddhism represents wisdom and personal spiritual growth while Christianity is defined as believers wishing to be saved by a perennial father-figure. He argues that Sukhāvatī and Amida represent primordial forces which each individual merges with upon their realization of *anātman*, and that the Pure Land is not a real place at all, but a spiritual allegory for our own happiness.\(^{83}\) For Suzuki, an increasing focus on Self and science made him prone to argue for the individualized psychological benefits of Amida.\(^{84}\)

Japanese Buddhist authors engaged centuries-old debates in Buddhist philosophy in order to reinterpret doctrines in light of current social biases. Despite the preponderance of academic literature which focuses on Suzuki’s interpretation of Zen, he argued, “of all the developments that Mahāyāna Buddhism has achieved in East Asia, the most remarkable one is the Shin


\(^{83}\) D.T. Suzuki, “The Development of the Pure Land Doctrine in Buddhism,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 3, no. 4 (1925): 298. I recognize that this doctrinal presentation is not that far afield from Shinran himself. However, the language used to present these ideas coincides with my argument.

\(^{84}\) Luis O. Gómez argues that Amitābha is simultaneously a real individual, though superhuman, as well as a metaphor for spiritual growth, although he argues that Amitābha should not be read as a model to be followed because his painstaking spiritual development would be theoretically impossible to follow [Luis O. Gómez ed. and tr., *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light, Sanskrit and Chinese Versions of the Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtras*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996), 11].
teaching of Pure Land Buddhism.” In “Zen and Jōdo, Two Types of Buddhist Experience,” Suzuki classifies the historical and doctrinal differences between Shin and Zen Buddhism, but his analysis of modern trends and prescriptions for the future display adaptations regarding views of the Self. Suzuki claims Zen and Jōdo have historically been so diametrically opposed to barely be considered the same religion before stating that the original meaning of the Buddha was that each discipline was complimentary. By combining Self-Power and Other-Power, Suzuki is able to merge the idea of “god” and “soul” in Buddhism and mysticize the religion in order to become a recursive philosophy of Asian dominance in the creation of human history. Suzuki claims, “the jiriki here becomes tariki and the tariki jiriki, that is to say, selfhood is revealed in otherness and otherness in selfhood,” clearly identifying Zen and Jōdo with reinterpretations of anātman. Suzuki seizes the opportunity to state that Christianity does not have a mystical view of the Self like Buddhism, and it was only after Christianity came into contact with other forms of religion that it gained any understanding of mysticism, again suggesting Christianity borrowed from the original Buddhism. Suzuki met Albert J. Edmunds (1857-1941) in the early-1900s, and it was Edmunds who explained Swedenborgianism, a mystical Christianity, to Suzuki.


86 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, “Zen and Jōdo, Two Types of Buddhist Experience,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 4, no. 2 (July-September 1927): 97.

87 Suzuki, “Zen and Jōdo,” 1927, 120. *Jiriki* and *tariki* are not italicized in the original.

88 In 1905, Suzuki claims that the Christian view of the Self is not intellectually comparable to Buddhism, and that the view of an individual soul breeds isolation and self-annihilation. He goes on to claim that the individual soul is not in accord with monistic views of science [Daisetz T. Suzuki, “The Essence of Buddhism,” *The Light of Dharma* 5, no. 5 (October 1905): 73]. In other words, in 1905 the Rational Suzuki accused Christianity of having an irrational view of the soul, while in 1927 Christianity lacked mysticism and was too materialistic/rational.

Suzuki was familiar, therefore, with mystical traditions in Christianity. However, during the Shōwa Period, in the overlapping periods of the Mystical-Nationalist Suzuki, he may have been more willing to overlook nuances in Christian history to make the claim that Buddhism was a superior tradition.\(^90\) It is also possible that Suzuki meant institutional Christianity, which has often suppressed Christian mysticism. In either case, I argue that Suzuki’s view of Buddhist mysticism versus the lack of Christian mystical traditions reverses the Aryan myth by placing Buddhism, especially Mahāyāna, as the beginning of human spiritual development.

A modernist turn is then taken, as Suzuki claims that every Shin practitioner already knows that Amida Buddha is not real in any scientific sense, but merely an internalized representation of our broader aspiration for perfection. In another article, Suzuki claims that an external god who reveals himself only at specific times “cannot be maintained in the face of science and philosophy,” compared to the non-dual scientific understandings of Amida’s Pure Land.\(^91\) The assertion that Jōdo is scientific was not a new argument, as Shin modernists had argued this even during the late-Meiji period; however, in the Shōwa Period, this argument is adapted once again in order to flip Orientalist discussions about the evolution of religion and posit Japanese Mahāyāna as the beginning and end of historical development.\(^92\) In an attempt to merge ideals of a global unified Buddhism, with Japanese roots, with new understandings of the

\(^{90}\) Ibid, 267.

\(^{91}\) Suzuki, “The Development of the Pure Land Doctrine in Buddhism,” 1925, 296.

\(^{92}\) In order to make Jōdo appear scientific, he uses typical tropes for the time period, saying “Enlightenment means perfected personality,” and that Sukhāvatī may only be viewed spiritually, not in a physical place [Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, “The Shin Sect of Buddhism,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 7, nos. 3-4 (July 1939): 259]. It is worth pointing out that it was only those in the United States and Europe who would have considered the assertion of Jōdo science to be absolutely baseless. These debates have roots much earlier, such as Kiyozawa Manshi (cited in Chapter One).
Self, Suzuki combines two historically opposing schools, as well as Shin devotion to Other-Power all within our collective mystical Self. In other words, he has found a way to utilize historical discussions of *tariki* and *jiriki*, as well as powerful beings like Amida, within the notion of Self. This non-Self had already been tied directly to *nihonjinron*, thus making Japanese Buddhism the most superior form of a religion which was already being touted as the most scientifically and racially superior tradition in history, all of which reconnects to his original argument through the essentialized view of the racially exclusive Japanese (Yamato Race).

In 1939, Japan was already engaged in the Second Sino-Japanese War (b. 1937), and the nation faced a rising militarism and nationalism. Although the 1940 Tripartite Pact between Germany, Japan, and Italy had not yet been signed, German and Japanese relations were increasing in 1939, which would suggest that Suzuki was well aware of the myth of Aryanism prevalent at the time. Suzuki draws a direct line from Śākyamuni to the Japanese people, positioning the Japanese as superior Buddhists, specifically provided teachings by the Aryan founder himself. Suzuki wrote an article for the July 1939 final issue of *The Eastern Buddhist*, before World War II placed the magazine on a decade-long hiatus, titled “The Shin Sect of Buddhism,” in which he attempts to historically connect Pure Land Buddhism to Śākyamuni as well as portraying the school as scientific.\(^9\) This is not to say that Pure Land schools were not taught by Śākyamuni Buddha, or that they are not scientific, but these notions demanded further scientific proof, given the predominant tenor of Buddhist scholarship and popular appeal. Suzuki begins the piece by saying that Pure Lands have always existed in Buddhism as *buddhakṣetra*, or

buddha-fields, but “it took the Japanese genius” to mature this concept into a school.\textsuperscript{94} This point seems rather telling as Suzuki simultaneously argues that the Buddha taught Pure Land Buddhism while the Japanese perfected it into singular schools, thus connecting Jōdo to Original Buddhism, bypassing India and China, further asserting \textit{nihonjinron} dominance, and solidifying the Five Periods teaching of Ekayāna discussed earlier.

As one may expect in an article written at the height of World War II, Suzuki’s piece contains a large number of references to Christianity.\textsuperscript{95} One issue Japanese Buddhists often criticized in the Theology of Christianity asserts that Buddhism has no mediator between oneself and Amida, whereas Christianity requires a mediator and his sacrifice as an “innocent victim.”\textsuperscript{96} Suzuki is more explicit when he calls the crucifixion, “revolting…the symbol of cruelty or of inhumanity. The idea of washing sin with the blood of Christ crucified reminds us of the primitive barbarism of victim-offering to the gods,” while the “Buddhist idea of death is rest and peace, not agony.”\textsuperscript{97} Considering the socio-political tenor of Japan versus “the West” at the time, I argue that Suzuki meant for Amida and Buddhism to stand for Japan, while Christianity represented the United States and Europe. Christianity, in this case, becomes synonymous with colonialism and oppression, whereas Buddhism becomes freedom. Christianity, he claims, believes in vicarious atonement which is an act done in order to produce forgiveness through violence. Buddhism, on the other hand, believes in merit-transference which is an act of


\textsuperscript{95} Wilson and Moriya point out that Suzuki compared Buddhism and Christianity more often in his English-language publications, and that this may be an attempt to make Buddhism more intelligible to those more familiar with Christianity [2016, xi].

\textsuperscript{96} Suzuki, 1939, 259.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid, 259.
compassion, produced purely from love for all sentient beings. However, he claims the Christian relation to god is therefore purely individualistic, as a person seeks their own personal salvation. The United States is a land of ātman, seeking more favourable situations only for itself, whereas Japan represents anātaṃ or a self-less desire to help others. Suzuki argues that Japanese Buddhism is “always motivated by enlightening all,” which some in Japan may have interpreted as religious justification for the colonial project in China, a point further solidified when the author claims Buddhism “wants Enlightenment, not salvation.”98 Buddhist enlightenment entails a sense of wisdom and personal experience; a sense which Suzuki would have undoubtedly utilized from the works of William James.99 In other words, the Japanese are helping other Asian nations out of compassion, pushing them towards their own purification, whereas Christianity and North America merely promise salvation if one is willing to care only of themselves and engage acts of violence for their own personal gain. This argument therefore reverses colonial tropes about “the West” helping other nations, because they cannot help, as the very foundations of their thinking are based on salvation through violent atonement; whereas, the colonial project in China represents a form of upāya, as the Japanese help the Chinese along the path. Suzuki puts a Buddhist twist on a typical justification for colonialism, whereby the colonized need the help of the colonizer. I do not wish to contend that Suzuki was attempting to function as a promoter of colonialism, but I do argue that in an English-language Buddhist magazine, he is giving a Buddhist philosophical justification for colonialism. I think it is comparable to a Buddhist “just-war” theory, written by a public

98 Ibid, 270.

Buddhist intellectual becoming increasingly interested in the mysticization of Japanese Buddhism.\textsuperscript{100} This philosophical justification was written for American and European audiences, as well as other Asians in Japan and beyond, in 1939, when America and Europe still held colonial power over nations in South America, Africa, and Asia, as well as representing the beginning of World War II. Buddhism continued to be a religion of superiority, which was proven by the philosophically justified Japanese colonial project in Asia.

Japanese Buddhist writers presented the whole of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which they claimed special authority to in opposition to the Chinese, as the recursive philosophy of humanity. In other words, it was the genius of the “Eastern mind,” especially refined in Japan, which pushed humanity forward and would ultimately bring about spiritual awakening rather than the Aryan Europeans. By using terms like mystical and timeless, Japanese Buddhists could reimagine history in order to place themselves at the very beginnings of religious development. If there is no proof that Zen and Jōdo were a part of original Buddhism, a fact Suzuki acknowledges at times and obscures at others, then one must simply claim Zen and Jōdo have existed since before Buddhism itself, that they represent forms of \textit{ur}-spirituality. The complex network of factors between external criticisms, internal political pressures, and spiritual devotion allowed groups to simply imagine history in order to place themselves further within it. This allows Japanese Buddhists to claim historical pedigree against the criticisms of scholars and rationalist Buddhists, but to claim a mystical history to esoteric Buddhists as well. Japanese Buddhists were attempting to have it both ways, to be scientific and mystical, historical and timeless, and they used understandings of the Self in order to frame these discussions. This can

\textsuperscript{100} Buddhist “just war” theory is not without precedent. In the \textit{Upāyakauśalya Sūtra}, there is a famous story of the Buddha, while still a Bodhisattva, killing a man to save 500 others [Williams, 1989, 152].
also help to explain the presentation of Zen and Jōdo, *Tariki and Jiriki*, as working in unison with mysticism as their commonality.

Japanese Buddhists are therefore imagining a history in which the culture, and even individual psychology, of their fellow countrymen and women is based on the doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The natural affinity and connection between race and religious doctrine necessitates an “othering,” as some claimed that Americans and Europeans had no hope of understanding Mahāyāna in its true form.101 The Self became the crux of religious argumentation, separating the superior Japanese *Nihonjinron* from the lesser American culture of dualism and materialism. This means that through argumentation regarding the Self, Japanese Buddhists actually claimed a level of agency whereby Mahāyāna doctrine could be utilized as a tool through which history could be reimagined and repackaged for future incursions in the United States.

The Mysticization of Japanese Buddhism within the Fog of War

This section focuses on the Buddhist discussion about the war in the years between the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War and Pearl Harbor. The Japanese Buddhist discussion of wartime politics did not cheer the war necessarily, but instead attempted to fit the present situation within larger preexisting discussions regarding the place of the Japanese in Asia and

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Buddhism in world historical development. Rather than promoting some sort of “Holy War,”
Japanese Buddhists attempted to explain what was already happening through the prism of their
religion. Sometimes, this leads to quite chauvinistic and even militaristic language, but I found
very little evidence of Japanese Buddhist promotion of the war. What Buddhists said about their
religion in relation to World War II shows more about the changing identity of Buddhism than
providing a Buddhist promotion of violence.

In the months just prior to the beginning of all-out war, Japanese writers portrayed
themselves as saving China, never the aggressor and often blameless. In The Young East which
followed the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War, K. Nakajima expressed the feelings of
average Japanese Buddhists, writing, “we are very sorry and regrettable to find a partial
misunderstood criticism on the Sino-Japanese Dispute…blaming Japan’s attitude towards and
her positive action in China.”

On 7 July, 1937, Japanese forces and Chinese forces met at the Marco Polo Bridge (Lugou Bridge), where the Chinese military was conducting exercises. The
timeline of events is historically debated, but this incident represents the beginning of the
invasion of China, and of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Nakajima goes on to describe the
events of 7 July, 1937, stating that the Chinese were the aggressors in the original battle, whereas
the Japanese acted only in self-defence, and “for bringing about the peace and order of the Orient
and consequently for the peace and order of the entire world.” The instigator of conflict is
often debated in history books, as each side blames the other as the aggressor in conflict. Kanji
Nakajima, writing in 1939, asserts that the entire conflict commenced due to the aggressive

102 Nakajima, 1937, 1.

103 Ibid, 3.
policies, insults, and threats of Chiang Kai-Shek. According to Nakajima, Kai-Shek and his followers are the enemy combatants in this war, not the people of China, and that is why Japan has no territorial ambitions throughout East Asia. The author does claim that Japan simply wants to create a “New Order in East Asia, whereby Japan desires an independent China, governed by an administration sympathetic towards Japan allowing her to have legitimate facilities for trade and commerce…as we see the conditions in relation to U.S.A. and the Middle & South American Republics.” With the added benefit of nearly a century of hindsight, readers may be quite skeptical as to the views expressed within this article. Many would point to the blinders which seem to enthrall society in the lead up to war, a surge of patriotism whereby atrocities go overlooked and the enemy bears the marks of pure evil. However, I would argue that this article, and the others like it, contain important views which nuance our understanding of Japan prior to World War II. Buddhist writers during World War II are not promoting Japanese invasion, but view themselves as promoting peace and helping China. These views are not unlike American and European justifications of colonialism, but no matter our current judgements on these views, it is what Japanese Buddhists claimed to believe.

In the grips of war, societies tend to rally support and imagine their actions on the side of righteousness. Following the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Junjiro Takakusu wrote an article about the rise of nationalism and what is to become of “the New Japan.” The article

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104 Kanji Nakajima, “The New Order in East Asia As Seen by a Buddhist,” The Young East 8, no. 2 (1939): 1.
105 Nakajima, 1939, 1.
begins paralleling an argument I have made throughout this work, whereby Takakusu argues that the Japanese reimagining of history and *nihonjinron* allows Japan to forge a new global future, as Japanese Mahāyāna has been pushing human development for millennia; in other words, the language of essentialization and superiority, combined with the mysticization of Buddhism, allows the religion to encapsulate a new utopian tone for the future against the characterizations of pessimism with which Buddhism had been labelled. The author is then rather forthcoming, claiming “the Japanese Spirit should contain the nature of superiority,” but this supremacy should also adopt the Buddhist ideal of compassion. Takakusu then proceeds to tell the story of how *nihonjinron* developed throughout Japanese history mirroring the development of Buddhism, both of which are “eternally unchanging,” or contain a timelessness, unbounded by the reimagining of history. Takakusu finishes his article by comparing the history of Europe and the United States to that of Japan. Japanese Buddhism was not the corruption of a once-great

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107 Takakusu, 1938, 2.

108 Ibid, 1.
Aryan tradition, but its very origin; European Aryans had not furthered the evolution of human history, as the Japanese Aryans represented this development.\textsuperscript{109}

Japanese Buddhists writers described Japanese soldiers as self-less, honour-driven heroes willing to sacrifice their lives at a moment’s notice for the emperor; an idealized form of masculinity driven by a sense of patriotism. The tales of past warriors are held up in many publications as heroes to be emulated, such as Shigenari Kimura, a “typical warrior of feudal Japan” who was polite, filial, and even a part-time tea-master while continuing to fight bravely for the “State tranquility.”\textsuperscript{110} The tales of warrior-heroes of Japan’s past and present can be found throughout *The Young East, Eastern Buddhist*, and other publications from Japan in the years leading up to World War II. Victoria argues that this proves Japanese-Buddhist complicity, or

\textsuperscript{109} Beyond America, Japanese Buddhists could utilize Theosophical discussions regarding the development of the Aryan race to place Japanese Buddhism at the beginning of “Western” civilization. L. de Hoyer, a Theosophically-inclined Buddhist, wrote “Meditations on Plato and Buddha” for the May 1936 issue of *The Eastern Buddhist*. In the article, he compares “Orientals,” “Greeks,” and “Egyptians,” to display cultural similarities and trace the evolutionary path of religion. De Hoyer claims that Plato discussed the ālaya-vijñāna (“storehouse consciousness”) when referring to the theory of universals, Jesus may have hinted at rebirth, and that Saint John the Baptist was actually a reincarnation of Elijah. Finally, de Hoyer asserts that the final words of Jesus upon the cross have been mistranslated, as he actually said “Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachtani!” The translation used by de Hoyer is actually claimed to be from the Mayan language as, “Eli, Eli, now I immerse within Him, before the dawning of his presence.” According to Theosophical doctrines regarding the development of Root Races, Egypt, India, and Tibet were all connected through the practice of Mayan occultism, and therefore Jesus would have known the Mayan language from his time spent in Tibet. In other words, Jesus was calling out to his Root Guru on the cross. Theosophical historical studies are being utilized by Japanese Buddhists in order to argue that they are the true Aryans, and responsible for all subsequent human development. Jesus was a Buddhist monk, Greek philosophy is Buddhist, and even the Indigenous peoples of all the Western Hemisphere become proto-Buddhists through a reimagined history of technological ingenuity with the Yamato Japanese race as its basis and Buddhism its religion [L. De Hoyer, “Meditations on Plato and Buddha,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 7, no. 1 (May 1936): 39].

Japanese Buddhist magazines quoted Theosophists, such as Lewis W. Bush, to argue that Buddhist presence in Europe provided the foundation for the development of European and North American thought. Theosophists believed Buddhists made it all the way to Europe, influencing the ancient religions of Druidism and the Greek Philosophy of Pythagorus. Bush also argues that Alexander Hamilton, founding father of the United States, wrote about Buddhism. Japanese Buddhists utilized the imagined history of Theosophy in order to assert their own position within the Aryan myth [Lewis W. Bush, “An Ancient Religion for Modern Needs,” *The Young East* 4, no. 12 (October-December 1934): 24].

even full participation, in nationalism and the war. As I have said, there is certainly no doubt that nationalism, dualism, and militaristic language is present throughout Japanese sources. However, similar stories of proud war heroes can also be found in the pages of the *Berkeley Bussei*, such as Yukio Kawamoto who was excited to be fighting for his country.\footnote{“It Happened in Monterey,” *Berkeley Bussei* 7 (Spring 1942): 7.} Japanese Buddhists were often caught up in the political situation around them, rather than supporting one side necessarily.

In some ways, the geopolitical situation reached the shores of the United States prior to Pearl Harbor, which can be seen in the names designated to overseas temples of Nishi Honganji.\footnote{Nishi Honganji and Higashi Honganji represent the two major branches of Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism in Japan. The two sides were split in 1602 by the Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu to curb the power of Jōdo Shinshū. The BCA is a part of the Nishi Honganji.} When temples were established in Taiwan, Korea, or other Japanese colonies, they were named *fukyōsho* (local branch temple), suggesting they were already a part of Japanese territory, while temples in Hawai'i were named *fukyōjo* (missionary station), which means they would eventually be part of Japan.\footnote{Ama, 2011, 36.} The difference in designation suggests that Japanese officials saw Korea as already a part of Japan, whereas Hawai'i and Siberia represented future territories from which missionaries would eventually spread. One can see the way Japanese society influenced the religious administrations of organizations such as the Nishi Honganji Headquarters.
Japanese Internment

On 7 December 1941, Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawai‘i, drawing the United States into World War II, and creating a firestorm of racial fear which led to mass internment in Canada and the United States. However, internment cannot simply be drawn back to the moment of first attack in Pearl Harbor. Canadian citizens were very wary of the Japanese prior to first attack, as they felt that unlike the Chinese who were content to stay within a few industries and residential areas, the Japanese were seen as infiltrating all areas of industry “with an aggressive efficiency.”114 For instance, by 1919, 3,267 Japanese immigrants held commercial fishing licenses and fifty percent of all newly issued licenses in British Columbia were given to Japanese immigrants. Economic issues became coupled with perceived problems of assimilation as the Japanese continued to attend Japanese-language schools and Buddhist temples, all of this while under the larger societal umbrella of race sciences. The spectre of immigrants refusing to assimilate while simultaneously “taking all the jobs” of native-born citizens certainly was not a new idea during the Yellow Peril, and is still not novel when it is employed today.

On 19 February 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, allowing military commanders to remove any person of Japanese ancestry and place them in

The final internment camp was closed in the United States on 20 March 1946. The internment facilities were exceedingly sparse, although meeting international law, but religious organizations, mostly Buddhist, were active in the camps. BCA priests, both Japanese and Caucasian, were some of the most vocal figures preaching within the camps.\textsuperscript{116}

Japanese-Americans and Japanese-Canadians were considered a threat to national security, assuming that anyone of them could hold allegiances to the Japanese Empire and perhaps even be a “sleeper agent” for that government. The Japanese were all blamed for the actions of their government half a world away. This blanket condemnation relied on the Japanese being a visible minority, with a strange religion, and odd customs. They were “taking the jobs” from Caucasian Christians. Furthermore, the race sciences prevalent at the time only proved the point, as arguments of racial inferiority were backed up with the popular scientific facts of the day. Ultimately, the Japanese were at a huge disadvantage from the beginning as science, war, and other issues merely provided the catalyst and proof for what caucasians already knew to be true, that the Japanese amongst them could not be trusted. When history, and to some extent science, is imagined for a given time and place, then the studies of science and history merely function to solidify what is already known through common sense. Couple this with the extreme

\textsuperscript{115} John Adams and the Fifth United States Congress had signed the Alien and Sedition Act in 1798, but this was recodified as the Alien Enemies Act during the 1800 election of Thomas Jefferson. Similarly, following the attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawai‘i, Canada signed the War Measures Act, categorizing Japanese Canadians as “enemy aliens.” These laws allowed for foreign-born Canadians to be codified as enemies in times of war. In Canada, the War Measures Act was then used to remove Japanese-Canadians from protected areas, forcing roughly 16,000 into internment camps (including forced labour) in 1942. Japanese Canadians were prevented from owning land, businesses, fishing boats, and from leaving the camps. The Japanese were interned in Canada from 1942-1946, but the government continued to enforce an “exclusion area” on the West coast in 1949, four years after the end of World War II [Tchen and Yeats, 2014, 254-256].

\textsuperscript{116} Tchen and Yeats, 2014, 255.
reactionary tenor of any attack on America, and all of the pieces become set to blame an entire race and religion for the actions of a few. Conversely, it was Caucasian Buddhists who often attempted to protect Japanese Buddhist temples from government officials and vandals, although many temples were ransacked during World War II.\footnote{Sunya N. Pratt (1898-1986) was America’s first female Buddhist Priest, ordained 23 April 1936 with her two children beside her. She was very active, not only in admitting new American members of her Tacoma, Washington Church, but also in connecting traditional Shin Buddhist doctrines with the teachings of Śākyamuni. Perhaps the most significant figure in the early propagation of Buddhism in the Los Angeles area was Julius A. Goldwater (1908-2001), a Californian Jew and cousin of Senator Barry Goldwater. The Reverend Goldwater held conversion ceremonies for numerous caucasians, delivered Dharma sessions in English, and even translated the \textit{Tannishō}, one of the most important texts in Shin Buddhism. Pratt and Goldwater proselytized and “converted” close to thirty caucasians to the BCA between 1934 and 1939 [Michihiro Ama, “‘First White Buddhist Priestess:’ A Case Study of Sunya Gladys Pratt at the Tacoma Buddhist Temple,” in \textit{Buddhism Beyond Borders: New Perspectives on Buddhism in the United States}, ed. Scott A. Mitchell and Natalie E.F. Quli, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 62].

Ernest Hunt (1876-1967) was born in England but moved to Hawai‘i with his wife Dorothy to become a Buddhist Priest at HHMH, where he was renamed Shinkaku. Along with Dorothy, he wrote the \textit{Vade Mecum} (1924), translating the Shin service book into English, and \textit{Praises of the Buddha}, a Christian-style hymnal for Buddhist services. He also started some of the first children’s Sunday School programs and wrote \textit{Buddhist Stories for Children}. Shinkaku started the Western Buddhist Order in 1928, which proselytized over sixty Caucasians, as well as writing articles for the \textit{Golden Lotus} and \textit{Theosophist}. In the mission statement of the WBO, the members claim that they have a special affinity with Buddhism because the religion was started by Aryans, like themselves. Emyō Imamura died in 1932 and was replaced by Gikyō Kuchiba, an ardent Japanese Nationalist who refused to learn English. Kuchiba cancelled the English-Language program at HHMH and fired Hunt, who then became a Sōtō Zen monk, and the first caucasian to receive the title of \textit{Oshō}. Hunt ministered to the Buddhist community during World War II while most of the Japanese priests were interned. He officially petitioned the military governor, General Emmons, to allow him to reopen the Buddhist temples with the promise of preaching only on religious matters. Hunt continued to conduct services, even when the military would invade and ask about his race in front of the congregation. Pratt and Goldwater also prevented their Buddhist Churches from being “plundered and desecrated” as many were. Pratt was even given government permission to enter Camp Harmony in order to minister to the Japanese community there, before they were moved to more permanent camps [Hunter, 1971, 152-154].}

Before being sent to camps, the Japanese were often asked to answer misleading questions regarding their patriotism, such as their support for the Emperor. However, if we look within the pages of the \textit{Berkeley Bussei}, further light may be shed onto the question of Japanese feelings prior to internment. In the “Foreword” to the Spring 1942 issue, the editor writes,
We will be asked to leave our home very soon. We do not want to leave. We want to stay. Yet we know that our petty grievances are so small when a serious realization of a gigantic task our country is brought close to us. We are glad to be able to do even a little to ease her burden.\textsuperscript{118}

Even when being forced out of their homes to live in internment camps as enemy combatants, the young Japanese attempted a modicum of appeasement in order to show their patriotism and do their part for their country, despite this being the very country which is imprisoning them. On the following page, Jim Sugihara shares a similar view stating, “as loyal Americans and followers of the Buddhist faith we know that we have but one course to traverse, that being to serve our country in whatever way she may ordain simultaneously guided by the Teachings of the Buddha.”\textsuperscript{119} Conversely, the Office of Strategic Services, a predecessor to the CIA created by the Roosevelt administration, was investigating Japanese Buddhist groups at the time; this means that the opinions written in the \textit{Bussei} were likely published in part for the benefit of American intelligence agencies.\textsuperscript{120}

Japanese-Americans volunteered for military service and became some of the most decorated soldiers in some of the most severe battles of the European theatre.\textsuperscript{121} Even within this surge of patriotism, U.S. Intelligence officials had already essentialized this group as a religious and cultural “other.” A 1941 report by the Office of Naval Intelligence deserves extended quotation as it describes the role of religion for Japanese-Americans, stating:

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\textsuperscript{120} Hsu, 2015, 15.
\textsuperscript{121} Keiko Wells, “The Role of Buddhist Song Culture in International Acculturation,” in \textit{Issei Buddhism in the Americas}, ed. Duncan Ryūken Williams and Tomoe Moriya, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 165.
\end{flushright}
Because of these priests, the nationalistic, Emperor-worshiping doctrines of Shintoism were kept alive among those Japanese whose tendencies were toward pro-Japanism and the fancied mission of the Yamato people. In the same way, certain priests and believers in Buddhism allowed the original meaning of their creed to become adulterated by the desire for Japanese expansion and the philosophy of Japanese supremacy over the other people of the earth.\textsuperscript{122}

Japanese Buddhists and Shinto Priests ministered to the people within the camps, forging stronger ties of community unity, while Caucasian Buddhists protected temples and continued to minister to Buddhists outside the camp. Within the camps, inter-Buddhist ecumenical groups formed, such as the Buddhist Brotherhood of America, a unification which Buddhist Modernists in Japan had been calling for since the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{123} In some ways, Buddhist Modernist calls for reform were furthered by the process of imprisonment. Religious change and adaptation cannot happen in a vacuum, but through the conditioned arising of events and actions within certain times and places.

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\textsuperscript{122} H.S. Burr, U.S. Navy Reserve, District Intelligence Officer, U.S. Navy, “Naval Intelligence Manual for Investigating Japanese Cases in Hawai‘i,” RG 389: Record of the Office of the Provost Marshal General, 1941, (Japanese Internment and Relocation: Hawai‘i Experiences, University of Hawai‘i, Hamilton Library, Special Collection, Box 3, A-40), 50-51. Not only does this brief description closely parallel the argumentative trends which I have been analyzing, through race, an essentialized view of “original doctrines,” and the generalized connection between religious belief and international politics, but it is also quite telling how similar this description of the Japanese to current discussions of Islam post-9/11. In other words, this paragraph buried deep within a military-intelligence document could easily be applied to Catholics in the 19th Century, Buddhists in the 20th Century, and Muslims in the 21st Century.

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The End of World War II and its Aftermath

Following the War, Japan was devastated, but life eventually returned to normalcy. *The Eastern Buddhist* began again in 1949 following a ten year break while *The Young East* began anew in 1952.\(^{124}\) In the United States, Japanese citizens were allowed to return to their looted lives and began to spread across the nation. The “Zen Boom” started to take hold around 1955 and Japanese Buddhism was again at the fore of many North American minds. The 1960s represent a huge institutional boom for Buddhists in the United States, especially following the relaxation of immigration laws in 1965, but it was the doctrinal foundations laid between 1899-1957, such as the focus on Self and the perceived superiority of Buddhism as an alternative religious tradition, which allowed for these institutional edifices to be built. Americans were familiar enough with the ideas of Buddhism, and those who were not were presented with an adapted form of doctrinal instruction tailor-made for America through a series of tense interactions forged during the Era of the Yellow Peril. It was this complex network of social, political, local, and global interactions which allowed Buddhists to create doctrinal understandings suited for Americans upon which the “Zen Boom,” counter-culture movement, and even our current fascination with mindfulness were created.

\(^{124}\) Both publications were forced to halt publishing due to the physical and economic destruction in Japan during World War II.
Scientific Amida, A Return to Śākyamuni, and Japanese Buddhism in the United States

By studying alternative primary sources, we can see the ways in which changes were created within specific groups and also how these changes help shed new light on a fundamental tension in the introduction of Buddhism to the United States; the fact that the Japanese nation was at war with the United States and the government forced Japanese-Americans into internment camps, all while Japanese Buddhism made inroads with citizens finally culminating in the “Zen Boom” following 1950. For Zen to suddenly explode in popularity in the mid-1950s, just a decade after World War II, might suggest that Buddhists made major changes in their religious presentation following the war. However, this is not the case, as Buddhists of Japanese ancestry in the United States continued to use tropes which had been popular long before the start of the war. This would suggest that perhaps there was no “Zen Boom” at all. These parallel factors, international war and domestic intellectual production and social adaptation, allowed for the eventual success of Japanese Buddhism in the United States. Intellectual production and social adaptation do not happen in a vacuum, of course, as Shin Buddhists were adapting themselves to American and European culture in the 19th Century; as my study also shows, these changes necessarily involve numerous actors and networks across the globe.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Buddha and Buddhism were often portrayed as scientific, or that the teachings of Buddhism preempted the findings of modern science. This comparison functioned as the most significant factor in the acceptance of Buddhism in the United States, both in the past and today. The analysis of “scientific Buddhism” has been positioned in numerous ways; as Enlightenment-based science influencing Buddhism, as Asian
Buddhists reacting to colonial pressures, or as adaptation to a changing culture upon immigration to the United States, but some studies relegate historical actors due to their lineage position or even country of origin, such as Jōdo Shinshū Buddhists. For Japanese nisei Buddhists, the debates surrounding Buddhism and science and the mystification of Buddhist doctrines could be reformatted in an American post-war context in order to help situate them within a changing landscape.

The nisei became active organizers, starting the Bussei, or Young Buddhists Association (YBA) in the 1930s. Bussei groups often had their own publications, perhaps the most famous of these was the Berkeley Bussei, a Jōdo Shinshū magazine sponsored by Kanmo Imamura, which was based out of the Berkeley Buddhist Church and ran from 1942 to 1960. This publication provides an alternative viewpoint as it was produced by young Japanese immigrants rather than older elites. The writings of D.T. Suzuki, for instance, are different than those found in the Bussei, suggesting a marked difference of age and the development of new ideas which would come to fruition following 1957.

One important factor, I argue, in analyzing the Berkeley Bussei is the lack of geopolitical or doctrinal issues which the magazine brings within its pages. When the Bussei began publishing again in 1950, the magazine does contain a larger number of religious articles. However, prior to the war, the pages are more predominately held by articles such as “Nisei Marriage Market” and the local Buddhist basketball team. The young members of the Berkeley Bussei were more concerned with local issues and school gossip than international war. I have no doubt that there may have been those Japanese immigrants who would have supported the

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125 Amstutz, 2002, 8.
Japanese Empire over the American one, given the choice, but there were no instances of
violence from Japanese-Americans during the entire course of World War II. In fact, many of
them became decorated war heroes. Instead, an entire race of people is vilified who had little or
nothing to do with this fight and the arguments taking place around them. A quick perusal of the
*Berkeley Bussei* would show that these Nisei were more concerned with, “girls [who] showed a
willingness to waive all superfluous consideration, such as jobs, social status, I.Q., [and]
religion.”

In fact, the *Bussei* authors become much more concerned with doctrine and religion
following their internment when the magazine is reinstated in January 1950.

Following their internment throughout World War II, the youth involved in the *Berkeley
Bussei* returned home and began publishing their magazine again. In the second issue following
return, the editors printed an article by M.G. Mori titled “A Liberal Interpretation of Jōdoism,” in
which Mori writes of the union of Zen and Jōdo as it is only through a perceived Self-Power that
one can realize the ultimate Other-Power. It is only through “Self-discipline [sic] taught by
Śākyamuni,” that we can find Amida’s paradise. The editors of the *Bussei* are continuing debates
from before the war, even back to the Meiji Era, and suggesting the mystification of doctrine in
order to unify Buddhism and present the religion as a singular whole with an historical trajectory
back to an imagined past.

The collapsing of distinctions between Self-Power and Other-Power in the Japanese
Buddhist tradition allowed writers to counter arguments of American interpreters, who claimed
that Jōdo was a total corruption of true Buddhism, while also presenting Buddhism as a more

fulfilling religious tradition which could satisfy the mind as well as the heart. In other words, unlike Theravāda Buddhism the Mahāyāna presents Other-Power, which Japanese Buddhists claimed was a mystical connection with an otherworldly being of ultimate power who can save a being with his unlimited compassion. Unlike Christianity, this saviour being was not a separated “Sky-God” who created the universe and judged humanity, but a representation of Śūnyatā, ultimately one-and-the-same with adherents. Eastern Buddhism became the religion which “had it all,” so to speak. For those unsure of Christianity, it became a religion of science and a focus on the Self, while for others it was a religion without any sense of Self; a religion simultaneously claiming adamantly to worship god, while also denying “his” existence.

Shin Buddhism, normally defined by Other-Power, became encompassed within the American Buddhist desire for Self-Power through reinterpretations of Jōdo in light of modern science. Above, I described the way some authors, like Suzuki, explained this perceived disconnect by merging jiriki and tariki, as well as Zen and Jōdo, into a singular cyclical entity. Other writers expressed alternative problems to this perceived disconnect. As far back as 1918, Emyō Imamura argued that Shin Buddhists could change the common views of their religion at the time by arguing for the scientific and social practicality of Shin teaching. In *Democracy According to the Buddhist Viewpoint*, he argues that the Pure Land belief that all distinctions are annihilated through Amida coincides with science, and that this belief may create a social revolution as adherents help to instigate a Pure Land on earth.¹²⁸ Amida is a symbol for the

¹²⁸ Imamura, 1918, 23. These debates do not simply come from Imamura, but also figures such as Akegarasu Haya (1877-1954), a student of Kiyozawa Manshi, who argued that the universal mind of Amida could be used as a basis for tolerance and acceptance of all people’s [Akegarasu Haya, ed. and tr. Gyoko Saito and Joan Sweany, *Shout of Buddha: Writings of Haya Akegarasu*, (Chicago: Orchid Press Publications, 1977), 167-168].
workings of all of scientific reality; in other words, Amitābha Buddha is a symbolization of the impersonal machinations of science and the universe.\textsuperscript{129} Therefore, the Shin view of ultimate oneness with Amida was science. I argue the focus on a scientific Amida and a Pure Land on earth, although not expressly regarding the Self, does emphasize the practicality and rationalism of Buddhist teachings and brings the teachings here and now. In other words, Shin writers did not claim sentient beings had souls, or anything which might go against traditional doctrines per se, but they did write about Amida as not separated from oneself, and that Sukhāvatī could be realized here on earth, thus placing the Pure Land within our very personage. For instance, Kaneko Daiei, an important Shin intellectual, claimed that without Amida’s compassion within each individual, societies “will not be able to stand strong and firm.”\textsuperscript{130} According to Akegarasu Haya, when beings realize that Amida is within them, and therefore they have already realized Sukhāvatī, “all lives are leaping and dancing, and we live together with others, work together, enjoy together…one who himself finds out such a life sees the whole world living such a life.”\textsuperscript{131} This line of argumentation continues the ambivalent presentation of Buddhism in the United States, as the presentation of a Buddhist god represents the transcendent for those who desire a god, whereas the scientific Amida makes Sukhāvatī imminent for those who desire rationalism.

Younger generations of Shin adherents, born in the United States, began to call for reform in light of common societal tropes. Throughout the Berkeley Bussei, article after article is written

\textsuperscript{129} Ernest Shinkaku Hunt, \textit{Buddhist Sermons}, (Honolulu: Takiko Ichinose, 1955), 89-90.

\textsuperscript{130} Kaneko Daiei, “Shin Religion as I Believe It,” \textit{The Eastern Buddhist} 8, no. 2 (May 1951): 42. Daiei was excommunicated for his criticisms of Shinshu in 1928, but was reinstated ten years later.

on “Gautama Buddha: Great Reformer,” Nikāya study guides, and instructions for meditation, none of which are traditionally a part of Shin Buddhist practice. In fact, the “Religion” section of the Bussei throughout the entirety of 1950 contains no articles mentioning Amida, but five on Śākyamuni specifically, including one article about Nirvāṇa with no mention of Shinjin. The most telling article on this subject comes from Reverend Kanmo Imamura, who was the minister of the Berkeley Buddhist Temple at the time. In his article “Oneness,” Imamura describes the disagreements within the Bussei groups over whether Amida or Śākyamuni should be the basis of faith, and writes that a “battle” broke over some young people replacing Amida with Śākyamuni on the church altar.132 Furthermore, with the hindsight of history we know that Shin publications today include historical accounts of Śākyamuni and what may be classified as Theravāda doctrines, such as The Four Noble Truths.133 I argue that all of this suggests a generational disagreement between the issei, the first generation to immigrate to the United States, and nisei, the second generation who were born in America. Shin calls for a return to the “original Buddhism” represent an adaptation to American culture, as Christians similarly argued for a return to the founder; conversely, younger generations of Japanese-Americans often could not read Japanese, and most English language Buddhist publications at this time were about Theravāda. In other words, Japanese Buddhist historians were studying Pāli Buddhism, American and European academics were doing the same, thus creating a situation where nisei Buddhists in America would likely be drawn to earlier phases of Buddhist history. In Japanese history, the Kamakura Age (1185-1333) was marked by famine, drought, and disaster, and it was


through this social milieu that Shin Buddhism, with its focus on mappō and the primacy of Other-Power, was formed. However, when confronted with a period of pessimism and dread in the United States, Shin Buddhists did not develop new techniques to make their Buddhism easier, nor did they call for a return to the time of Shinran, but instead adopted calls for a return to the founder of their religious tradition broadly.\textsuperscript{134} Scholars were openly disparaging Pure Land Buddhism in the United States, other Buddhists thought Shin was a total corruption of a once pristine tradition, and other more dominant religious traditions in North America were also responding to current social situations by describing the need for a return. Religion is again utilized to critique current conditions by imagining history in order to produce a golden age, simultaneously existing within an imagined distant past and producing an imagined future.

\textit{Zen Notes} and the “Zen Boom” that Never Was: Japanese Buddhism in the 1950s and Beyond

The seeds of discussions taking place before 1950 began to bear fruit in the years following. In 1954, the First Zen Institute of America began publishing a new journal called \textit{Zen Notes} which featured some posthumous writings of Sokei-an, who died in 1945. \textit{Zen Notes} contains Japanese language lessons, including a small vocabulary of kanji printed in each edition. I argue that this displays a continued ambivalence to Japanese Buddhism; first, this

\textsuperscript{134} This means that Shin Buddhists in North America in the 1950s are calling to return to the time of a figure who Western scholars have deemed central, rather than their own religious traditions. Doctrinally, this call becomes even more complex as Śākyamuni is just one Buddha of many, and is only the “founder” of Buddhism in the sense that he discovered it for the current age. However, Snodgrass has pointed to the change in language around the historical Buddha as he became a founder figure to compete with Jesus, as well as being such an intense focus of early scholars and Orientalists.
represents a level of exoticism which Americans craved following the devastation of the war, and the resultant beginnings of cultural shifts away from a pure “Western rationalism,” and towards something perceived as more mystical. By 1959, *Zen Notes* contains advertisements for incense and meditation pillows made in Japan.\(^{135}\) Second, I contend that this tying of Japanese culture to Zen represents a flowering of *nihonjinron* continuing in Post-War America. Beginning in Volume Two, *Zen Notes* also regularly features the “Eye of Horus,” an Egyptian symbol; in *From Stone to Flesh*, Donald Lopez argues that some scholars as early as the 18th century connected the Buddha to Horus, and argued that Buddhism may actually be of Egyptian origin.\(^{136}\) This argument was also used by the Theosophical Society, and represented a connection within the longer trajectory of the Aryan myth.\(^{137}\) Jung also argued that Egypt represented an archetype for “Western” civilization. The inclusion of the “Eye of Horus,” represents a continuation of the Aryan myth which continues to place Buddhism, and by extension Japan, at the centre, even forming the archetype of, American society.

Prior to World War II, Japanese Buddhists claimed that their religion had a god, especially in publications for international consumption. In 1954, the publishers quote Sokei-an to say, “[Dharmakāya] is our God. We worship this.”\(^{138}\) In the August, 1957 issue, Sokei-an argues that the Soul is “Vijnana-Consciousness.”\(^{139}\) Even articles in 1971 refer to “God-Nature”

\(^{135}\) *Zen Notes* 6, no. 1 (January 1959): 1.
\(^{136}\) Lopez, 2013, 133.
\(^{137}\) Anthony, 2007, 22.
rather than Buddha Nature, or *Tathāgatagarbha*. Each of these examples come from one man, Sokei-an, and were written at least a decade prior to their publication, which means they may simply reflect the idiosyncrasies of one particular figure. However, these words were still being published in the 1950s, as well as 1960s and 1970s, which suggests that they were continuing to influence the broader American Buddhist culture. Simultaneously, the writings of a bona fide Japanese Zen monk would likely continue to be influential amongst interested parties even decades after his death. Another prominent change can be seen in interpretations of Śūnyatā, as Sokei-an claims, “Emptiness is a living being, so has active power. It has will power and it starts movement in the quietude of the universe…this is a very important part of Buddhism—understanding the omnipotence of Emptiness. This emptiness takes the place of your God.”

It would seem that one side of the romantic attraction to Buddhism continued to bear fruit into the 1960s, as the idea of a Buddhist soul and god found an audience within the American religious landscape.

Even the term Aryan continued to be used in the 1960s. According to Sokei-an, “the Brahmans had arrived in India in an early period. As Aryans, they considered themselves the race of the sons of God, purest in the World.” He then argues that Śākyamuni was not an Aryan, but was Śākya, and that Buddhism is therefore not an Aryan religion. Sokei-an goes on to say that the Buddha became Aryan later, following his enlightenment; Aryan, in this case, had become mysticized enough so as to become a spiritual designator, more closely akin to the original

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Sanskrit meaning. I do not think that the editors of *Zen Notes* have any malicious intent in using Aryan in this way. Instead, I would argue that the continued use of Aryan as a designator in Japanese Buddhist literature is an example of the non-existence of the “Zen Boom,” as Zen was presented using arguments from nearly thirty years earlier. How could this be true if the "Zen Boom" represents the sudden explosion of Zen onto the American landscape? In 1930, near the height of pre-war tensions and the eugenics craze, Buddhists used the Aryan myth in order to portray their religion as scientific and noble; in 1960, Aryan is being used as a Self-designator for being noble, and although not in this particular article, often portrayed as scientific. In the case of *Zen Notes*, Buddhist usage of the term Aryan went largely unchanged, as the term which once designated the religion as noble, now related more to the individual. In other words, Buddhists in the United States were developing new ideas and presentations of Buddhism before the “Zen Boom” much like they were afterwords. What had changed around them was the cultural perception of Buddhism and the American attraction to the religion. Buddhists did not remake Buddhism suddenly in 1957, nor did a wave of Buddhists from abroad arrive in American shores. Instead, fashion-forward Americans and spiritual seekers became increasingly attracted to Buddhism in the mid-1950s. This was, in many ways, the result of developments which had been taking place since before 1899. One of the biggest things which had changed prior to the “Zen Boom” was the mysticization of Buddhism, especially Zen, which allowed the religion to encapsulate a huge number of styles, including the existence of a god and soul, and their own non-existence. Buddhism, like the Aryan myth, continued its presence before and after the “Zen Boom”; what created the “Zen Boom” was the increasing attraction of segments of the American population to the religion. These developments had been taking place for decades and
were often the result of Asian Buddhist missionaries attempting to re-create the religion for a new audience. Simultaneously, cultural attitudes towards other groups shifted in the mid-1950s as the dangers posed by Communism and de-segregation became bigger threats than the Yellow Peril. This all allowed Buddhism a space within the American religious landscape.

Conclusion

Japanese Buddhism during the Shōwa Period underwent a process of mystification using emic and etic discussions in order to place themselves at the beginning of world historical development as well as to make the religion more palatable to outsiders. Their doctrinal reinterpretations are neither one or the other, but a shifting dynamic between these two tensions. These two tensions show the difficult position which Buddhists were in more broadly during a period of war between Japan and the United States, as they attempt to walk a line between Japanese patriotism for some, and a deeply-felt spirituality on the other side. In other words, Japanese Buddhists did not outright promote the war, but were largely caught up in it to varying degrees, responding in different ways at different times.

There are two tensions in this historical narrative to which I wish to draw attention. The first tension comes from my argument that Buddhist writers adopted new interpretations of the Self in order to assert their religion throughout history, internationally, and within the context of the United States specifically. This is contentious as Buddhism asserts the doctrine of anātman, although exact understandings of this concept have been contested throughout Buddhist history. In The American Encounter with Buddhism, Tweed describes 19th Century North Americans
who focused on Nirvāṇa, a concept which many asserted was too far outside the limits of cultural acceptance as it became synonymous with individual annihilation. In the Victorian era, the encounter with Buddhism was through the lens of outsiders interpreting Buddhism and deciding what was authentic and even whether the religious tradition could be considered socially acceptable. However, during the Yellow Peril Buddhists themselves adapted the doctrines of their religious tradition in order to fit within the limits of cultural dissent in America.

Buddhists attempted to reinterpret doctrines in light of one of their most important philosophies, as well as a deep-seated feeling of individualism and selfhood characteristic of the United States. Throughout the print run of *The Young East*, readers can even see a marked shift of opinion within the years of the early 20th Century. Throughout volume one, the magazine makes clear for North American audiences that Buddhism does not believe in a permanent and *a priori* self, whereas by 1928 there are pieces titled “Over-Soul,” “Your True Self,” and others. This means that there were not only arguments which revolved around reinterpretations of the self, such as debates of *tariki* and *jiriki*, but also more direct explorations as to what actually constitutes the Self in Buddhism.

The focus on the Self in Buddhism in North America relates directly to my second point of tension; given that the United States was directly at war with Japan, and Buddhist doctrines of nirvāṇa and *anātman* seem so far afield from traditional American beliefs, why would Americans embrace Buddhism at all? In *The Modernist Impulse*, Hutchison describes changes to Liberal Christian churches following the upheaval of World War One, including the development of Neo-Orthodox Theology and a drop in overall attendance. Paralleling developments in Liberal churches, Metaphysical religions such as Theosophy provided alternatives for seekers
dissatisfied with traditional Christianity. In primary sources from 1899-1957, one can see the
dissatisfaction some felt with Christianity as they wrote of its “unscientific dogmas” and rigid
social power structures. Beyond that, Buddhism was beginning to gain a language of utopianism,
which can be seen most clearly in Metaphysical Buddhism, and Japanese Buddhists were
connected in many ways to these discussions. Similarly, eugenics movements, especially
combined with the possibility of Japanese military success prior to World War II may have lent
Buddhism a new sense of utopian progress. Finally, the Buddhist emphasis on notions of the Self
provide notions of individual progressive development, rather than the perceived “pessimism” of
nirvāṇa. The developing sense of Buddhist utopianism will be detailed more fully in the
following chapter.

Japanese Buddhists presented Buddhism as the alternative to Christianity, imagining
history in order to place the Mahāyāna as a superior religious tradition for those of superior
intellect and racial progeny. Part of the success of Buddhism in the United States comes from
precisely this view, that Buddhism presents an antithesis to that which was perceived as
distasteful in Christianity, thus creating the success of Buddhism amongst those in the counter-
culture in the 1960s, for instance. This helps to explain how North American nation-states could
be at war with Japan for approximately three years, imprison those of Japanese ancestry for far
longer, and then supposedly experience a massive “Zen Boom” in the proceeding decade. Japan
failed to overtake the United States and was forced to rescind its territorial claims throughout
Asia. In Jeff Wilson’s ethnographic study of a Buddhist temple in the southern United States, he
writes that at Ekoji Temple, Buddhism was, “in many ways as much about not being something
(Republican, Christian, stereotypically southern, narcissistically American) as it is about
believing or doing something (accepting the Four Noble Truths, meditating, seeking enlightenment.”¹⁴³ The Buddhism of the participants involved identity construction, as Buddhism and being a Buddhist are considered alternative to a stereotypically Judeo-Christian, Western, White, religious lifestyle.

Chapter Five

Metaphysical Religion and the Democratization of Buddhism

“Even as water may be poured into different coloured bottles, yet remain the same in each, so the Teaching of the All-Enlightened One may be presented in a dozen different ways according to the needs of those to whom it is given.”¹ - Anonymous, 1929

“We are fundamentally a materialistic people and few are the Occidentals who are not in some measure bound by material values, attachments, and ambitions. Metaphysics is to us an avocation, a hobby, a luxury, a passing experience. We must accept the materiality of our race as part of the divine plan. Like the prodigal son, we must metaphorically go down into Egypt and herd swine. In the end we shall be richer for all the experiences that we shall have gained; we shall be wiser and nobler for our journey in the land of darkness and error. The reward for our experience is to be truly greater than the angels, in acquiring wisdom, courage, vision, and truth. Because we are very different from Easterners, and because we are different from the ancients, we must adapt their mystical philosophies to present conditions.”² - Manly P. Hall, 1942

These two quotes come from very disparate sources; one is a translation of a millennia-old sūtra and the other describes thousands of years of history. However, both quotations represent upāya, or Skillful Means. In the sūtra text, the Buddha claims that the Dharma can be taught in multiple ways in order to produce further understanding. The quote is utilized by the British Buddhist Lodge in order to prove that their understandings of Buddhism should be considered legitimate. In the second quote, American Metaphysical Buddhists believed that they were the true Buddhists, entering a “land of darkness and error” in order to reclaim an ancient mystical tradition which had been saved for the United States by a divinely ordained plan for history. If Metaphysical Buddhists study Asian Buddhism, “metaphorically…herd swine,” then they will be able to “adapt their mystical philosophies to present conditions.” American


exceptionalism and the Aryan myth were combined in order to create a utopian vision for Buddhism in the United States; this vision would aid the development of Buddhism in America.

The presentation of Buddhism in the United States was often marked by ambivalence, as it was simultaneously a corrupted tradition of idolatry, associated with a disparaged racial group, and a religion of science, associated with a racially superior founder. Similarly, in the 1880s the Theosophical Society was closely associated with the top figures in a developing international Buddhism, but throughout the Yellow Peril these same Metaphysical Buddhists were increasingly at odds with Asian Buddhist groups. Metaphysical Buddhism was interpreted through the prism of Theosophical doctrines. Therefore, Theosophical publications will inform a large part of this chapter. The present chapter is thematically-chronological in order to show the shifting relation of Buddhism and Theosophy during the Yellow Peril; this means that certain doctrines developed in Theosophical publications between 1900-1920, will then reemerge as presented by Metaphysical Buddhists in the 1940s and 1950s. In this chapter, I begin by presenting the Theosophical view of the Self and racial evolutionary development in contradistinction to the essentialized Self of Asian Buddhists. By defining the Aryan Self, in this case meaning a spiritually evolved being, Theosophists could define the “other” as those who were less developed along the Theosophical path. This definition of a Theosophically-inclined Buddhist Self is then used to present a coherent narrative for the Buddhist path, resulting in a mystical unification with the Over-Soul. The journey of an individual soul towards a mystical unification with the Over-Soul was presented as science; according to Theosophical authors, Theosophy was science. Theosophical science was brought to South Asia, which was then combined with traditional Buddhism and race sciences to form the “Aryan Path.” Throughout the
1930s, Theosophy decreased in popularity. Beginning in the 1940s, Metaphysical Buddhists, especially in *The Golden Lotus*, began to present themselves as “true” Buddhists with an ancient lineage rather than Theosophists. Metaphysical Buddhists again reinterpreted the Self and the Over-Soul in order to present themselves as the authentic Buddhists against Asians. By presenting Metaphysical Buddhists as real Buddhists, with a god and a soul, they could propose a future Buddhist utopia which would eventually be created in the United States. This development of a Buddhism of superiority, with a god and a soul, that would eventually result in a utopia in the United States was very useful in domesticating a hybrid Buddhism in the United States.

**Defining the Self: Aryanism and the Evolution of Races in Theosophy**

The theory of race-based spiritual development is an important part of Theosophical doctrines about the nature of the universe; by defining themselves as the spiritually-superior “Aryan race,” Theosophists could separate themselves from the “other” who were the less-evolved Asian Buddhists. Theosophists were the “true” Buddhists, as opposed to Asians who had only harmed a once-great tradition. Theosophists began travelling to Asia in the 1880s, as Olcott and Blavatsky met with Dharmapala, and established the Theosophical Society-Adyar (Chenai, India) in 1886.³ The first Theosophical organization founded by Blavatsky was the Aryan Theosophical Society, originally founded in 1883 in New York.⁴ The relationship between Dharmapala and Olcott was detailed in *The White Buddhist* by Stephen Prothero, although he

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focused more on the vernacular Buddhism produced by Olcott, and the hybrid Buddhism which resulted from this relationship. What understandings of Buddhism were being brought to Sri Lanka by Theosophical interlocutors? What doctrines and ideas were provided by the Theosophists to Dharmapala which shaped his Buddhism, and therefore the developing Buddhism during the time of the Yellow Peril? This chapter provides a new link in a web of global interactions; or, to continue my metaphor, I will analyze the seeds being cast into Asia from American and European sources in the late-1880s, which then flowered and reproduced new seeds which were planted in the United States by 1957. The cross-pollination of Asian and American forms of Buddhism over the course of the Yellow Peril helps to display further contributions of Asian Buddhists to the growing Buddhism in the United States, but also the influences of Metaphysical Buddhists in creating this growth.

Theosophical doctrines are heavily based on ideas of evolution and race sciences, with the Aryan myth becoming increasingly mysticized in order to function as a spiritual designator for human development. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) wrote *The Secret Doctrine* in 1888, in which she claimed to have studied the ancient *Book of Dzyan*, written in the secret language of Senzar. Blavatsky describes a system of seven rounds, or ages of the earth, seven root races, and seven subraces. She claimed earth is currently in its fourth, materialistic, age and during the final three rounds the planet will slowly return to its spiritual form. Blavatsky used this idea to suggest that modern science was too materialistic, and needed an influx of spiritualism in order to further progress human evolution; this spiritualism was Theosophy. The fourth root race was very advanced, using electricity and airplanes, and lived in Atlantis.

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final subrace of Atlanteans was subsumed into the fifth root race, the Aryans. The Aryans then destroyed the remaining Atlanteans, who were “yellow and red, brown and black” due to their inferiority, although some managed to escape to Africa and Asia. According to Blavatsky, “the last survivors of the fair child of the White Island perished ages before. Their elect had taken sheet on the sacred Island, while some of the accursed races, separating from the main stock, now lived in the jungles and underground, when the golden yellow race became in its turn ‘black with sin.’” Human evolutionary development was traceable and knowable; simultaneously, race development was viewed as the spiritual-scientific workings of divinity, and uneven racial evolution was tied directly to karma. The Aryans push society forward and attack the inferior races who are holding human evolution back.

In The Secret Doctrine, Blavatsky declares her Theosophy is not orthodox Buddhism, but it is “Esoteric Budhism,” or “Ādi-Bhūta,” “absolute Wisdom…‘the primeval uncreated cause of all.’” Like the philologists and scientists of religion in her day, Blavatsky said the Buddha was an Aryan. However, he was surrounded by those of a lesser root race, and therefore, “unable to teach all that had been imparted to him—owing to his pledges—though he taught a philosophy built upon the ground-work of the true esoteric knowledge, the Buddha gave to the world only its outward material body and kept its soul for his elect.” In Chapter Two, I discussed the philological claim of Buddha as an Aryan, although here this pronouncement has a rather

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9 Ibid, xxi. Italics in original.
different meaning. In the case of Blavatsky, mapping out a genealogical connection to the Buddha allows for some claim of control over the past, therefore helping to explain the present, and thereby predict the future. It is this mystical and imagined racial connection to the Buddha which allowed Blavatsky to imagine herself and fellow Theosophists as laying claim to the “pure” and “original” teachings of a religion with roughly 2,500 years of history. The combination of science, esotericism, and occult science allowed Blavatsky and her forebears to utilize the Aryan myth in order to posit themselves at the beginning of human development.

According to Blavatsky, humanity would continue to evolve into further root races, becoming progressively more ethereal and eventually turning into purely spiritual beings; all of this information was provided by, and validated by the presence of, adepts, or Mahātmāns.

10 Horst Junginger, “From Buddha to Adolf Hitler: Walther Wüst and the Aryan Tradition,” in *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, ed. Horst Junginger, (Boston: Leiden BRILL, 2008), 109. It should be noted that the notion of “Aryan philology” did not hold the negative or racial connotations which we would think of today, post-World War II. In the beginning of comparative Indo-European linguistics, “Aryan” meant expertise in Sanskrit and Avesta languages. However, during the latter-19th century, racial views were posited onto these academic studies. In other words, in ways comparable to Psychology, academic studies were popularized and used in ways not necessarily promoted by those who created them. Léon Poliakov directly associates the appearance of the Aryan Myth in Germany with F. Max Müller.

11 Blavatsky claims that all of the great religious leaders of history were actually ancient Adepts, or Mahātmāns, highly evolved beings sent down to progress humanity through an upward trajectory of spiritual development. The Buddha was one of these beings. Beyond that, humanity has developed by specific groups, Root Races, receiving this help directly from Adepts and then developing their own spirituality to the point where a new planetary cycle is forced. In other words, when one Root Race has sufficiently progressed, the planet (of which earth is one of seven), will constrict and reform, producing a whole new form of humanity. The current Root Race is the Aryan, although Blavatsky and other Theosophists are clear that holdouts from the previous Root Race still remain on earth. Therefore, the entire progression of human spiritual development is an evolutionary trajectory whereby certain beings are simply higher spiritually than others. The highest beings in this hierarchy are the ancient Adepts, who Blavatsky claimed to have direct connection with, from their cave in Tibet [Kenneth Morris, “Keep the Link Unbroken,” *The Theosophical Forum* 27, no. 11 (November 1949): 676-681].

12 Henry T. Edge, “Man’s Mighty Destiny,” *Universal Brotherhood Path* 15, no. 3 (June 1900): 136. The adepts who allegedly spoke directly to Blavatsky were Koot Hoomi and Master Morya [137]. However, their existence was never physically verified, and it was their presence which began initial splits within institutional Theosophy. Some members disagreed about their existence, or Blavatsky’s connection to the masters.
Mahātmāns were not celestial beings of any sort, but supermen who were much more highly evolved than the rest of humanity. The adepts represented the “Spiritual Hierarchy of Earth,” which was also known as the Great White Brotherhood, headquartered in the Great White Mountains of Tibet, where all of the “eternal Buddhas” live. The adepts represented the future goal of human spirituality, and it was through progressive evolutionary rebirth that these beings came into existence. This progressive evolution through rebirth represented humanity’s upward spiritual climb, and those less evolved due to negative karma display their degraded status outwardly through their skin colour and race. Again, in the 1880s and 1890s, race would have meant a person’s culture, religion, and individual psychology, which were all biologically tied to race, not just skin colour.

Blavatsky utilized the dominant science of her age, including race sciences and eugenics, to explain the development of human history, and provide a utopian goal which could be accomplished through progressive rebirth and evolution. In so doing, she mysticized and spiritualized race sciences in order to give this view of “race betterment” a divine quality. Blavatsky used the Aryan myth to claim that Caucasians were the real Buddhists, as Buddhism had been drastically misunderstood by those of lesser racial evolution. According to A.P. Sinnett, the Buddha purposefully withheld information due to his knowledge of the lesser capacities of his audience, instead saving the best teachings to be discovered through esoteric means and direct connection with an advanced race of spiritual masters. Theosophists claimed to have had a direct connection to these adepts.

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The Theosophical society experienced schism in the 1890s following the 1891 death of Madame Blavatsky. Public reaction condemned Sinnett’s *Esoteric Buddhism*, Blavatsky was considered a fraud, and William Quan Judge stood accused (by Olcott and Annie Besant) of forging letters from the Mahātmās.\(^{15}\) The society was largely discredited by academics of the time, as Müller claimed academics, “have found no evidence anywhere of the pretended esoteric meaning which your Theosophists profess to have discovered…there is nothing of the kind, I assure you.”\(^{16}\) Following disputes over the existence of the Mahatmas, Judge and Katherine Tingly separated to form the Theosophical Society-Pasadena, based in California. In this chapter I will focus most of my attention on developments within this lineage of the Theosophical Society as it relates to Buddhism. This is intended to continue the focus on the United States in particular, and the development of Buddhism in America. Similarly, prior to 1900, the Theosophy which was going to Asia was rather unified, and it is this version of Theosophy which would have influenced Dharmapala; after 1900, the Pasadena branch would have developed on its own, meaning it would have been receiving influence from Asia in many cases. It is also within this larger schism that Dharmapala begins to distance himself from Theosophy as a whole, and by 1909 is openly disparaging the Theosophical Society-Adyar. Theosophy was not a unified whole. The schisms within Theosophy mean that previous scholarship about relations between Theosophy and Buddhism represent only specific time periods and groups; following 1900, two separate lineages of Theosophy are present.
In the initial publications of the Theosophical Society, they begin by delineating what constitutes the Self, or the position of Theosophists in contradistinction to the world, but focus mainly on the upwards spiritual trajectory of personal souls. Although I will attempt, where appropriate, to tease out differences between Theosophy and Buddhism, it should be noted that these delineations are necessarily muddied by the fact that Theosophists believed their religion was Buddhism. Therefore, especially in the early half of the Yellow Peril, the writings of “Buddhists” often overlapped with the arguments of Theosophy. The *Universal Brotherhood Path* was a Theosophical magazine from the Pasadena branch between 1900 and 1901, which was edited by Katherine Tingley and E.A. Neresheimer (1847-1937). Articles in *Universal Brotherhood Path* fall largely into two categories: those which describe and unify the past, and those which foretell humanity’s spiritual future. There is a series of articles running throughout the magazine called “Egypt and Egyptian Dynasties,” which traces the historical development of Egyptian society and spirituality, all of which would have been included in the larger Theosophical picture of the Aryan race. For Theosophists, the unification of the past through imagined history created a direct link through universalism to all of humanity’s greatest achievements. Historical figures from Pythagorus to Galileo to the Rosicrucians are all claimed as promoting Theosophical doctrines, as long as one holds “a correct reading of the meaning of these philosophers.” In other words, the universalism of Theosophical doctrine mysticized the

17 Emil Augustus Neresheimer was a German-American and early member of the Theosophical Society, even attending the World’s Parliament of Religion with Madame Blavatsky [Ashcraft, 2002, 32].

18 Jerome A. Anderson, “The Alchemy of the Rosicrucians,” *Universal Brotherhood Path* 15, no. 7 (October 1900): 376. Italics in original. Rosicrucianism was a popular movement in early-17th century Europe which sought to uncover the ancient esoteric truths of the past by mixing Kabbalah, Hermeticism, and Christianity.
Aryan myth in order to add a spiritual-scientific dimension which posited Aryan superiority as a divinely ordained process of human spiritual development.

The second category of Theosophical writings in the *Universal Brotherhood Path* prescribed an evolutionary spiritual trajectory of upward mobility as individual “Souls” are reborn repeatedly in order to further develop spiritual capacities, moving ever closer to realizing union with divinity, and thus becoming gods. The Theosophical path was one of self-deification, as, “man’s mighty destiny, then, is to gain the knowledge of his soul. By doing so he will unite heaven with earth, for he has explored all the regions of the lower creation…now he has to regain his original divine and spiritual knowledge.”¹⁹ Henry T. Edge (1867-1946), personal pupil of Madame Blavatsky and professor at the Theosophical University, goes on to say, “he has to remember that the Soul is immortal, eternal, and that the body is a garment which suffices for the needs of one day’s work…hence the Universal Brotherhood upholds the forgotten truth of REBIRTH…he has to remember that the Soul is ONE and not many.” Although Edge is speaking of Theosophy in a Theosophical magazine, the Universal Brotherhood of which he speaks was often used by Blavatsky as a designation for Buddhism, a designation that was also used by Buddhists themselves.²⁰ In “What is Man?” the author, signed only as “A Student,” explains the Theosophical life-cycle most clearly, stating,

> Life is a great cycle, the soul descends into matter and clothes itself in garments of ever increasing density until the mineral, the outermost kingdom of Nature is built. Then begins the return journey, the refining of the garments of the soul, the ascent

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¹⁹ Edge, 1900, 137.  
through all the kingdoms of Nature until the human is reached, and then, beyond, the climbing to the height of divinity and Godlike power. And when these heights of blessedness are reached the soul again goes forth for new experiences, to build new worlds, to help this others who may have lost their way. This is Theosophy’s answer to the question, “What is Man?” Man is the soul—in essence divine, Godlike, a son of God; and the soul itself, of its own will, acting in accord with the supreme law which is but the expression of its own divine nature, starts forth on its pilgrimage and journeys through the cycles of being.21

For Theosophists encountering Buddhism, and Buddhists encountering Theosophy, this description may have seemed very similar to the career of a Bodhisattva, especially in 1901.22 Theosophy presented a mystical tradition with cycles of time, rebirth, karma, and a focus on Aryanism, all of which was similar to Buddhism. In 1901, when Buddhists encountered Americans and Europeans, the descriptions of Theosophy, although not the same, may have been viewed as “close enough” for many. This explains the close affinities of Buddhism and Theosophy especially in the first decade of the 20th century.

In the first decade of the 1900s, Metaphysical Buddhists argued that Buddhism had a soul, which was based on the science of Theosophical doctrines, and the mysticization of the Aryan myth; this assertion will be repeated throughout the Era of the Yellow Peril. H. Fielding A Student, “What is Man?” Universal Brotherhood Path 16, no. 5 (August 1901): 273.

21 The career of an individual monad (soul) is comparable to a Bodhisattva; according to E.A. Holmes, “for, just as the entities which make up the kingdoms below man are slowly evolving to become men, so are we individual entities growing in mental and spiritual stature, so that in aeons upon aeons to come we shall have grown into god-like creatures, and all creation will have moved up one step with us.” However, the Theosophical doctrine of soul-development focuses on the individual Self, as “we owe it to ourselves to remember our humble greatness as individuals, but for the future welfare of universes we owe care and right treatment to our own physical bodies and to the spiritual faculties within them” [E.A. Holmes, “The Absolute was Once a Man,” The Theosophical Forum 28, no. 4 (April 1950): 202-206]. I do not suggest that the Theosophical doctrine of soul-development is the same as the Bodhisattva doctrine, but simply suggest that they are comparable, especially in a time period with such broad and sometimes misleading descriptions of Asian religions.
Hall claims to be expressing the views of Buddhism in *The Inner Light*. However, the story of two “Westerners” in Burma advances a number of understandings which scholars may view as unorthodox. The protagonist claims that Buddhists believe in transmigration, whereby “an individual rises…because his whole personality has risen, because he is the expression of a higher soul within a more adapted body.” When the characters learn of *anātman*, it is explained that this doctrine means “nothing is true,” and no-self represents “the undertone of the world’s sorrow.” However, the author wrote in other works that other authors have failed to write on Buddhism “because they have assumed that the formal teachings of Buddha are the whole of Buddhism.” In *The Soul of a People*, published in 1898, Fielding Hall claimed, “so [sic] it seemed that the religion of the Buddha was one religion, and the religion of the Buddhists another; but when I said so to the monks, they were horror struck, and said that it was because I did not understand.” Fielding Hall goes on to describe all the ways that the Buddhists were wrong about their own religion, a consequence of their racial inferiority, climate, and misunderstanding of the Aryan founder. Metaphysical Buddhists knew that Buddhism had a soul because Buddhism coincides with science, which is equivalent to Theosophical doctrines; simultaneously, other Buddhists, including monks, could all be wrong about their tradition due to

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24 Hall, 1908, 54.

25 Ibid, 164.


28 Hall, 1898, 12.
their decreased propensity for logic, which was tied to their diminished evolutionary race status. Descriptions of Buddhist doctrine became examples of colonialism, as that which was considered illogical in the Buddhist tradition, the notion of the Self, was posited as ignorance on the part of the Buddha’s racially inferior audience.

The Metaphysical belief in the biological-spiritual evolution of humans also resulted in theories of degeneration. *The Open Court* (1887-1936) was published by Paul Carus in La Salle, Illinois; D.T. Suzuki also worked with Paul Carus in Illinois during this period. Carus, and others in *The Open Court*, often used elements from American culture to help explain Buddhism in more comfortable terms, leading to a mixing of language which is revealing for the ways in which Buddhism adapted to American culture. Born in Chicago, Simon Nelson Patten (1852-1922) was an historian and economist at the University of Pennsylvania who wrote “Becoming American” for the July 1915 issue of *The Open Court*. According to Patten, by having a “pure race, a pure language” people can “separate the American from the non-American, we must be able to distinguish the normal from the abnormal.” This separation must occur, or else America may be burdened with, “an old religion, an antiquated morality, the race ties of yesterday, and the thought modes of any language [which] lower the tone of those chained by them.” Patten then goes on to say that if this separation were to occur, Americans could begin progressing from men to supermen. In fact, “it is only the blinding influence of cant that

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29 Wilson and Moriya, 2016, xx. *The Open Court* dealt with Metaphysical Religion, but was not Theosophist.

30 S.N. Patten, “Becoming American,” *The Open Court* 29, no. 7 (July 1915): 385.

31 Patten, 1915, 387.

32 Ibid, 388.
keeps us from seeing that we are more German than the Germans;” in race sciences, the “Germanic” was another name for the Aryan, suggesting that Americans are actually more Aryan than those who call themselves Aryan. History and science are combined when he claims “races in the past have been wolves or lambs,” and that this racial distinction is part of “our physical heredity [which] is transmitted by a single germ-cell” that could be manipulated in order to produce “stronger stock.”\textsuperscript{33} Patten puts a slight twist on this argument, however, by saying that eugenics would likely not help, because evolution would become to stilted; instead we must consider environmental factors, asking “can we not breed a physical wolf and control him by intensifying social environment?”\textsuperscript{34} This is a justification for Colonialism, as “aggression is not bad, but it requires a fitting end to make it an uplifting force.”\textsuperscript{35} In 1915, this theory was considered a progressive argument towards the spiritual uplift of mankind, but it is also a justification for race separation and Colonialism. Metaphysical Buddhism sprung from this contested soil.

Although not a Theosophist, Paul Carus was attempting to create a Metaphysical “religion of science” through his reinterpretation of Buddhist doctrines, combined with other religious traditions. For many intellectuals in the first decades of the 20th century, Monism was considered a scientific understandings, as popular scientific understandings equated ideas of physics with a universal substance, or ether.\textsuperscript{36} In \textit{The Dharma, or the Religion of Enlightenment},

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 392.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 392.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 393.

Paul Carus claims Buddhism denies an ātman, a self, and a soul-substance, but has a soul and soul-forms. The five skandhas are viewed through Carus’ prism of American religious liberalism as saṃskāra and contact become “soul-forms” and “soul-activities.” Carus argues that Buddhism denies the Hindu ātman, but not the soul. This point seems rather telling, as Carus separates “Hinduism” from Buddhism, but posits a more Christian tone onto Buddhism. In many ways, this continues the societal separation between the idol-worshipping and degraded “Hinduism” versus the Aryan religion of science, Buddhism. Carus makes Buddhism more palatable by equating it with Christian and Metaphysical truisms, against the misunderstandings of the Indian mind. In other words, despite their close historical and doctrinal relation, “Hinduism” becomes the symbol for lesser-Asia, Dravidians, and Semites, while Buddhism becomes the Aryan tradition. Similarly, Carus does not define soul in this work, suggesting that he meant a popularly understood notion of what “soul” means, again positing a broader “Western,” or in this case perhaps Aryan, view of soul.

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38 Carus, 1918, 29. Note that the five skandhas begin with mental formations for Carus, which is typical of Theosophy and other forms of religious liberalism, and possibly based on his understanding of Yogācāra. He then returns to rūpa, although attaching it to a soul, which then acts theoretically through karmic volition [mental formations, soul-forms, soul-groups/sensation, consciousness]. The traditional ordering of the skandhas in the Pāli Canon are: form, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. In Buddhism, there is form which is then put into relation with a sense (i.e. food is form, which we then smell) which leads to perception, which creates mental formations, and finally a being’s conscious understanding. For Carus, mental formations are already present when our “soul” contacts form. This “soul” then groups these sensations in comparison to its previously held mental formations, which produces consciousness. The difference, I argue, relies on the notion of the soul.

39 The ātman in Hinduism is a permanent Self which migrates from one being to the next until final release [T.S. Saraswathi, “Hindu Worldview in the Development of Selfways: The ‘Atman’ as the Real Self,” *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, no. 109 (September 2005): 43]. Carus ventures no explanation as to his definition of ātman, a term which has been contested and developed in the Hindu tradition—no singular definition of ātman has prevailed throughout the course of Hindu history.
However, if we look to some of Carus’ other works written in the same year (1918), an answer can be discerned. Carus defines a soul as an individual’s mentality, personality, and predisposition to spirituality.\textsuperscript{40} The \textit{ātman} is “the mysterious ego-entity…in the sense of a kind of soul-monad.”\textsuperscript{41} The supposed predisposition towards spirituality which the soul engenders is important here, as Asians were labelled materialists, due to their practices of idol-worship and characterizations of Buddhism as atheism. In the Aryan myth, Aryan peoples are also described as naturally predisposed to spirituality.\textsuperscript{42} Carus is thus further “Aryanizing” Buddhism by injecting a soul. Like the Aryans, Buddhism with a soul is predisposed to spirituality, not crass materialism; this continues lines of thinking which separate the historical founder of Buddhism from the teachings of the religion. Reiterating the fact that the Tathāgata rejected \textit{ātman} but absolutely affirmed a soul creates a dichotomy whereby “Hinduism” can be diminished writ large, while American notions of the soul are reinforced by connection to a racial forebear. For Carus, the Buddha rejected the common view of his time, the \textit{ātman}, but affirmed an American view of the soul; thus suggesting that the Aryan social reformer was against “Hinduism,” but would have been in agreement with American Metaphysical religionists.

For Metaphysical Buddhists between 1899-1920, Buddhism had a soul, and it was this soul which would continue the rounds of rebirth in an upwards trajectory towards reunification with a monistic divinity, or Over-Soul. Buddhist notions of the Self were being reconstituted in relation to American Metaphysical beliefs. This doctrinal reconstitution was not simply a change

\textsuperscript{40} Paul Carus, \textit{The Gospel of Buddha: Compiled from Ancient Records}, (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1915), viii.

\textsuperscript{41} Carus, 1915, viii.

\textsuperscript{42} Anthony, 2007, 21.
in intellectual philosophy, but represented dominant scientific and cultural understandings of the
time. By reinterpreting the Buddhist notions of Self, Metaphysical Buddhists could mysticize the
Aryan myth in order to recapitulate predominant stereotypes and power dynamics within an
increasing age of colonialism. The Buddhist “soul” became a symbol for the uneven racial
evolution of Asians versus Europeans, thus perpetuating and reinforcing the Yellow Peril.
Conversely, Metaphysical views on the ultimate goal of the Buddhist soul provided an
opportunity for the historical development of Buddhism in the United States.

The Soul’s Journey and the Beginnings of a Utopian Buddhism

One of the most important aspects of Metaphysical presentations of Buddhism for the
domestication of Buddhism in the United States, was the positive and utopian tone which
Metaphysical religionists portrayed in Buddhism. The Buddhist religion was presented as
pessimistic nihilism in American and European popular culture. Carus describes the Buddha as
“the first positivist before positivism was ever though of,” because the Buddha only described
avoiding evils rather than demanding positive behaviour, which Carus likens to Nietzsche and
his ideas of self-determination. In other words, the Buddha, like the most advanced minds
today, placed all of human development firmly within the Self; thus Buddhism can become
simultaneously a process of self-deification and a system of rationalism. According to Edge,
“Life is Joy…when the Soul awakens, man will arise with a shout of joy.” In fact, Edge claims

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43 Paul Carus, *Nietzsche and Other Exponents of Individualism*, (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing
Company, 1914), 135. The Buddha is considered an exponent of individualism in this particular text.
44 Edge, 1900, 137.
that Buddhism, “aims at bringing back into humanity the joy of soul-life.” According to Herbert Coryn (1863-1927), president of the Brixton Theosophical Lodge in South London, “life is joy,” and it is only the events of life which produce suffering, “and every one knows that the more life he has the more he enjoys himself. His joy is proportionate to his life. The pleasure or pain he gets out of events is due to the fact that those events do actually—or bid fair to—increase or diminish his amount of life.” Coryn uses positivistic views of life to separate and denigrate Hindus, who fail to bring joy into life on earth. Even in articles defining the positivity of Buddhist life, Hindus represent the “other;” this is a continuation upon the Aryan myth, which split the world into the Dravidian Semite against the Aryan. In an article titled “Positive and Negative,” the author known only as “E.” claims that “everywhere in life we meet with Pairs of Opposites,” and it is for this reason that an optimistic Buddhism must be rebuilt, or what E. calls a “New Temple.” A positivistic Buddhism continues to reinforce the Aryan myth as well as the colonial agenda. The colonial agenda against “Hinduism” becomes mysticized in the dualistic interpretation of “positive and negative,”

As darkness is the absence of light, cold the absence of warmth, evil the absence of good, so also are the positive and negative opposites only by comparison. In reality they are of the same nature, only in different stages of evolution. They are

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46 Herbert Coryn, “Life is Joy,” Universal Brotherhood Path 15, no. 3 (June 1900): 139. This would be in direct opposition to understandings of existence as dukkha.

47 Coryn, 1900, 140.


49 E, “Positive and Negative,” Universal Brotherhood Path 16, no. 2 (May 1901): 76.
co-existent, and just as light dispels the darkness, so the presence of the positive quality tends to raise the negative upward.\textsuperscript{50}

The forces of darkness, in this case, represent the backwards “East” within the clash of civilizations which defined the Era of the Yellow Peril. The ability to “raise the negative upward” mirrors the civilizing mission which was presented by colonialism. Metaphysical Buddhists believed that their doctrines were the true original Buddhism taught by an Aryan founder, and so the negative and pessimistic parts of Buddhism could be posited onto Asians, who were racially and spiritually inferior. This stunted evolutionary track could then be used to justify the need to help Asians by teaching them the true meaning of Buddhism, and thus civilizing them into the true ways of Aryanism, meaning advanced humans.

\textbf{Mystical Science and the Over-Soul in Theosophy}

In Theosophy, the most supreme being, which each person hopes to find unification with through progressive spiritual evolution, is known as the Over-Soul, or sometimes Higher Self.\textsuperscript{51} The Theosophical Over-Soul differs from traditional Transcendentalist understandings presented in the previous chapter, as the Theosophical Over-Soul requires traversing a specified evolutionary path in order to achieve union; furthermore, the Theosophical view of the Over-Soul differs from other presentations because it has representatives who are able to speak for the Over-Soul in the form of the Mahātmāns. The idea of an Over-Soul in Theosophical thought

\textsuperscript{50} E, 1901, 76.

suggests each human shares a certain kinship with the cosmos writ large, and this cosmos represents a singular unity with a certain consistent essentialism. According to Theosophists, this Over-Soul represents a “deific self,” or the idea that human nature more broadly is divine, and that each person will become a god when they reach unification with the one Universal spirit of man.\(^{52}\) This unification is achieved through rebirth along a path of progressive evolutionary spiritual development, suggesting that certain beings are already closer to the Over-Soul, and therefore more advanced, than others. The most evolved beings, or Mahātmāns, are the closest to the Over-Soul, and are therefore able to harness this power to help other monads to progress.

Theosophists regularly portrayed their religion as science; they also portrayed it as the very basis of humanity’s religious ideals. Lydia Ross, a medical doctor and Theosophist, wrote in 1920 that “Theosophy is not a Religion but that Theosophy is Religion itself.”\(^{53}\) Ross goes on to describe the “primeval instructors of the infant humanity [who] were the legendary gods of the Golden Age, and that the impress of their Divine Wisdom, or Wisdom-Religion,” became the basis for this religious revolution.\(^{54}\) Ross creates a recursive philosophy to explain the advanced beings who inhabited the world during this “Golden Age” and gives credence to the idea of the secretive nature of this “Wisdom-Religion.” Theosophy is religion itself, taught by a race of superhumans, and uncovered by a woman racially advanced enough to understand that which

\(^{52}\) Henry, 1920, 234. This gradual reunification is expressly called “mysticism” in this article.

\(^{53}\) Lydia Ross, “Theosophy, the Natural and Universal Religion,” *The Theosophical Path* 18, no. 1 (January 1920): 25. *The Universal Brotherhood Path* was placed on hiatus in 1902 when Katherine Tingley decided to move the Theosophical Publishing House to Point Loma, California. It was not until 1906 when the publishing house had a power supply, and 1911 when a printing press was installed. The magazine was renamed *The Theosophical Path* and began publishing again in July 1911 [Mills, 1987, 152].

\(^{54}\) Ross, 1920, 25.
had been lost to generations of inferior subjects. Ross explicitly claims that this same process had taken place with science, as most scientists are still beset by, “the old régime of blind belief,” and this is why science has become “purely materialistic.”\textsuperscript{55} She argues that Theosophical doctrines protest against the rising tide of scientific materialism by combining the original religion of humanity with scientific understandings of the universe, or that Theosophy is “the sacred science of life.”\textsuperscript{56} Theosophy, representing the ancient “Wisdom-Religion” of the advanced race of Atlantis, was a synthesis of science and religion produced by racially-superior beings for the good of the Aryan race. In fact, it was “this natural unity…keeping with the myths and legends of all times and all peoples to find that our race, in its infancy, was guided and led along by those divine Beings, who had attained to godlike love and wisdom by travelling a like road through the mazes of matter.”\textsuperscript{57} Theosophy is a thoroughly mysticized and perennial tradition, as it represents science and religion for “all times and all peoples,” thus becoming the very fount of all human knowledge and development.

According to Theosophical periodicals in the 1920s, Theosophy goes beyond current views of science and religion, in part because it was taught to Madame Blavatsky by superior Aryan souls. According to C.J. Ryan (1865-1949), an Irish astronomer and painter who lived at Point Loma, the “materialism of nineteenth-century science,” created a “Nature red in tooth and claw,” and which furthered “the unfavorable aspect of world-conditions.”\textsuperscript{58} Luckily,

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 25. Accent mark in original.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 26.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, 31.

\textsuperscript{58} C.J. Ryan, “Scientific Progress,” \textit{The Theosophical Path} 18, no. 2 (February 1920): 119.
“Theosophical activities [have] partly neutralized the materialism of nineteenth-century science,” and replaced it with “the Esoteric or Higher scientific method.” Ryan then goes on to give examples of scientific theories which he claims accord with Theosophical doctrines, using disparate examples such as Pythagoras of Greece, Albert Einstein, and Issac Newton. Ryan even claims that “the Theory of Relativity is the most metaphysical product of modern science…the cause by which man can find his true way to wisdom through the labyrinth of illusion are outlined in the teachings of Theosophy derived from aeons of experience of Wise Men.”

Finally, Ryan quotes Blavatsky, who says, “atoms fill the immensity of Space, and by their continuous vibration are that MOTION which keeps the wheels of Life perpetually going. It is that inner work that produces the natural phenomena called the correlation of Forces. Only at the origin of every such ‘force,’ there stands the conscious guiding noumenon thereof—Angel or God, Spirit or Demon—ruling powers, yet the same.” In other words, Theosophy is science and religion, much like an individual soul is the universe, or Over-Soul. The “correlation of Forces” means that the spiritual development of individual souls is mirrored in the wider universal soul. The spiritual evolution of some brings all other upwards. Simultaneously, this means that the current state of the world is in some ways a reflection of the cosmic universe. For Theosophists, this mean that the favourable conditions of the Aryan race represent the natural progress of the universe; the natural evolution of the universe favours those who are spiritually advanced, who are the Aryans. This circular logic serves to define and spiritualize the past as an evolutionary

59 Ryan, 1920, 120.

60 Ibid, 124.

progress towards a divinely-ordained goal, while relegating those considered “inferior” as merely reaping the karmic proclivities which they themselves produced. These Theosophical doctrines provide an imagined version of the way the world was, as described by Theosophists, which is then posited as representative of the way the world ought to be. Things could, indeed, be much worse considering it is the advanced spiritual qualities of the Aryan race “which keeps the wheels of Life perpetually going.” This mysticized view helps Theosophists to lay claim as being simultaneously religion and science in toto, while also claiming to be the very propulsion which is driving the universe upwards on its spiritual-evolutionary journey. This evolution, driven by Aryans, will then eventually raise the “lesser-races” as well. This arguments represents a mystical colonialism as the correlation of Forces posits that Aryans were meant to be advanced, but that they could aid those less developed through their own progress.

I have previously noted the ways in which defining the Self often involves delineating an “other” to serve as the antithesis to Self; for Theosophists, that “other” was often the Asians who had “become perverted into absurd practices of sitting in a peculiar posture, fixing the eyes on a fly-speck on the wall, and working oneself up into a weird and morbid state of mind.” Instead of meditation, Theosophists recommend a “prayer of the heart for Light and truth” to be found within, which focuses on self-deification rather than an “ unholy attempt to gain ‘powers’ by means of ‘concentration.’” In defining the Self, an “other” is often created and degraded in order to solidify one’s own standing.

63 Ibid, 234.
64 Ibid, 234.
Theosophical sources increasingly focus on self-deification and the importance of the Self within the larger scheme of human spiritual evolution throughout the 1920s. This would seem very telling, given that this coincides with the rise of eugenics in America. One article describes the “new gospel that is arising in our midst today,” which focuses on the idea “that there is a fount of power within us, back of our mind, a kind of superior self; and that we can learn to invoke this power, to tap this source, so as to secure increased strength and comfort.” However, this focus on Self is mere narcissism if people do not turn towards “that Higher Self [which] is the center of all that is pure and unselfish in man.” This Higher Self, or Over-Soul, functions somewhat as a psychological projection, as the individual Self becomes that which is “pure” while other humans throughout the world are under-developed biologically and spiritually. Theosophical doctrines, when applied to race sciences in the 1920s, become an entirely chauvinistic process, whereby Caucasians could be reassured in their views based on a millennia of evolutionary process which proves their superiority, while other non-Aryan races were considered more akin to on an evolutionary scale to animals. This idea is thoroughly mysticized through science, as biological evolution is used to make Aryans into gods connected to an Over-Soul while other races are tainted through millennia of bad karma, which is apparent in their physical characteristics, such as skin colour and skull size. The most leading science of

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66 Travers, 1920, 234.
the day could be used to justify imagined history from before mankind was even on the current planet, and this imagined history became further mysticized by a focus on Self.67

Following World War I (1914-1918), Americans began to question their position in the world and why Christianity and American exceptionalism did not prevent the horrors of war.68 Americans feared that they may be entering a process of devolution, whereby their culture was being lost to outside forces. Americans were searching for optimism, which in many ways produced the leisure culture of the “Roaring 20s,” but also resulted in societal calls against materialism.69 The eugenics movement of the 1920s was both an influence to and result of this drive, as eugenics provided a utopian trajectory of race betterment. The 1920s was also marked by anti-Semitism, as many believed that Jews were in league with Communists as “Jewish Bolsheviks.”70 In 1922, Harvard University instituted a quota system on Jewish students entering the University, and Yale University added “physical characteristics” as part of its admission process—a policy which was not changed until the 1960s.71 However, the supposedly utopian eugenic project was ended by the Great Depression. On 29 October 1929 (known as Black Tuesday), the American stock market crashed, which resulted in a global recession, plunging

67 In Theosophy, as souls pass through the various ages, or aeons, they will inhabit different planets across the solar system. Earth is the third of seven planets which our souls will inhabit, which means the coming evolutionary ages will be ones of increasing spirituality. Unfortunately for us, we are presently in the “kali-yuga” of materialism on this planet, which means things are beginning to collapse towards a cataclysmic end for Earth [Gottfried de Purucker, “Questions and Answers: How Old is the Aryan Race?” The Theosophical Forum 14, no. 6 (June 1939): 453-454].


69 Eichengreen, 2015, 6.

70 Ibid, 27.

71 Ibid, 120.
international trade by more than 50%.\textsuperscript{72} This economic chaos forced the world into various states of turmoil, leading to revolutionary movements including the rise of Adolf Hitler.\textsuperscript{73} The 1930s represent an era of global turmoil, pessimism and dread, which allowed many to rethink their position in history and therefore hope for the future.

\textit{The Aryan Path to India and Back}

In 1909, another schism in the Theosophical Movement was undertaken by Robert Crosbie, who started the United Lodge of Theosophists (ULT) in Mumbai.\textsuperscript{74} The magazine published by the ULT was called \textit{The Aryan Path} (1930-1960) and carried articles by prominent Theosophists, Buddhists, and Hindus, including some Japanese Buddhists. One striking difference between \textit{The Aryan Path} and the Theosophical journals described above, is a focus on the culture, of India, including physical culture. In Theosophical tracts published in the United States, there are numerous descriptions of mystical connections between Egypt, Greece, and India, but in \textit{The Aryan Path}, articles describe archaeological digs in order to find a culture which is “altogether Aryan.”\textsuperscript{75} For Theosophists, the material culture being uncovered in India would point to the ancient Aryan past of Europeans; however, for Indians, archaeology may have been a popular tool for promoting their own greatness. The beginnings of a post-colonial focus

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, 1.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, 20.

\textsuperscript{74} Mills, 1987, 63.

on history may have been provided by Europeans themselves, as they searched for a lost city of Aryan greatness, while Indians found something of themselves in the ancient ruins.

During the Great Depression, it was fairly common belief that, “the decay of religious belief in the Western world is notorious.” Joad says that it is the failure of Christianity and America which makes it imperative that the people “of Asia, and especially of India.” Asians are being told by Europeans and Americans that Europe and America are in decline, and instead, Asians should be looking towards their own culture and religious tradition for answers. Simultaneously, Americans and Europeans were moving towards Asia, both literally and figuratively, for “ancient wisdom” as can be seen by the Theosophical Society, Pāli Text Society, and others. In other words, Metaphysical religionists were telling Asians that they were the racially superior forebears of an ancient wisdom, while Colonial powers told Asians they were the degraded result of devolution who needed help. Buddhism was being presented in the United States by those who believed Asian Buddhism was superior, and those who felt Asian Buddhism was debased, all while many discussed the idea that Buddhism as it is presently is not real Buddhism, but that this religion can be found with correct interpretations. This complex network of interactions displays the ambivalent nature of the relationship between Buddhism and “the West.” The European and American presentation of Buddhism was most often one of scientific rationalism, even for Theosophists who argued that their mysticism was science. It is for this reason that Americans can learn much from the “wisdom of the East,” but only “provided the

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76 C.E.M. Joad, “What Eastern Religion has to Offer to Western Civilization,” *The Aryan Path* 1, no. 1 (January 1930): 16. C.E.M. Joad was a philosophy professor at the University of London.

77 Joad, 1930, 16.
wisdom of the East be stripped of the religious dogmas which have accreted around it.”  

It is only when the “Aryan European” decides what is true Buddhism and what is not that the “wisdom of the East” can function as the future of human spirituality. During the Great Depression, the greatness of American Capitalism was being questioned, and it was through this that some began to turn towards religions which were considered part of their ancient racial past. Despite the pessimism displayed in the pronouncement of a failing Christianity, Americans and Europeans still knew themselves to be racially superior to Asians. Therefore, Buddhism, scientifically proven to be an Aryan religion, could be taken from Asians and utilized; this utilization would actually help Buddhism, and therefore Asians, by returning the religion to its former glory. Values of American and European superiority were being questioned, and for some, Buddhism provided that answer.

Americans and Europeans believed that their cultures were materialistic, as can be seen in classifications from Jung, neo-orthodox theologians, and Theosophical writers. In fact, in “Where East and West Meet,” the author known only as “A.N.M.” suggests that even the art and literature of Europe is too realistic, and with an infusion of mystical “Indian culture.” The 1930s represents a sort of sea-change for Buddhism in the United States, as Theosophical and academic portrayals of Buddhism in India focused on a scientific agnostic tradition, while the

78 Ibid, 17.
79 Ibid, 18.
80 A.N.M. “Where East and West Meet,” The Aryan Path 1, no. 2 (February 1930): 75. A.N.M. is obviously a pseudonym, but it says that he is the “Literary Editor of the Manchester Guardian.” For the characterizations of Jung, see Chapter Two, on the Rise of Psychology.
81 A.N.M., 1930, 75. The 1930s was also the beginning of the “Mystical Suzuki” described in the previous chapter.
Japanese attempted to promote a mysticized Buddhism with a god and soul. Americans sought a tradition which was not “too realistic” due to the dangers of materialism being felt in the 1930s, and it was during this time that Japanese Buddhists presented a tradition which was simultaneously a scientific tradition standing at the fount of all human knowledge, and a mystical tradition which promised unification with an unknowable universal force. This would explain why Buddhism was so close to Theosophy from 1899-1929. Theosophy sounded so close to Buddhism that it made sense for Buddhists and Theosophists to be interested, while beginning in the 1930s and continuing through the 1950s, Buddhism begins to slowly divulge from Theosophy, as people desire a more authentic and mystical religion which can encompass their beliefs. This also makes sense within the prism of the Aryan myth as people want to be aligned with the most “noble” version of this religion, which is how Japanese Buddhists attempted to portray themselves. Furthermore, this ambivalence can be proven by the increased number of Buddhist magazines, with Theosophical inclinations, published in the United States beginning in the 1940s, as opposed to Theosophical magazines which discuss Buddhism characteristic of 1900-1930. According to Lori Pierce, there was a marked increase in the number of Buddhist publications following World War II. I would also argue that the increased number of Buddhist publications following World War II also present a shift in tenor away from Theosophy and

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82 Theosophical doctrines such as Karma, Rebirth, and the primary Adi-Bhuta principle, would have all sounded similar to the doctrines of Buddhism, especially in the latter-19th and early 20th centuries [Ross, 1920, 25]. This is even more apparent when some Theosophists claim that Theosophy is Buddhism. The subtle and nuanced differences between these philosophical understandings were often obscured in order to create more universalist understandings of history. Given that many Asian Buddhist groups did not interact with each other prior to the 20th century, it is entirely possible that Theosophy may have been viewed as another alternative form of Buddhism.

83 Pierce, 2010, 91.
towards more traditional presentations of Buddhism; this new direction would also coincide with the decreasing popularity of Theosophy in the United States.  

**Shifting Attitudes Away from Theosophy and Towards Yogācāra Buddhism in the United States**

Buddhist publication efforts in the United States were largely stopped due to the Great Depression, but was restarted during the latter years of the war; when publication efforts began again in the 1940s, Buddhists were beginning to move away from Theosophy, which was decreasing in popularity. Buddhism, and therefore Buddhist publishing and missionizing efforts, were affected by the social and military situation of World War II. The United States entered World War II following the attack on Pearl Harbour (1941); prior to this attack the United States was the largest supplier of gasoline to the various actors in the war. In 1939, the same year Hitler invaded Poland, the United States renounced its trade deals with Japan, leading to major economic pressure for the Shōwa Empire.  

It should also be noted that Hitler expressly claimed influence for his Aryan racial program from the American eugenic movement and the Theosophical doctrines of Blavatsky. Hitler utilized some of the imagined history utilized by Theosophy, combined with völkisch

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84 Mills, 1987, 72.

85 Dower, 1986, 115.

86 Ibid, 51.

interpretations of the Aryan myth and Ariosophy to create his ideology. Throughout 1941, the Japanese government was in talks with its American counterparts to reopen trade and improve strained relations, and in November the United States demanded that Japan rescind all of its Colonial states in China and Korea in exchange for lifting sanctions. Many in Japan considered this imposition a declaration of war, and two weeks later launched the attacks on Pearl Harbor, forcing the United States into war. In June of 1944, The Allied Forces began the invasion of Europe, starting with D-Day, which marked the beginning of the end for the European Axis powers, with the Axis eventually collapsing; Berlin was invaded by June of 1945. Throughout 1945, American forces moved closer and closer to Japan as they invaded individual islands, including the Philippines. In March of 1945, the American military began using incendiary bombs against major Japanese centres, killing close to 400,000 people and destroying up to 65% of most major Japanese cities. Despite the toll these bombings took on national morale in Japan, the war continued throughout the summer of 1945, and in July, rejected calls for unconditional surrender. In early-August 1945, the United States dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing hundreds of thousands and forever altering Japan. Following the nuclear bombs Russian troops invaded Manchuria and parts of Korea. On 15 August 1945,}

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88 Nicholas Goodrick Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology*, (New York: Tauris Park Paperbacks, 2005), 5. Ariosophy is a term associated with a number of esoteric cults popular in Germany and Austria between 1890 and the 1930s. Ariosophy was concerned with the study of Aryans, especially through ancient forms of sun worship and theories of racial gnosis. Ariosophists also claimed influence from Theosophical thought, which was combined with historical recreations of Germanic paganism [123-125].

89 Dower, 1986, 5.

90 Ibid, 119.

91 Ibid, 120. Interestingly, another bomb was planned for Kyoto, but US Secretary of War Henry Stimson claimed that he liked the Buddhist Temples in Kyoto so much that he convinced President Roosevelt not to bomb the city.
Japan surrendered, and their former territories were rescinded, or in the case of Korea, split between Russia and the United States. After the war, Asia became a hotbed of political instability as Communist revolutions overtook China, North Korea, Vietnam and other nations, while the United States attempted to curtail this growth, in many ways laying the seeds for the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Vietnam War (1955-1975). America emerged as a world superpower following World War II, leading to a time of economic prosperity and perceived superiority. The global chaos and confusion following World War II helped to create the right conditions for the flowering of Buddhism in the United States.

In the United States, interest in Buddhism grew, although unevenly, from the Victorian Period through the Great Depression. However, this cultural shift was largely curtailed by the war effort, especially in regards to negative attitudes towards the Japanese. For some, the war represented the ugly shadow of material prosperity and science, as the cold rationality of war made some search for spiritual solace. Metaphysical religionists, Theosophists, and seekers continued to show interest in Buddhism, even during World War II.

*The Golden Lotus* was a Metaphysical Buddhist magazine which began publication in 1944 and ended in 1967, making it one of the longest running Buddhist magazines produced in America. Robert Stuart Clifton (1903-1963) was the editor of *The Golden Lotus* from 1944-1960. He was from Birmingham, Alabama. He was first ordained in the Jōdo Shinshū Nishi Hongwan-ji lineage in 1934 and served as a director of the BMNA until 1942, when he received a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) inquiry concerning his activities with Japanese immigrants. Following this inquiry, Clifton became the editor-in-chief for the *Golden Lotus* until

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92 The majority of articles in *The Golden Lotus* were written anonymously.
moving to England to start the Western Buddhist Order there in 1952, then subsequently being ordained again in Laos as a Theravāda monk in the lineage of Venerable Sumangalo before starting the Penang Buddhist Association in Malaysia where he lived until his death on 6 February 1963. The Golden Lotus featured articles by Blavatsky, Olcott, Ernest Shinkaku Hunt, and others. The periodical was one of the first by Americans which was not associated with a foreign version of Buddhism, but instead, was expressly written to be an American form of Buddhism for Caucasians. The magazine was meant to function as a primer, beginning with the basics of the Dharma. According to the bylaws printed in each issue, the staff of The Golden Lotus promote an explicitly Yogācāra Buddhist philosophy and stand against the “occult… childish fantasies” of others. However, in the first reading list provided in the magazine (1944), Blavatsky’s The Secret Doctrine is included in a reading list to help the novice understand the contents of the Buddhist Canon.

These two points merit some discussion, as one may wonder what exactly the editors mean by “Yogācāra” as well as their perceived enemies within the occult. In 1944, sources in English on Yogācāra were very limited. Yogācāra’s perceived Idealism may help to explain this anomaly. In The Buddhism of H.P. Blavatsky, H.J. Spierenburg writes that the “Yogācārya” school is the closest to Blavatsky’s Buddhism, although when asked about the relationship between the

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93 Ama, 2011, 80. This means Clifton was involved in The Golden Lotus, Jōdo Shinshū, Theravāda, and Chinese Buddhism.

94 The Buddhist Ray ran from 1888-1894. This is probably the very first Buddhist publication by Americans and for Americans while not be associated with any foreign forms of Buddhism.

Blavatsky herself responded “not quite.” This also helps to explain why, by 1951, the mission statement of _The Golden Lotus_ had changed from explicitly Yogācāra to “inclined to the Mahāyāna.” Beginning especially in the 1950s, _The Golden Lotus_ shifts away from Theosophical doctrines and presentations, focusing more on traditional Buddhism. This shift is evidenced in the Mission Statement, as well as within articles. This shift would also explain the second portion of the Mission Statement, which describes the editor’s, and Buddhism’s, disdain for the occult, despite the obvious influence of Blavatsky. Following the splits of the Theosophical Society, it was common for one group to blame the other as being merely occult fantasies. In other words, this Mission Statement allows the writers of _The Golden Lotus_ to define a Self, American Buddhists connected to a respected historical lineage, while simultaneously discrediting the “other,” who are Asian Mādhyamika Buddhists as Mādhyamika was portrayed broadly as atheistic nihilism, and other Metaphysical religionists. Many of the editors and contributors to _The Golden Lotus_ either were involved in Theosophy prior to joining Buddhism, or were involved simultaneously, such as Robert Stuart Clifton. The magazine’s articles often assume the reader has some knowledge of Theosophical terms and doctrines while explaining the basics of Buddhist belief and practice.

By using the designation of Yogācāra, Metaphysical Buddhists in _The Golden Lotus_ were able to imagine themselves within a community by utilizing historical polemics to place


97 On a wider scale, this reflects, in some ways, the trajectory of Buddhism in the United States, as the religion begins with connections to Theosophy (such as Blavatsky and Olcott taking _pansil_ in the 1880s) before shifting away in order to focus more on traditional Buddhism (such as the increase in the popularity of Zen following 1957); this can be seen in Sri Lanka with Dharmapala’s relation to Theosophy, as well as in Japan with D.T. Suzuki’s move towards Zen following the death of Beatrice Lane.
themselves within an ancient debate; by using Theosophical doctrines, which focused a great
deal on a mysticized version of the Aryan myth, Metaphysical Buddhists could actually claim
ownership over the original doctrines of Buddhism, as they had more understanding of it than the
racially-inferior Asians whom the Buddha had taught. This Mission Statement defines a
perceived Self of Buddhism in the United States as those able “to penetrate to or reach
Illumination far enough to comprehend the doctrines reserved for those who pass the outer gates
in understanding;” by allowing the Aryan European Buddhists to place themselves with the
historical founder, the “highest doctrines” of “the East may find a voice again within the West.”

In *The Golden Lotus*, one anonymous article claims, “stripped of miracles, Buddha stands as the
wisest man of ‘our’ race,” while others refer to the whole of Buddhism as “The Aryan Path.”

American Metaphysical Buddhists imagined themselves as Yogācāra, as opposed to merely
Americans interpreting Buddhism through a sort-of Christian guise or simply as science, as many
scholars asserted. Instead, not only were Metaphysical Buddhists a part of an ancient tradition in
Buddhism, but they were also more biologically well-equipped to interpret Buddhism in the
modern world, as “Aryans” were racially connected to the very founder of the religion.

The influence of a culture of pessimism and dread influenced the writings of
Metaphysical Buddhists. *The Golden Lotus* featured a running opinion piece titled “Sentinel’s
Signals,” although written anonymously, the pieces generally focused on the state of society at
the time. Throughout the essays the author often questioned the deplorable state of human nature,
perpetual violence, and the danger of falling into despotic overlordship at the hands of world


leaders. According to the editors of *The Golden Lotus*, the zeitgeist of “misery is world-wide and deep-rooted, not confined to the war-torn lands, but spreading over territories of the conquered and the conquerer due to a world economy that is still unstable and uncertain.”

Following two world wars, “no one who considers these things can feel that peace is permanently here, or that the intent of every world delegate is to build and maintain peace for all mankind.” Some Buddhist writers directly compared the current social situation to the First Noble Truth. The societal situation was furthered as the trauma of world wars sent some looking for alternatives to traditional Western models. These spiritual seekers sought universalism, but wanted to do away with “gods which lay behind us…who show human emotions, like vengeance.” A culture of pessimism and dread, combined with recursive philosophies of universal religion and mystical connections to the ancient Yogācāra school created the ability for Metaphysical Buddhists to claim ownership over Buddhist history.

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100 “Sentinel’s Signals,” *The Golden Lotus* 2, No. 3 (March 1945): 27. Many of the “Sentinel’s Signals” between 1944-1955 are pessimistic about the state of human affairs. This particular one was quite glum and the threat of being overtaken by a despot seemed very appropriate for the time.


103 Although in 1923, C.T. Strauss was perhaps the most explicit when he wrote, “it is not necessary to think, for example, of the world war with its innumerable pains and tears, for it could be objected that this was something extra-ordinary; it is only necessary to visit hospitals, prisons, lunatic asylums, lodgings of the poor, slaughter-houses, and similar places to be convinced of the correctness of the first truth” [Strauss, 1923, 20].

Metaphysical Buddhism and Colonialism

Metaphysical Buddhist writers in *The Golden Lotus* attempted to portray themselves as the “true” Buddhists, mystically racially connected to the founder, who could then go to Asia in order to teach them proper Buddhism; as the more evolved Root Race, Metaphysical Buddhists could teach Asian Buddhists true Buddhism, which would eventually raise the collective level of spiritual evolution for all of humanity. This “civilizing effort” was undertaken by focusing on the doctrines of the soul and god, which had been misunderstood by Asian Buddhists for millennia. Metaphysical Buddhists were seeking alternative religious ideas in opposition to the perceived dogmatism of Christianity. Buddhism is thus romanticized as a religion of science against Christianity. The supposed “clash of civilizations” between Christianity and Buddhism was created within a zeitgeist of pessimism and dread, pushing seekers toward an essentialized version of Buddhism which could be possessed, or owned, as an Aryan tradition.

Authors in *The Golden Lotus* often combined race sciences and Theosophical views of racial development in their presentation of Buddhism to the United States, allowing Metaphysical Buddhists to promote the idea that the world would be reshaped by a superior group following the end of the war. In the premier issue of *The Golden Lotus* there begins a running series of articles under the title “The Mystery of Being,” with the first subject “The Race.”\(^\text{105}\) The article describes the upward evolutionary trajectory of the Aryan race in world history, of which Siddhārtha Gautama was a part. The racial pedigree of the Buddha was reinforced by modern science, such as citing T.W. Rhys Davids’ assertion that the Buddha was

Aryan, as well as mysticism, as writers in *The Golden Lotus* labelled the Buddha as one of the Aryan adepts who come to Earth to teach spirituality to less-evolved beings. In “Pathways to The Supreme,” the author explicitly describes the need for the “Āryan root race” to establish their religious inheritance to Buddhism and regain control from those who corrupted it, theoretically the Atlanteans of Asia. This article can be found on the same page as a side item which quotes Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden.” The inclusion of this poem continues my

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106 “Pathways to The Supreme,” *The Golden Lotus* 1, No. 6 (June 1944): 2.

107 While in India, Olcott met Rudyard Kipling, future author of “The White Man’s Burden” and *Kim*. “The White Man’s Burden” is a poem which would be employed in America’s push to the West, and colonization of Native peoples, as well as the impetus for Colonialism. The poem would also be quoted in the pages of *The Golden Lotus*, showing an impetus to proselytize “original Buddhism” back to Asian nations, for their own sake. It was obvious the “lower root races” needed to be helped by Colonialism of all fashions, including the importation of a purified Aryan Buddha back to Asia.

“The White Man’s Burden” (1899)

“Take up the White Man’s burden, send forth the best ye breed
Go bind your sons to exile, to serve your captives’ need;
To wait in heavy harness, on fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples, Half-devil and half-child
Take up the White Man’s burden, In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror and check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple, an hundred times made plain
To seek another’s profit, and work another’s gain.
Take up the White Man’s burden, The savage wars of peace—
Fill full the mouth of Famine And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest The end for others sought,
Watch sloth and heathen Folly Bring all your hopes to nought.
Take up the White Man’s burden, No tawdry rule of kings,
But toil of serf and sweeper, The tale of common things.
The ports ye shall not enter, The roads ye shall not tread,
Go make them with your living, And mark them with your dead.
Take up the White Man’s burden And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better, The hate of those ye guard—
The cry of hosts ye humour Ah, slowly toward the light:
‘Why brought us from bondage, Our loved Egyptian night?’
Take up the White Man’s burden, Ye dare not stoop to less—
Nor call too loud on Freedom To cloak your weariness;
By all ye cry or whisper, By all ye leave or do,
The silent, sullen peoples Shall weigh your gods and you.
Take up the White Man’s burden, Have done with childish days—
The lightly proffered laurel, The easy, ungrudged praise.
Comes now, to search your manhood, through all the thankless years
Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom, The judgement of your peers!”
previous argument that Metaphysical Buddhists were attempting to claim ownership of Buddhism and to teach true Buddhism to Asians, which is similar to the colonial project with which this poem is often associated. As Aryans, it was the “burden” of Metaphysical Buddhists to teach Asians real Buddhism, as it was only through the common spiritual progress of humanity that a new root race could be developed.

Colonialism is a recurrent theme throughout the pages of *The Golden Lotus*, with historical interpretations often used to create historical precedent for the preconceived biases of American society in the 1940s. Although portrayals of the Buddha opposing the Brahmin clerical hierarchy are present in Buddhist texts, such as the *Prātihārya-Sūtra*, anti-Brahmin sentiment was emphasized during the Yellow Peril. Metaphysical Buddhists portrayed Brahmins as the straw-men against which the rationalism and science of Buddhism could be compared; Brahmins were also portrayed as being the sole destructors of Buddhism in India, using the “emotions and superstitions of the people” to enact their “Brahmanical enmity” against Buddhism. The story of the Buddha represents the colonial project, as Indians and “Hinduism” are blamed for destroying Buddhism. “Hinduism” becomes the driving force behind the devolution of Buddhism towards idolatry. Simultaneously, anti-Brahmanical portrayals of Buddhism reinforced anti-Catholic thought. The Buddha was actively “dethroning…the god of tyrannical dogmas and arbitrary commands to worship and sacrifice at such an altar,” like Martin Luther in the past.

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108 “The Story of the Buddha’s Dharma,” *The Golden Lotus* 1, No. 5 (May 1944): 36. In the *Prātihārya-Sūtra*, the Buddha is challenged by “heretics” to a display of miracles, which he wins. The Buddha then condemned the “heretical” views, saying, “this isn’t the best refuge; it isn’t the most excellent one. Recourse to this refuge doesn’t release one from all suffering” [Andy Rotman, tr. *Divine Stories: Divyāvadāna Part I*, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008), 282].


This historical portrayal of Buddhism reinforces colonial agendas by reframing the Aryan myth. The Buddha is portrayed as a driving force behind an historical trajectory of anti-clericalism, rationalism, and spirituality. He, like the other Aryans, is in a perpetual struggle against negative forces in the world; this desire to aid the world demands that the Aryan helps those less advanced, perpetuating the colonial agenda.

In the 1940s, Metaphysical Buddhist concentrated on reimagining Buddhist history through the prism of Theosophical doctrines, arguing that supposedly less-evolved races corrupted Buddhism due to their superstitions. These reinterpretations often involved colonial language and the theories of race sciences, which were present in Theosophical doctrines, as they were presented as religious science. In “The Story of the Buddha’s Dharma,” the author claims that “customs govern thought, and thought governs customs.” According to Theosophical doctrines and race sciences, which are in agreement on this point, the “thought” of a person would be tied to their genetics, which means that “customs,” or culture, is biologically predetermined. The author then asserts that when Buddhism moved from India to Tibet, an “uncivilized land,” and it was at this time that Buddhism adopted “uncivilized qualities.” In fact, according to this author, it was when Buddhism entered Tibet that it developed “clinging, parasitic superstitions,” typical of the Tibetan mind. In Theosophical mythology, the Aryan adepts live in the mountains of Tibet, begging the question, how could Buddhism devolve so drastically while in the epicentre of the Theosophical world? Buddhist history becomes a

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112 Ibid, 17.

113 Ibid, 17.
metaphor for Buddhism more broadly, as Buddhism, a great Aryan tradition, entered Tibet and was then corrupted by the racially inferior inhabitants. However, Buddhism continues on through the secret esoteric teachings of the Aryans who preserve this ancient wisdom deep within the Buddhist heartland. Yes, Buddhism is crumbling all around, clinging and parasitic, but the Aryans will continue to uphold Buddhism from within. The Aryans and the adepts will preserve the teachings which they have been protecting for thousands of years, against the uncivilized horde who thinks it knows “real Buddhism.” Metaphysical Buddhists used Buddhist history in order to claim ownership of a tradition which was their genetic inheritance, and that they had been protecting for millennia.

Reading Metaphysical Buddhist texts through the prism of Theosophical doctrine provides alternative avenues for analysis which allows scholars to nuance understandings of the presentation of Buddhism in the United States. Authors in *The Golden Lotus* reify the Mahāyāna school, claiming it is a higher goal than the “Hinayāna;” they argue that the Mahāyāna represents the culmination of Buddhist thought.114 However, previous scholarship asserts that historically, Caucasian Buddhists were more often inclined to Theravāda, as they viewed it as the more

“original” form of Buddhism. How can a magazine which claims to be based in the Yogācāra, viewing the Mahāyāna as the highest teaching, claim Buddhism was corrupted over time? In this instance, Theosophy is the Mahāyāna and Yogācāra. These teachings were not corrupted, but kept secret through centuries by Aryan masters. The problem was not Buddhism, but the Buddhists who were allowed to corrupt the teachings. In other words, by placing the corruption of Buddhism in Tibet, Metaphysical Buddhists could claim ownership over all of Buddhism, claiming that they, and the Aryan masters, had kept the most supreme teachings alive while the less-evolved beings around them corrupted it. Now that the Yogācāra, and Mahāyāna, were being fully developed by the ever-evolving Aryan race, the teachings could now be taught to the lesser-Asian races in order to aid them in their own spiritual quest. Historical tropes have been reversed to place Metaphysical Buddhists squarely at the fount of all human development. This also problematizes understandings of the “Mahāyāna” in earlier phases of Buddhism in the United States, as it too becomes an essentialized object utilized to claim supremacy over an “other.”

115 Snodgrass, 2003, 198. Japanese Buddhists attempted to argue against the perceived pro-Theravāda bias of American Buddhists and scholars alike [198]. During the Yellow Peril, the most popular sūtra for Metaphysical Buddhists from the Pāli Canon was the Kālāma Sutta, which was quoted above the table of contents in each issue of The Golden Lotus. The Buddha enters a town called Kesaputta, but Kālāma townspeople are confused by the varying religious opinion common in Northern India at the time. Sākyamuni then provides the criterion for rejection and acceptance of religious ideals. He says, “do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another’s seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, ‘the monk is our teacher.’ Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: ‘These things are good; these things are not blameable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,’ enter on and abide in them” [Thanissaro Bhikkhu, tr. “Kālāma Sutta: To the Kalamas,” Anguttara Nikaya 3.65, Access to Insight, https://web.archive.org/web/20131908090400/http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html]. This refrain is often assumed to be a “rationalist type” argument, claiming that the Buddha was an agnostic scientist only asking people to believe what was verifiable [Tweed]. However, for Metaphysical Buddhists reading through the prism of Theosophy, this sūtra could also be read as arguing for esotericism. Aryan Buddhists do not need to rely on “tradition,” “monks,” or that which is written in “scripture.” Instead, they are the true Buddhists who know for themselves. The Kālāma Sutta provided scriptural credence to the Metaphysical Buddhist project. This sūtra shows the ambivalent relationship of Buddhism and the United States.
understanding also helps to explain why a Buddhism which was often characterized as a corruption, especially during the Victorian Era, could then be the object of fascination and a supposed “Zen Boom” just a decade after World War II.116

Metaphysical Buddhism and a Theosophical Vernacular: Changing Uses of The Over-Soul

In 1945, articles in The Golden Lotus use comparison and interpretation to explain Buddhism for an American audience, as the mixing of Theosophical and Buddhist doctrines creates a “creole Buddhism.”117 In The White Buddhist, Stephen Prothero argues that Olcott created a new “language” for Buddhism, whereby the “outer form” was Buddhism derived from Sri Lanka, while the “inner form” was based on Theosophy; this linguistic mixing produced new vocabularies for Buddhism in the late-19th century. However, in the United States in the 1940s, this process becomes reversed, as Theosophical phrases, explanations, and comparisons form the explanatory structure surrounding Buddhism. Although Theosophical doctrines presented an Over-Soul as early as the 1880s, Metaphysical Buddhists began to adapt this teaching to fit with a developing “original” Buddhism. In Sri Lanka, Dharmapala aligned himself with Olcott, in part due to the close comparison of Theosophical and Buddhist doctrines, but then began to distance himself to focus on Buddhism with a new set of terms and explanatory devices. Similarly, in The

116 This also continues my theme of ambivalence for Buddhism in the United States, as the religion is simultaneously rejected and accepted, even within a single “object,” such as the Mahāyāna; in other words, certain aspects of the Mahāyāna, such as a mystical connection to Yogācāra, can be utilized, while other forms, such as rituals and the worship of Bodhisattvas, are rejected as false. Catherine Albanese claims that American Metaphysical relations with Asia can often be characterized as a relation of attraction and repulsion [Catherine Albanese, A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 330].

*Golden Lotus* throughout the 1950s, Theosophical language is further removed from the magazine, leaving more traditional understandings of Buddhism. Some of the portrayals of Buddhism in *The Golden Lotus* display the seeds of a developing Buddhist Modernism, such as articles which unequivocally deny that Buddhists pray or perform rituals.\(^{118}\) In another article, the author claims that the Hindu god *Viṣṇu* originally created the five skandhas;\(^ {119}\) in Theosophy, the Buddha is considered a reincarnation of *Viṣṇu*, and this infinite “Christ Principle” has again been reincarnated in the Mahātmāns.\(^{120}\) These alternative views of traditional Buddhism were used to try to create a universalist Buddhism devoid of rituals and prayer.

The mixing of Theosophy and Buddhism is displayed on the pages of *The Golden Lotus*, such as the presentation of traditional Buddhist material in close proximity to Theosophical ideas. The December 1945 issue features a sūtra snippet of the Buddha speaking to Ānanda, while on the same page with a thin line separating the two is “The Idyll of the White Lotus,” a Theosophical poem by Mabel Collins (1851-1927).\(^ {121}\) The small portion of a larger work is titled “The Three Truths,” very similar in language and presentation to the Three Characteristics of Existence (*trilakṣaṇa*) and the Four Noble Truths (*catvāri āryasyatāni*). However, the short sections reads as follows:

\(^{118}\) “The Question Page: How does the Buddhist Pray?” *The Golden Lotus* 1, No. 7 (July 1944): 50.


There are three truths which are absolute, and which cannot be lost, but yet may remain silent for lack of speech. The soul of man is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendour have no limit. The principle which gives life dwells in us, and without us, is undying and eternally beneficent, is not heard or seen, or smelt, but is perceived by the man who desires perception. Each man is his own absolute lawgiver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself; the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment. These truths, which are as great as is life itself, are as simple as the simplest mind of man. Feed the hungry with them.122

Buddhism and Theosophy are presented as one in early issues of *The Golden Lotus*. In fact, *The Theosophical Forum* (1936-1951) regularly ran articles from *The Golden Lotus*, furthering this overlap.123 It likely would have been difficult, or nearly impossible, for those encountering Buddhism for the first time in 1945 to truly know what parts were Theosophy and which portions were Buddhism. The more important point is that it likely did not matter to the readers of *The Golden Lotus*, as many were seeking a hybrid Buddhism. Rather than presenting the soul and the Over-Soul as a Theosophical idea, Buddhist authors in *The Golden Lotus* argued that these doctrines represented the real original Buddhism. The seeds of race sciences and Theosophy continued to flower in the 1950s through the use of hybrid Buddhism. Similarly, this hybrid Buddhism may have been considered superior, due to the higher evolutionary status of the “Aryan” readers of *The Golden Lotus* versus traditional Asian Buddhism.

Theosophical doctrines traditionally ascribe an Over-Soul, whereby an individual “retreats within the Self” to further their own spiritual development, creating an evolutionary

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122 Collins, 1945, 103.

process which ends in full merger with the universal Self.\textsuperscript{124} In the article “Introspection,” the author argues if Buddhism claimed No-Self this would be akin to atheism.\textsuperscript{125} The author goes on to say “this is a very hard doctrine to accept, as it throws each Western reader into a direct contradiction of all that he has hitherto considered sacred and desirable…this is the point of departure for many Western people.”\textsuperscript{126} The author of this article concludes that “Western man” must use his own reason to decide \textit{anātman} is not correct and Buddhism may change in America if it truly denies “the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{127} Buddhism must therefore hold a Soul and a god, or else the real Aryan Buddhists would not accept it, which would be a contradiction. Authors in \textit{The Golden Lotus} attempted to portray the Over-Soul as a traditional Buddhist doctrine.\textsuperscript{128} In Theosophy, one reaches higher spiritual planes as a spiritual entity, or monad, moving ever closer to the centre of this “universal life-spirit.”\textsuperscript{129} One who can evolve their particular monad to higher levels of the Over-Soul may gain “life to eternity” and “can cure himself of almost any morbific condition.”\textsuperscript{130}


\textsuperscript{125} “Introspection,” \textit{The Golden Lotus} 8, No. 10 (1951): 255.

\textsuperscript{126} “Introspection,” 1951, 256.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, 256.

\textsuperscript{128} “Sentinel’s Signals,” \textit{The Golden Lotus} 2, No. 12 (December 1945): 103. The Over-Soul was directly related to the individual soul, both of which were considered science; in “The Scientific Explanation of the Influence of Celestial Bodies on Earth-Life and Human Affairs,” H. Groot argues that the veins and arteries in human bodies directly mirror the flow of electrical particles flowing between the universal polarities of sunspots [H. Groot, “The Scientific Explanation of the Influence of Celestial Bodies on Earth-Life and Human Affairs,” \textit{The Theosophical Forum} 20, no. 7 (July 1942): 300].

\textsuperscript{129} John H. Manas, “Reincarnation the Eternal Cosmic Law,” \textit{The Theosophical Forum} 23, no. 6 (June 1945): 262.

\textsuperscript{130} Manas, 1945, 262.
These abilities are particular to Theosophy, but the idea of an Over-Soul was popular amongst religious liberals, from Ralph Waldo Emerson\textsuperscript{131} to the New Thought Movement;\textsuperscript{132} however, by 1945, Metaphysical Buddhists presented mystical unification with the Over-Soul as the goal of “true” Buddhism. A loop is created amongst varying groups as they cite each other to explain these ideas; such as writers in \textit{The Golden Lotus} citing Blavatsky, stating that humans have “nirvāṇa consciousness,” which is a reflection of an individual’s “soul development” and connection to the Over-Soul.\textsuperscript{133} However, the authors in \textit{The Golden Lotus} are clear that only “those who earn it” will achieve nirvāṇa, as it is reserved for those who have “experienced evolutionary processes within the planetary school sufficient to bring them to a certain development.”\textsuperscript{134} The Over-Soul was used to define the Buddhist Self against an Asian “other,” while Metaphysical Buddhists laid claim to the original development of Buddhism. Therefore, Buddhism is not an Asian religion developed over millennia in various locales, but is instead the continuing evolution of American, or at least Aryan, spirituality.

Metaphysical authors were attempting to create a creole Buddhism whereby Buddhism was presented with an “outer form” of Theosophy for American audiences. The Buddhist Over-Soul directly relates the Buddhist Self, as understood through a Theosophical prism, and connects the Buddhist path to the Theosophical doctrine of upward spiritual evolution. In the

\textsuperscript{131} Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Over-Soul,” in \textit{Essays}, (London: James Fraser, 1841), 267.


\textsuperscript{133} “The Question Page: ‘Why do the Buddhists seek Nirvāṇa?’” \textit{The Golden Lotus} 1, no. 6 (June 1944): 43.

\textsuperscript{134} “The Question Page: ‘Why do the Buddhists seek Nirvāṇa?’” 1944, 43.
July 1944 issue of *The Golden Lotus*, there is an article titled “The Dharma,” which purports to explain the basic teachings of Buddhism. The author claims,

[The Buddha] taught that man came from the lower evolutions upward; that all men pass through this stage on the way to higher stages; that it was man’s misfortune to be engulfed in Matter, to be imprisoned in the flesh for certain lessons to be learned, but that he should not linger; that he should turn his eyes toward the Heights and climb toward them.\(^{135}\)

Individual souls were engaged in an evolutionary process of spiritual development, leading beings from “lower evolution” towards final merger with the universal soul; according to Metaphysical Buddhists, this was Buddhism.

The Metaphysical Buddhist path toward reunification with the Over-Soul is presented as the original doctrines of Buddhism, allowing Metaphysical Buddhists to claim a superior position within human spiritual development. *The Golden Lotus* contained a running series of articles titled “The Way” and “The Mystery of Being,” which presented the story of a young novice discovering Buddhism as a “Western Chela,” or disciple.\(^{136}\) The story begins rather traditionally with lists of fetters, practicing meditation, and finding a master. However, the novice then begins an upward journey towards the Heights, attempting to pierce the centre of the spiritual universe. This journey involves giants and astro-travel. In “The Mystery of Being,” the stories are less of a consistent narrative, but they begin with a race of cyclopses living in an ice

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\(^{135}\) “The Dharma,” *The Golden Lotus* 1, No. 7 (July 1944): 50. According to traditional Buddhist doctrines, the human existence is a positive one as it allows a being the chance for meditation and to experience pain and pleasure [Epstein, 1995, 36-37].

\(^{136}\) “The Way: Chapter 81, Manu,” *The Golden Lotus* 11, No. 6 (1954): 144. The first story of “The Way” was in 1948. According to Theosophy, prior to Chelaship, or starting upon the path, humans lack souls. This means that the lower races are actually without souls entirely. The process of Chelaship, or initiation, is then an “ensouling” process [G. de Purucker, “The Ensouling of Man,” *The Theosophical Forum* 12, no. 4 (April 1938): 217].
age who are forced to root their tentacles through “etheric matter” to find sustenance.\textsuperscript{137} According to Theosophical science, cyclopses are proof that humans once had a literal “third eye.”\textsuperscript{138} Throughout both stories the protagonist meets with the Ancients of varying races, who further inform him about the nature of the mind, or bestow psychic abilities. The Chela encounters the Water Deva on Atlantis who provides him the “Powers of the Realm of Water,” which produced great merit.\textsuperscript{139} These stories mix Buddhist language and ideas with Theosophical doctrines and explanations of global spiritual evolution, focusing on final merger with the Over-Soul. Beginning in December 1945, \textit{The Theosophical Forum} began a series of articles titled “The Chela Path,” describing the upwards evolutionary trajectory of a Theosophist monad being reborn until he “\textit{finds} himself in the Universal Self.”\textsuperscript{140} The story of the Western Chela was still carried in \textit{The Golden Lotus} in 1957, displaying the continued hybridity of Theosophy and Buddhism in the United States. Theosophical and Buddhist language is combined in order to create a hybrid Buddhism, which was presented as the real original Buddhism against the corrupted Asian Buddhism which had developed over millennia.

The articles in Theosophical and Metaphysical Buddhist magazines describing the journey of a young Chela display the belief in a Cosmic Process, the continual evolution of the universe, and a cosmogony represented by the progression of a singular monad towards a final merger with the Over-Soul.\textsuperscript{141} It is this Over-Soul which allows the Chela to travel from planet to

\textsuperscript{137} “Broken Strands,” \textit{The Golden Lotus} 8, No. 3 (March 1951): 49.

\textsuperscript{138} Arthur A. Beale, “The Races of Man,” \textit{The Theosophical Forum} 22, no. 2 (February 1944): 58.

\textsuperscript{139} “The Mystery of Being,” \textit{The Golden Lotus} 8, No. 4 (1951): 105.


\textsuperscript{141} “The Mystery of Being,” \textit{The Golden Lotus} 14, No. 7 (1957): 152.
planet as well as temporally in order to meet the Ancients before piercing into the Cosmic Mind and gaining enlightenment. “The Way” series ends discussing the evolution of the Over-Soul, saying “but that is mystery and only travellers upon the Way would understand it.”

For Metaphysical Buddhists, Buddhism was a mystical reunification process with a universal Over-Soul. Metaphysical Buddhists had, in many ways, claimed a degree of “ownership” to speak for Buddhism. Even in 1957, authors in *The Golden Lotus* claimed that the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth explained racial evolution. The mixing of Buddhist and Theosophical doctrines did not end with the “Zen Boom” but continued beyond it, suggesting once again that Buddhism did not change in 1957, merely American culture’s relationship with the religion.

**The Buddhist Ātman and the Asian Detriment to Mankind**

According to Metaphysical Buddhists in the 1950s, Buddhism had a Self, because it was an Aryan tradition of science. Therefore, as the Aryan inheritors of this tradition, Buddhist doctrines could be known and promoted against the forces attempting to hold back human evolution. These negative forces were holding back human evolution by promoting illogical doctrines, repulsive to the Aryan mind and science. The doctrine of Self was promoted against the most illogical form of Buddhism, Zen.

Metaphysical Buddhists interpreted Buddhism through the prism of Theosophy, including the belief in an individual soul. This belief in a soul was not attributed to textual traditions or

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142 “The Way: Chapter 81, Manu,” 1954, 144.

established Asian lineages, but based on the idea that Americans and Europeans could speak for Buddhism based on their genealogical relationship to the founder and superior Aryan evolution. In “The Dharma: Delusion of Self (Continued),” the author asserts Theravāda schools have strayed so far from “what the founder of Buddhism meant by his teachings,” that students in the United States “invariably discard the ANATTĀ doctrine, because of its illogical nature.”

The writer goes on to claim perhaps the Buddha proposed the doctrine of anātman so adherents would consider the body as impermanent and not the self, and therefore turn focus towards their true ātman, or soul. The author argues without a Self, consciousness cannot arise, there could be no “after-death,” and nirvāṇa becomes meaningless without an entity which can attain. In another article, the author claims Śākyamuni could not have rejected the Self, because Self is a scientific fact and points to the hypocrisy of Asian Buddhists who claim no-self, yet believe in the Jātakas. As the true Buddhists, Metaphysical writers could appeal to “common sense” and “science” to argue against thousands of years of tradition. The “true Self” of Buddhism could be known by viewing the religion through the science of Theosophy. The real Buddhism could then be taught back to Asians in order to help them along the spiritual-evolutionary path in the hopes that they would one day reach the level of the Aryans, which would further the development of the next Root Race.

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145 “The Dharma: Delusions of Self (continued),” 1952, 109. This proposal sounds rather similar to the Buddha as the avatar of Viṣṇu, when he tricks many nonbelievers into rising against the caste system.

As the true Buddhists, Metaphysical Buddhists could utilize “their” own emic arguments to prove the existence of the Buddhist Self. In “Sattva-The Self: (Anattism and the Middle Way),” John Roger argues the doctrine of anātman represents an extreme view of annihilation and therefore cannot be a part of Buddhism’s Middle Way.\(^\text{147}\) Rogers claims “[anātman] propaganda, which misrepresents Buddhism, deceives students, and negates the work of those who seek to spread the Dharma in the West.”\(^\text{148}\) Nirvāṇa becomes “empty words” and “Arhatship is an absurdity” if each of us is made of “five transitory skandhas.”\(^\text{149}\) He claims there is nobody to realize arhatship if there is no Self. Ultimately, Roger’s argument can be summarized by the statement, “Anattism outrages commonsense,” as he argues that the doctrine of No-Self would be too illogical for the “Western mind.”

Metaphysical Buddhist also used emic arguments which combined views of “common sense” with the Buddhist textual tradition. In “The Dharma: Delusion of Self,” the author claims the Jātaka tales prove the Buddha could not have preached anātman, as we would not know the details of his climb to Buddhahood, if nothing is passed to subsequent lifetimes.\(^\text{150}\) The author further claims there must be a Self, which is “the undetectable Source that moves in every atom and in the common man, who somehow enshrines Spirit,” mixing Theosophy and Buddhism.\(^\text{151}\)

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148 Roger, 1957, 85.

149 Ibid, 85-86.

150 “The Dharma: Delusion of Self,” *The Golden Lotus* 14, 7 (1957): 145. The Buddha is said to have gained omniscient knowledge of his past lives and Karma while under the Bodhi Tree, therefore we have his recollection of the Jatakas.

In another article, the *anātman* doctrine is described as “destructive and unnecessary,” as having no Self, “would deny to Man these higher principles that form the over-shadowing Spiritual Trinity, and at one blow deprive him of his heritage of rebirth and reward for effort.” Metaphysical Buddhism, interpreted through a prism of Theosophy, has a Self, because to think otherwise would be illogical, the result of inferior evolution.

In contradistinction to the usage of Zen in Japan, Metaphysical Buddhists used the Buddhist Self to critique Zen doctrines. In “Analysis of some Writings and Radio Talks of Alan W. Watts,” Theosophist Willem B. Roos argues Zen is antinomian and displays “a subtle hostility…towards general moral laws.” The author claims Zen is belittling of Śākyamuni and his achievements, as well as being incorrect on Buddhist understandings of Self, and “inaccessible to the logical mind.” Antinomian language is actually typical of the Zen school, and going beyond the logical mind is generally presented as a positive aspect; however, Metaphysical Buddhists who presented Buddhism as science argued that Zen was a corrupted and illogical form of Buddhism. As Japanese Buddhists increasingly presented a mysticized form of Zen for American audiences, the Metaphysical Buddhists who previously portrayed Buddhism as a mystical ancient wisdom now blamed Zen for lacking rationality. Negative portrayals of Zen may have had more to do with race than doctrine, as the supposedly “true” Buddhists now

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154 Roos, 1957, 156.
blamed mysticized Zen for being illogical. In a separate article, Roos writes that Zen is further incorrect regarding rebirth due to their fundamental misunderstandings of the *anātman* doctrine; this is due to the fact that Zen claims a continual process of rebirth from moment to moment, which would negate the position of the Bodhisattva. Roos says a being cannot return in lifetimes as Avalokiteśvara, for instance, if they are being reborn from moment to moment. The article finishes with the hope that “any serious student of Buddhism, [will not be] intoxicated by Zen.” In a review of the book *The Goose is Out* by W.J. Gabb, the author claims Zen has “such a slim relation to genuine…Buddhism itself that new students should be made aware of the difference.” As the real Buddhists, the authors of *The Golden Lotus* claimed that Zen was a corruption of Buddhism and even bad for society. The arguments against Zen in *The Golden Lotus* problematize the idea of a supposed “Zen Boom,” and displays the changing Buddhist landscape in the United States, as Zen was becoming more popular in the wider society and diverging from Metaphysical interpretations. This continues the ambivalent relationship between Americans and Buddhism, as aspects of Metaphysical and Asian interpretations of Buddhism were utilized in order to claim ownership and superiority.

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155 If Metaphysical Buddhists were anti-Zen, does this mean that they “failed” when the “Zen Boom” began? I do not think so. Instead, aspects of Asian Buddhism, such as mysticized Zen, were utilized and further combined with Metaphysical doctrines in the 1950s. Buddhism in America did not stop hybridizing in 1957, but continued to do so with aspects of Metaphysical and Asian presentations. Metaphysical Buddhist views of themselves as true Buddhists were combined with a form of Zen that was mysticized to the point of being open to anyone who was “evolved” enough to claim ownership. Anti-Zen presentations by Metaphysical Buddhists show the ambivalent relationship between Americans and Buddhism more generally.


157 Roos, 14, no. 9, 1957, 178.

In 1958, Zen Buddhism was becoming increasingly popular within American popular culture; however, true Buddhists would know that Buddhism had a Self and God, making Zen illogical. According to an author known as “S.L.,” “we all know that the Lord Buddha would not have taught Reincarnation without acknowledging something to reincarnate into a body or form of a human being, and to survive it. It is precisely this senseless interpretation of the teaching of Reincarnation that stops the progress of Buddhism in Western lands.”159 Without a Self, Buddhism was bound to fail in the United States, as it was incompatible with American logic. S.L. directly blames the racially-inferior Asian presentation of Buddhism for hindering Buddhist development, claiming, “you seem to be the only Buddhists concerned with the true interpretation of the teaching. Why should all these great dignitaries put themselves and their ideas as hindrances in the Path and prevent the spread of the true teachings of the Lord Buddha? This becomes a tremendous tragedy to mankind.”160 The presentation of traditional Asian forms of Buddhism was believed to be a detriment to the religion, and mankind. Within the prism of Theosophical doctrines, preventing the spread of Buddhism would be akin to retarding the progress of human evolution.

Metaphysical Buddhists portrayed themselves as the true Buddhists, racially connected to the founder, and spiritually and evolutionarily superior to Asian Buddhists. Theosophical views of spiritual evolutionary science further solidified an esoteric understanding of Buddhism and science as well as the Aryan myth. The divergences between traditional Asian Buddhism and Metaphysical Buddhism is displayed directly in Metaphysical critiques of Zen, which was

becoming increasingly popular due in part to the mysticization promoted by Suzuki and others. However, there was another element of Metaphysical interpretations of Buddhism which Asian Buddhists were able to capitalize on, which was the promotion of a utopian Buddhism.

**An American Buddhist Utopia**

Metaphysical Buddhists attempted to create a utopian view of an American Buddhist future in order to counter the perceived nihilism of corrupted Asian Buddhism, as well as the pessimism and dread which defined the era. In the 1930s, with the Great Depression causing global suffering, the idea of a utopian future found fertile soil in which to grow. The development of a Buddhist utopianism represents a new flowering in the domestication of Buddhism in the United States created from an imagined past in order to posit a future with Americans at the centre of this history. In 1934, Manly P. Hall (1901-1990), a Canadian author and Metaphysical religionist, founded the Philosophical Research Society in Los Angeles, which was dedicated to the study of the world’s esoteric traditions. Prior to founding the Society, Hall wrote *The Secret Teachings of All Ages: An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic, and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy*, which purported to combine the esoteric wisdom of all past societies into one larger recursive philosophy.\(^{161}\) *The Secret Teachings* was quite popular, and began Hall’s long career as a public lecturer. The book also reinterpreted humanity’s spiritual

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\(^{161}\) Manly P. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages: An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic, and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy*, (San Francisco: H.S. Crocker Company, 1928), 1. Hall connects many disparate religious traditions and histories within a Metaphysical prism, suggesting that the most intelligent Atlanteans left to become the first rulers of Egypt [75] and that Plato was educated in India [538].
roots, focusing on secret and mystical connections between all world traditions. Hall further mysticized the Aryan myth in order to create a singular historical narrative, whereby secret adepts held the true teachings of all the world religions. This recursive philosophy of secret wisdom was used to create a “secret destiny” which had been laid out by the adepts of all the previous ages, for “the Occidental is convinced that he is making history while the Oriental is worshipping history.”

By tracing history from the current age back to the beginning of human spirituality and positing a secret plan upheld by highly evolved masters, Hall could claim that the future was also knowable, and therefore posit a utopian progress to all actions and beliefs which were being done in the current age.

The Metaphysical tradition of adepts mysticizes the Aryan myth in order that Metaphysical Buddhists can claim special knowledge of a tradition which theoretically developed over thousands of years in Asia. Mahāyāna Buddhism, according to Hall represented the esoteric teachings of Buddhism which were reserved for a select group throughout history. Hall reinterprets Buddhist history when he claims, “the Greater Mysteries of Buddhism were reserved for those of larger sincerity who were impelled to fulfill the disciplines and to dedicate their lives and their hearts to the realization of the Law.”

However, if the “Greater Mysteries” were reserved for a select group, how could a person in Los Angeles make this connection? According to Hall, “the Mahayana system went so far as to acknowledge that Adeptship could be

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attained without acceptance of Buddhism and without instruction by a teacher,” meaning that anyone could discover Buddhism without an intermediary, such as an Asian teacher.\textsuperscript{164} This historical trajectory is then further mysticized when Hall claims,

the Northern school certainly believed that the great teachers of the world, including non-Buddhists, formed part of an over-government. This invisible Fraternity of the illumined is the true Sangha, of which the physical assembly is only a shadow...the Arhats wait in silent meditation to be discovered by those who deserve instruction and are willing to earn the right of growth through personal consecration and endeavor...the Adept or Arhat is regarded as a personification of the overself.\textsuperscript{165}

Metaphysical Buddhists represent the “true Sangha,” according to Hall, and they only have to discover the teachers, who will recognize those “who deserve instruction.” Concordantly, Hall claimed that religious seekers do not need a teacher, and need not even be Buddhist. This means that anyone can “discover” Buddhism for themselves, without going through any sort of Asian intermediary; after all, esoteric books and American Metaphysical teachers would also be a part of the larger Over-Soul, which was considered a basic tenet of Buddhism.

Hall utilized Theosophical views of the Over-Soul presented as “true” Buddhism in order to connect American audiences with an imagined past, and therefore create a future American Buddhist utopia. According to Hall, the Over-Soul in Buddhism is an impersonal spirit present in all things; the personal aspect of the larger Over-Soul, or “regenerated personal Self,” is Amitābha.\textsuperscript{166} In 1929, Hall wrote, “to [Buddha] there was nothing real but the Self, nothing absolute but the Self, no true attainment but perfect unification with the Self,” combining

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{164} Hall, 1953, 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{165} Ibid, 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{166} Ibid, 28.
\end{itemize}
Metaphysical views of the Self with Buddhist doctrine.\textsuperscript{167} As the personal aspect of the Over-Soul, Amitābha represented humanity’s inner desires for faith, which is why Sukhāvatī was created by the adepts, as it was the perfect religious form “for those incapable of the supreme achievement,” or nirvāṇa.\textsuperscript{168} Luckily, the adepts also created a superior mystical tradition which is “identical” to the practices of the original Arhats of the Buddha himself, and this tradition is displayed in the “Zen Buddhism of Japan.”\textsuperscript{169} Hall is not merely continuing an ancient polemic between Zen and Jōdo, as he then focuses on the perceived founder of the Zen tradition, Bodhidharma. According to Hall, Bodhidharma famously had “piercing blue eyes” and continued the tradition of Socrates.\textsuperscript{170} To further reinforce his point, Hall turns to Tibet. In 1929, Hall wrote that pre-Buddhist Tibet was a land of “savage cannibals,” who were taught Buddhism, but this was eventually corrupted because Tibetans are naturally, racially, prone to “devil-worship.”\textsuperscript{171} Hall combines Tibetan Buddhist and academic accounts of Buddhism’s introduction to Tibet, claiming that although Tibetans believe supernatural beings visited Tibet, the native people were simply in shock at seeing the far superior Aryans.\textsuperscript{172} In fact, Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), famed Tibetan Lama and founder of the Gelug school, was European and was initiated into esoteric Buddhism while still living in “the West,” and without the aid of a

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
  \bibitem{167} Hall, 1929, 32.
  \bibitem{168} Hall, 1953, 28.
  \bibitem{169} Ibid, 51.
  \bibitem{170} Ibid, 68.
  \bibitem{171} Hall, 1929, 19-20.
  \bibitem{172} Hall, 1953, 82.
\end{thebibliography}
master. Hall has reinterpreted Buddhist history and doctrines in order to place European Aryans firmly at the centre of all development. Not only did Aryans create Buddhism in India, Japan, and Tibet, but they have been the ones protecting the “Greater Mysteries” for millennia while Asians were content with lesser teachings designed for those who had no chance at attaining nirvāṇa. Buddhist history could thus be controlled.

Metaphysical Buddhists, including Hall, believed that they represented the fulfillment of an ancient historical narrative which was divinely ordained, and that this trajectory would eventually result in an American Buddhist utopia. Hall argues that time tends to work in cycles, whereby phenomenon are born, live, and then die away; so too, “Buddhism would gradually be overcome by alien religions until Shambhala, a great State to the North of Tibet, would take up arms and restore the Faith throughout the world.” According to Metaphysical Buddhists, a government of Aryan adepts control Shambhala. In fact, when Maitreya comes, he will not “merely confirm his predecessor. The teaching will be suitable to the times.” Buddhism was created by spiritually and racially superior Aryans, who kept the tradition alive until it was overtaken by foreign forces. However, these superior Aryans will return to teach a new Buddhism, which will be suitable for the times. Hall is removing Asians from Buddhism entirely. They are the corrupting force against which Aryans must fight. This is the divine “will” of the Over-Soul, and the scientific progression of mankind. The first instances of this Shambhalan revolution can be seen in the mystical teachings of Aryan Buddhists, such as Madame Blavatsky

173 Ibid, 92-93.
175 Ibid, 63.
(Theosophy), Bodhidharma (Zen), and Tsongkhapa (Vajrayāna).

According to Metaphysical Buddhists in 1953, “the great school will return to the world, restoring the succession of the priest-philosopher-kings, who, by divine right and the divine will, are the natural rulers of mankind.”

In 1944, during the height of World War II, American Metaphysical Buddhists were searching for hope at a time of pessimism and dread. Hall wrote *The Secret Destiny of America* in 1944, during a period of intense international strife, suggesting that utopian ideals of a future golden age would be very popular. The historical trajectory of Buddhism was created and developed by Aryans, which allowed Metaphysical Buddhists to create a future utopia based on the newly-discovered secret teachings. Theosophical science suggests that each race will progress upwards, whereby the most advanced races will form the beginnings of the next Root Race while the lesser races are allowed to die away. This progression will create new golden ages in the future when the “childlike” races are removed by a spiritual natural selection.

According to Hall, thousands of years before Columbus, the ancient adepts knew of the existence

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177 Ibid, 112.

178 G. de Purucker, “Man in a Just and Ordered Universe,” *The Theosophical Forum* 20, no. 10 (October 1942): 433. Gottfried de Purucker (1874-1942) was an author and leader of the Theosophical Society at Point Loma from 1929-1942.

179 Purucker, 1942, 434.
of America, but set it aside to become a future “philosophic empire.” Hall describes that in the age of Atlantis, there was once a great university, “which originated most of the arts and sciences of the present race;” this university was a large pyramid with an observatory at the top from which Atlanteans could view the stars. This great university and centre for Aryan learning is now pictured on the American one-dollar bill. America is therefore directly connected to the Aryan peoples who once inhabited Atlantis, and this history must be “remembered” in order to progress the coming utopia. It was when Atlantis sank into the water that the force pushed America upwards out of the ocean, making it “perfectly true that America is older than Egypt, and that Egypt is older than what is now called India.” According to Hall, Christopher Columbus was actually Greek, furthering the Aryan myth, and claims that ancient Greeks were in contact with Mayans. Japanese Buddhists and Chinese Buddhists had also claimed contact with ancient Mayans in their publications, suggesting a similar view of personal superiority which can be asserted through “discovery.” The theory that Christopher Columbus was Greek is

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180 Manly P. Hall, *The Secret Destiny of America*, (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1944), 3. It is also worth noting that this publication comes just over a hundred years after Joseph Smith, Jr. (1805-1844) translated the *Book of Mormon* which also posited a utopia in the United States [Albanese, 2006, 65]. This displays the disparate seeds which all coagulated to bring Buddhism into the United States, but also the further connection between Buddhism and Metaphysical Religion in America. I would argue that American exceptionalism, sometimes resulting in the view of an American religious utopia, is a common thread amongst a variety of religions in the United States.

181 Hall, 1944, 46.

182 Ibid, 46.


184 Hall, 1944, 21.
then used to show that world history has developed thanks to the work of a “Secret Order,” which included the Buddha, Pythagoras, Jesus, and Mohammad.\footnote{Ibid, 5.}

The Aryan myth is thoroughly mysticized in order to claim a perpetual lineage underlying the secret historical development of all spirituality. However, this theory only explains how history has developed in the past, not the future. Hall posits that in the future American utopia, “the theologian planner who will be truly useful will be one who acquires at least some knowledge of the science of biology.”\footnote{Ibid, 4.} William Quan Judge, a leading Theosophist, wrote that “Americans have become in only three hundred years a primary race \textit{pro tern.”} and therefore the next Root Race will be born from the Pacific Ocean and instigate an era of peace in the United States.\footnote{William Q. Judge, “On the Future/A Few Reflections,” \textit{The Theosophical Forum} 28, no. 9 (September 1950): 513.} According to Theosophical doctrines, biology includes race sciences, as the science of “human evolution” proved that the “Fourth Root Race” which occupied parts of “Africa and the East as far as India, including Ceylon” were of “a low grade kamic intelligence, materialistic, selfish, cruel, revengeful and at their height they developed a great deal of sorcery and black magic.”\footnote{Beale, 1944, 63.} If the Fourth Root Race is so cruel, then this would posit a Theosophical justification for Colonialism, as “races are reborn to either suffer or repay each other.”\footnote{Patrick Clemenshaw, “Evolution and Theosophy,” \textit{The Theosophical Forum} 26, no. 6 (June 1948): 349.} Due to the “Reimbodying Ego,” Theosophists argued that karma was tied directly to predestination, as the
collective karma of a race would decide their position in the next age.\footnote{G. de Purucker, “Predestination,” *The Theosophical Forum* 21, no. 4 (April 1943): 161.} The “Kali-Yuga,” or age of pessimism and dread which humanity finds itself in currently is when the Root-Races began to have full scale war, but this is considered a positive development as fighting can remove karma and force evolutionary rebirth through death.\footnote{F. Chapman Clemenshaw, “Rounds and Races,” *The Theosophical Forum* 26, no. 11 (November 1948): 683.} Metaphysical Buddhists, including Blavatsky and Hall, argued that each new Root Race would have a new Buddha, and that the next Root Race would start in the United States.\footnote{Hall, 1944, 3. Blavatsky, 1888, *Vol. II*, 444.} In fact, new Root Races germinate within the previous Race, which means the Sixth Root Race is already evolving in the United States.\footnote{Clemenshaw, “Rounds and Races,” 1948, 685.} Therefore, Metaphysical Buddhists have laid claim to a mysticized Aryan Buddhist history, and they know that the next Buddha will be American. Buddhism of the past, present, and future, is commanded by Aryans who protect the tradition from the polluting influence of those who are not evolved enough biologically to appreciate the ancient mysticism.

Buddhism was thus a thoroughly American tradition, simultaneously proving American exceptionalism and forecasting utopia. Buddhism was no longer corrupted from the beginning or corrupted by the end; instead it was a mystical tradition for all which was superior in the beginning and promised utopia by the end. Following a chaotic period of war and economic depression, an Aryan tradition which explained history and posited an ideal future found fertile soil in the United States. The seeds of this development continue to influence Buddhism in the United States.
Conclusion

In 1957, the United States supposedly underwent a “Zen Boom” whereby Americans suddenly turned to Japanese Zen; however, Metaphysical interpretations of Buddhism suggest otherwise. There was no major event which catapulted Americans towards Zen in the mid-1950s. Instead, 1957 represents a continuation of a much longer development. Buddhists utilized the Japanese mysticization of Buddhism, combined with Aryan race theories, and the promotion of a Buddhist utopia following American victory in World War II in order to suggest that they were the “real” Buddhists. This can be seen most clearly in delineations between “Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen,” whereby Americans were able to separate aspects which resonated with them, and disregard all other forms as not being real Zen. In some ways, perhaps Jack Kerouac and other Beats really do represent the “Zen Boom” as they claimed themselves to be the true Buddhists, a designation which had been claimed numerous times during the Era of the Yellow Peril. Although the Beats are often disparaged as basically inventing their own Buddhism, it would seem that Buddhism was being actively created at various locations throughout the globe. Rather than suggesting that a “Zen Boom” occurred, or that anyone represents this supposed explosion, it is better to say that the Beats, the Zennists, the hippies, and the Asian immigrants of the 1960s all represent the continual flowering of seeds placed within the American religious landscape from 1899-1957. Rather than a rupture, or explosion, Buddhism in the United States represents a continued translocative process of flowering. Although Buddhists in the United States rarely, if ever, refer to their Aryan past, the seeds of this development can continue to
flower within an American landscape. Like karma itself, it is unknown when these seeds will sprout and what forms they will take, but the seeds always come to fruition.

Traces of an Aryan Buddhism continue today, both within the strictures of Buddhism as a religion, and beyond, such as the rise of interested in the Buddha amongst White Nationalist and Alt-Right groups. Jason Reza Jorjani is an Iranian-American, and founder of Alt-Right.com; in *Prometheus and Atlas* he openly advocates for the rise of an “Aryan World Order” which will be based on an “Indo-European (Aryan) world religion” separate from the “parasitic Abrahamic religious fundamentalism.” Jorjani cites Carl Jung to prove his racialized view of the “Eastern mind” versus the “Western mind,” and suggests that the atomic bombing of Japan represents a deeper “metaphysical confrontation” between Aryans and others. Eric Clanton is one of the founders of the American Freedom Party and a self-described “Nazi;” he also does Yoga and meditates daily, and it was during his time in Japan which fostered his interest in Buddhism as a religion for Aryans. The connection of Aryanism and Buddhism is resurfacing today.

Buddhists in the United States have largely forgone connections of Aryanism and Buddhism. However, subtle traces of this form of thinking continue today through discussions of the secularization of Buddhism, or Atheist Buddhism, which focus on removing the “cultural accretions” which Buddhism developed following the death of the founder. In *Against the Stream*, a popular source by Noah Levine, he claims that Asian accretions damaged original

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Buddhism as the Dharma was “co-opted by the very aspects of humanity that [Siddhārtha] was trying to dismantle…greed, hatred, and delusion.” Descriptions of Aryanism and race sciences no longer form the American Buddhist discussion, but instead calls for a scientific and secularized understanding of Buddhism function as continued traces for those who claim to be the true Buddhists. The elimination of this “cultural baggage” represents a more subtle form of supremacy, favouring American views of Buddhism which are removed from “traditional ethnic” forms and favour psychological and scientific explanations. I argue that these subtle forms of separation between groups represent continued traces from the Era of the Yellow Peril.

Conclusion

A Building-Block Approach to Buddhism in North America

A group is extraordinarily credulous and open to influence, it has no critical faculty, and the improbable does not exist for it. It thinks in images, which call one another up by association, and whose agreement with reality is never checked by any reasonable agency. The feelings of a group are always very simple and very exaggerated. So that a group knows neither doubt nor uncertainty. It goes directly to extremes; if a suspicion is expressed, it is instantly changed into an incontrovertible certainty; a trace of antipathy is turned into furious hatred…since a group is in no doubt as to what constitutes truth or error, and is conscious, moreover, of its own great strength, it is as intolerant as it is obedient to authority. - Sigmund Freud, 1921

Freud directly linked the development of group psychology to a process of othering and violence; the present study shows the way in which a “collective self” can be imagined from individual notions of the Self. In other words, a complex network of influences is instituted within individuals, as well as collective groups, whereby the Self constitutes all that is good and pure within the world, while all that is displeasurable is essentialized as “other.” This process can work on an international level, as nation-states demarcate boundaries between good, or civilized, nations and barbaric, or uncivilized, peoples. A clash of civilizations, separating the world between two unequal parts, creates this separation of Self and “other,” which can then be reinforced through appeals to a shared imagined history, scientific reinforcement of preconceived notions, and religious justifications for violence. I used a quote from Freud specifically to suggest that this is not a problem of “the West” or Christendom, anymore than “the East” or Buddhism, but instead that this process of separation of a perceived good, which is pure in its

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homogeneity, from a bad, holding all negative aspects of human development, represents a mental process to which all of us are vulnerable. The separation of “us and them” is not the monopoly of any singular group, nation, or race, but a common mental process which we must analyze even within ourselves. When a group, be they Catholics, Buddhists, or others, is marginalized as the “other,” this represents an attempt to maintain the perceived purity and goodness of the Self and the avoidance of complexity. What is more useful is the recognition of this complexity, and the idea that No-Self allows for this multifaceted outlook. In other words, if the United States, or Buddhism, is without a Self, then it can be simultaneously good and bad; Buddhism can be a religion with a history of violence and a peaceful religion of science, while the United States can be a nation of profound racism as well as a land of compassion and tolerance.

In this study of Buddhism in the United States during the Era of the Yellow Peril, I have shown that various actors were sowing the seeds for the continuing success of Buddhism in the 1950s and 1960s. Contestations surrounding notions of the Self connect the Victorian fad of Buddhism to the supposed “Zen Boom,” and the end of Yellow Peril in the 1950s; however, it was the shift away from the Asian “other” to the dangers which many believed were posed by the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* which provided the most room for Buddhists within the cultural landscape, as societal fears had become more focused on African Americans. This is not to suggest that African Americans were treated positively prior to 1957, as racism is rarely focused on only one subject, and often those who are discriminated against are combined, such as the blanket condemnation of “Semites” connected to the Chinese, Europeans, and others. Prior to 1957, African Americans were present within the European-American
consciousness, but segregated; *Brown v. Board of Education* removed many of the barriers of separation, at least in the minds of many Caucasian Americans, and meant that children would now be integrated, which brought fears of miscegenation and declining racial purity directly to families. African Americans became the more immediate existential threat following the Supreme Court decision. Cheah places the beginning of the post-1960s popularization of Buddhism with *Brown v. Board of Education*.\(^2\) Similarly, Austin Sarat, a law historian, argues that *Brown v. Board of Education* represents the end of the era of race sciences, as scientists largely disavowed the idea of biological racial predeterminism.\(^3\) Due to the connections I have identified between race sciences and Buddhism in the United States, this assertion further solidifies my demarcation of *Brown v. Board of Education* as a watershed moment for Buddhism in America, the United States, and the history of race. Again, this change in focus does not represent the replacement of one communal subject of racism with another, as subaltern groups are often combined and assumed to be in league with one another, but instead the refocusing on what was considered to be the most immediate threat to American culture and homogeneity.

No specific group defined the history of Buddhism in America, as multiple actors influenced the direction which the religion would take. However, the Japanese and Metaphysical Buddhist groups discussed in this study contributed to the picture of Buddhism in the United States today. Interlocutors from Japan, Sri Lanka, America, and Europe contributed blocks to the foundation upon which Buddhism in the United States would be built. Buddhist reconfigurations of the doctrine of No-Self for target audiences, such as the presentation of Japanese Buddhism as

\(^2\) Cheah, 2011, 5.

a timeless and mystical tradition which is superior to Christianity, shed refracted light on
American conceptions of the Self. Adaptations in presentation developed in Japan in the 1900s
continued to reflect in the 1950s in publications from Los Angeles, acting as an Indra’s Net of
global Buddhist movement. American culture and Buddhism were simultaneously renegotiating
long-held views regarding the nature of the Self, and it was through this reimagining that
Buddhism was able to cross into the United States and create a more permanent home. To posit
that a “Zen Boom” actually happened would be to argue that Japanese Buddhists eventually
“won” in the United States, but I do not think this is the case. Instead, it was a perpetual mixing
of doctrines and ideas of superiority which eventually triumphed, as Zen itself was re-created
within the Beat Movement and other counter-cultural groups. When American audiences were
able to posit themselves as the “true” Buddhists of the past, and the catalysts for a future utopia,
a Buddhism of superiority could be popularized in the United States. The Japanese and the
Americans both won this debate. The Aryan myth was continually mysticized, and following the
end of World War II and the perceived pacification of Japan, the United States could begin to ally
itself with the Japanese as business partners, and in opposition to the growing threat of
Communism, as America was then firmly established as the “superior” nation. Buddhism was
able to find a more lasting place to grow in the American religious landscape through a
reciprocal process of romanticization and Colonialism, like Metaphysical Buddhists imagining a
mystical land in Tibet, with rejection and anti-Colonialism, such as Dharmapāla’s anti-Semitic
rejection of Christianity.

Whether it was Suzuki’s mystical connection of jiriki and tariki or Hall’s utopian
evolutionary Self, the domestication of Buddhism in the United States revolved around
reimaginations of the nature of the Self, but no singular group monopolized that debate, and no singular reinterpretation took precedence over others; instead, non-Buddhists like the academics and popular writers and Buddhists like Dharmapāla, contributed pieces which make up the overall picture of Buddhism in North America. In *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, Ann Taves argues that all religions are composite formations, which are built together in order for people to create religious significance. For Buddhists, these building-blocks include print culture itself, imagined history, and even race sciences. In many ways, this study presents a mosaic, with actors from Japanese Jōdo Shinshū Buddhists, who argued that Shin Buddhism should return to Śākyamuni, to Catholic newspaper writers in Colorado, who claimed that Christianity was being lost to Eastern philosophies, each contributing pieces to a broader picture of Buddhism in the United States. No singular idea or entity came to dominate the public discussion of Buddhism, with many separate ideas coexisting and influencing each other to create the debate which I have attempted to display. Through the developments described in this study, it is the renewed debates regarding ideas of the Self which bridges the “low point” in the historiography during the Yellow Peril to the fads of Buddhism which took place during the Victorian Era and the supposed “Zen Boom,” which partially shifted Buddhism from exotic religion to pop cultural object.

Buddhism in the United States has been heavily influenced by, and benefited from, a sense of romanticization. The romanticization of Buddhism has taken place through imagined history, perennial philosophies, and a sense of nostalgia for things considered “primitive” or original; this imagined nostalgia sometimes inherits political dimensions, such as the search for ancient Aryan ancestry in the personage of the historical Buddha. This imagined history does not

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simply involve Caucasian Americans imagining a “simpler” India and a mystical East, but the imagined past of Japan resulting in the need for monks to take up guns to protect an imagined Buddhist heartland. Romanticized imagined history explains why Buddhism could simultaneously have leaders writing to praise Adolph Hitler for his promotion of Aryan values while also writing of the desire for world peace; when the events of the past are imagined and romanticized, the present becomes increasingly malleable, as people can reinterpret the current social situation in relation to imagined versions of the past, which many use to define the Self in contradistinction to others. Imagined history is used to give these preconceived notions of the Self versus others historical precedent. Specific Buddhists who wished to promote their own agendas of superiority utilized imagined history to create interpretations which appeared to promote negative outcomes, such as the advocacy of militarism prior to World War II in Japan, or the fostering of race sciences in the United States. This study shows that these issues are complex, as they involve currents and countercurrents across the globe, with the writings of Japanese Buddhists being influenced by politics in Southeast Asia as Japanese writers travelled to India and Sri Lanka in search of a historical Buddha. An imagined history also aided the movement of Buddhism into the United States, as Americans began actively searching for an authentic, original, or primitive tradition at exactly the same time in which Buddhists were imagining their religion through a prism of authenticity and superiority. For example, Metaphysical Buddhists in the Era of the Yellow Peril promoted themselves as “real” Buddhists in order to create a utopian future of superiority, while at the same time race sciences were being popularized in the United States, and Japanese Buddhists argued that their religion was the most

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5 Jaffe, 2004, 66.
racially and spiritually superior. Each of the preceding influences contributed to the “Zen Boom” of the 1950s, rather than any one specific cause.

Some may argue that the present study suggests that Buddhists were at best disingenuous, or at worst racist, in their presentation of an Aryan Buddhism during the Era of Yellow Peril. In a way, this is true, as the ambivalence created throughout 1899-1957 displays the sense of superiority inherent in the creation of an “other,” such as the Japanese Buddhist focus on *nihonjinron* defining a superior Japanese ekāyana spirituality, versus the materialism of “the West.” This cultural chauvinism is apparent throughout the imagined history created by Japanese, Metaphysical, and South Asian Buddhists. Racism is not simply a unidirectional process against people of colour, but a network of ideas, including the imagined past, which places one group above an “other” which is essentialized by all that is not the perceived “Self.”

However, the network of factors present within the Era of the Yellow Peril allowed certain aspects of Buddhism, or Asian culture, to be appreciated while others were disregarded. Perhaps the more poignant question within the given history is, in a profoundly racist, with popular and academic culture focusing on eugenics and corruption respectively, and governments which engaged in global war and mass internment, why would we expect Buddhists to present themselves any differently? Buddhist discussion of race, Self, and science at least makes sense, given the ambivalent nature of the relationship of Buddhism, Asian nations, and the United States, oscillating between romanticization and demonization. Buddhists were reacting to the times in an era of colonialism, global war, and post-colonialism, which suggests that a shift towards Aryan Buddhism was actually a process of Modernization, at least in the sense that they were developing a Buddhism suited to the current times. In other words, this is in part a study of
Buddhist Modernism. Simultaneously, the Buddhist notion of *upāya* suggests that infinite means may be employed in order to set sentient beings along the Path. In an era of pessimism and dread, Aryan Buddhism helped to present a religion of superiority, well-suited to the time period. The idea of an Aryan Buddhism, in this case meaning “noble,” was emic within the Buddhist tradition. Therefore, Buddhists were not suddenly interested in a racially-based designator; instead, this term was used by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike to argue for their position within a changing world. Buddhists therefore used the Skillful Means available to them in order to re-create a Buddhism of superiority for both Asians and non-Asians. These seeds simply continue to develop and flower till through the present day.

It is the confluence of factors which are the building-blocks of Buddhism in the United States. These “blocks” are not inherently positive or negative, as a singular piece, such as race sciences, which represents a cultural chauvinism, can also contribute to the acceptance of Buddhism in the United States. Buddhists attempted to bring their religion to the United States in the Victorian Era, but it remained mainly a fad because cultural attitudes were not open to Buddhist doctrines, and it was considered too foreign. It was only when the specific “blocks” were configured together that they created a more lasting place for Buddhism in American society. These factors include cultural attitudes of pessimism and dread which were prevalent in the United States and Europe during the Era of the Yellow Peril, especially during two World Wars and the Great Depression. This culture of pessimism and dread created fertile soil for utopian interpretations of Buddhism and the promotion of a religion of superiority. Simultaneously, Buddhist print technologies, such as the primary sources highlighted in this study, represent a necessary catalyst for the development of Buddhism in the United States by
creating a public forum for doctrinal adaptations. Meanwhile, anti-colonial movements like Japanese Buddhist calls for multiple modernities of Buddhist sciences and Dharmapāla’s anti-Semitic railing against the British which promoted Buddhism as the superior world religion. Each of these “blocks” were necessary pieces for the domestication of Buddhism in the United States.

It is through analyzing these specific pieces that we can present more active Asian agency. Americans did not simply realize Buddhism was a viable option in the early 20th century, because it had been present in the 19th century. The romanticization of Buddhism by American writers could create a certain amount of interest, but without the writings of Asian Buddhists claiming their own superiority, Buddhism would not have benefited from the sense of authenticity and counter-cultural cache which it has enjoyed even up to the present. Cultural shifts, Asian agency, and imagined history were all necessary to create the foundation for Buddhism in the United States post-1957. Evidence of this argument can be seen in interviews with Buddhists in Dixie Dharma, where respondents claimed that Buddhism helped to create an identity which was alternative and superior to broader American culture.6 In “Countercurrents from the West,” Ryan Bongseok Joo describes American Buddhists proselytizing Buddhism in Korea.7 The seeds of repeated calls for Americans to proselytize Buddhism back to Asia are still flowering in the present era. This is not to suggest a continued Aryanism, per se, merely that the seeds laid from 1899-1957 continue to flower in differing ways even in the 21st century.

6 Wilson, 2012, 100. In Wilson’s ethnographic study, respondents imagined themselves and their Buddhism in contradistinction to materialistic Western culture.

Buddhism has taken on a countercultural caché through the chauvinistic language of superiority and the mysticization of racial myths.

As scholars, many seem to be attempting to explain solidly defined objects, rather than focusing on the permeability of these foci. We describe cultures as water ways or limited segments, through which other entities must pass, leaving us with metaphors which end in breach. This limits us to ideas of outsiders coming in, while inside there was once a defined boundary. In realizing the back-and-forth nature of the globalized world, beginning in the early 20th century, we come to realize that entities such as America, are actually empty and without concretely defined boundaries. America both reflects outside of itself through war or global commerce, but also from within itself, through scientific racism and colonialism or the striving for an authentic religious alternative found within Buddhism. America does not present us with a singular entity which can be defined against outsiders because the diversity of views from within allow it to reflect the world without. This type of boundary-defined thinking creates false divisions between Buddhisms, cultures, and religions. Buddhism specifically falls into this trap as scholars attempt to define two and three Buddhisms from an “object” which is empty, and without specifically defined boundaries.

The problem, both culturally and academically, arises from essentialization; the construction of categorization between religious and secular, or even defining what a particular religion is or is not. Rather than essentialization, scholars would be better served to focus on the permeability of groups; for instance, the present study shows that Buddhists have a history of racism, but are still “nice” simultaneously. It is essentialization which allows all members of an

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ethnic group to be labelled as “enemy combatants,” despite the complexities of the Japanese-American experience discussed in this study. However, the benefit of this study is in displaying the ways in which groups and individuals were able to adapt to and counter the situation in which they found themselves; how do religious groups create space for themselves when they are the subject of intense discrimination? In other words, the experience of Buddhists during the Era of the Yellow Peril, when Buddhism was essentialized as the dangerous “other” over-taking the world, may help to provide a blueprint for other religious traditions being essentialized and threatened in the modern era.

During the Yellow Peril, Buddhism was considered by many to be a dangerous religion opposed to democratic values which controlled the Asian population, thus splitting the world into a clash of civilizations. At the time, this was not a novel fear, as the same criticisms had been laid against Catholicism in the past. Cultural fears of an essentialized other allowed Buddhism to become a repository for economic, cultural, and religious dread. This fear resulted in the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. The broader processes at work of othering a religious group through the essentialization of their religion and culture can be seen in
the current treatment of Islam in North American society. This study shows the historical precedent of deeming religions violent in the past, and helps to nuance these overarching narratives by showing the ways that Asian Buddhists and non-Asian Buddhists helped position the religion in a more favourable light, eventually leading to more widespread acceptance within the broader American culture.

In *The Idea of the Muslim World*, Cemil Aydin argues that European views of social and racial hierarchies combined with Muslim notions of decline and the desire for essentialization of particular Muslim nations to create the notion of a unified “Muslim World.” Whoever wanted to claim power over Islam, or to degrade Muslims broadly, focused on the “Muslim World” as a singular and unified block. Aydin even claims that the idea of a “Muslim World” is directly linked to the theory that Muslims constitute a specific subgroup of the Semitic race [5]. In order to counter notions that Muslims were inherently inferior writ large, Muslim intellectuals emphasized the historical contributions of Islamic civilization, which unfortunately led to further essentialization and the historical creation of a past “golden age” [8]. This view of Islamic civilization and a past golden age inadvertently reinforced European views of global racial hierarchies and theories of corruption [Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017)]. Aydin’s study is comparable to my own, and provides an excellent comparison. I think my theoretical frame of creating a Self would be a useful methodology for analyzing other religious traditions in the same era, including Islam. My study is different from Aydin’s in two main forms; first, Aydin only criticizes European Orientalist assumptions and the reaction against them, without connecting the creation of an “other” to any doctrines of Islam, per se. Second, I would argue that Aydin’s work and my own prove an interesting comparison for the influence of distance. Muslims lived in many of the same places as Christians, and the Middle East was thoroughly colonized between 1899-1957; not only that, but Islam shares the Abrahamic Tradition with Christianity, as both religions come from similar cultures and areas. Buddhism, on the other hand, enjoyed a “distance” from Christianity, both geographically and doctrinally. Buddhism, therefore, could become mysticized as an "other,” but also romanticized as a tradition of the ancient masters. Islam, however, was too familiar, and Muslim immigrants were not only present in Europe, but much closer, such as African Muslims coming to France. Similarly, Islam was largely considered a branch of Christianity, Mohammadanism, until the 1950s in Europe [17]. This would suggest that although both religions are “wrong” according to certain thinkers, at least Buddhism had aspects of scientific thinking and a racially superior founder, while Islam was doubly-incorrect because it was perceived as so close to Christianity, representing only a corrupted sect. We can also apply this to previously discussed notions of Buddhism as a “nice” religion in Tweed’s article, as Buddhism is often portrayed as a religion of singular contemplation (a lone monk meditating in the forest) which distances and mysticizes Buddhism, while Islam is portrayed as a faceless mass, either in Mecca or in prayer spaces, and this “horde” is both inside, and just outside, of “the West.” Muslims are portrayed as more negative because they are too similar to the essentialized "Self” created for “the West,” which would lead to complexities and nuances about what exactly constitutes the Self. Meanwhile, Buddhism is distinct enough that all aspects perceived as negative can be relegated as “other” while any positive aspects can be claimed within the ongoing Aryan myth.
In studies of Buddhism in the United States today, subgroups of Buddhists are often split between two or three Buddhisms, with these categorizations separated by levels of adherence to traditional doctrines, cultural and devotional practices, and views of the metaphysical. James William Coleman separates “ethnic” and “new” Buddhists by claiming:

as converts, it is logical to assume that most of the early Buddhists must have had the same kind of spiritual hunger that draws Westerners into Buddhism today, in contrast to most contemporary Asian Buddhists who are simply born into the faith. Siddhārtha himself never placed much emphasis on rites, rituals, and ceremonies, and neither do many of the new Buddhist groups.  

Coleman directly ties ‘Western converts’ to Śākyamuni himself, and a superior level of spirituality in comparison to their essentialized Asian counterparts. There are then discussions attempting to complicate and nuance our dualistic views of traditional versus new Buddhists. For instance, the present study complicates historical descriptions of baggage and import Buddhists, proving that singular groups can sometimes represent both typologies. Jōdo Shinshū youth in Berkeley promoted the presence of Śākyamuni while Metaphysical Buddhists brought their own cultural “baggage” to Buddhism in the form of assumptions about the Self and racialized imagined history. It is only when the ideal types used to categorize Buddhists in America are associated with specific groups, or the suggestion that these delineations are realistic in historical examples that ideal types become problematic. By perpetuating these ideal types as if they were

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historical examples, they become more prescriptive as “real” Theravāda, for example, rather than descriptive, which is the intent of typologies like “three Buddhisms.” The ideal types of two and three Buddhisms lose their viability when associated with a specific lineage, such as Zen, or a cultural grouping, such as “Westerners.” Two Buddhisms marginalizes individual Buddhists, such as Asian-Americans born in America who discover Buddhism later in life, thus feeling excluded from both sides of the Two Buddhisms dichotomy.\(^ {11}\) According to Chenxing Han, a young Asian-American Buddhist, “though presented as a value-neutral sociological description, the ‘two Buddhisms’ model is too often used to valorize white Buddhists while denigrating Asian American Buddhists.”\(^ {12}\) Han interviewed a young Shin Buddhist minister who said she did not think Zen was a Japanese tradition; instead, she claimed “I don’t think of Japanese Americans in Zen; I think of Caucasians.”\(^ {13}\) Although only the opinion of a single Shin minister, it seems rather telling that Caucasian Americans now hold such a degree of ownership over Zen, to the point that a Shin Minister no longer considers the tradition “Japanese.” However, was this not also the very point Suzuki was trying to make in his mysticization of Zen? The point is not to make either side of the “two Buddhisms” divide hold blame, but to suggest that the separation of “new” and “ethnic” forms of Buddhism are part of a longer history than simply describing the state of Buddhism in the United States.\(^ {14}\) Scholars must stop uncritically perpetuating these

\(^ {11}\) Chenxing Han, “We’re Not Who You Think We Are,” Lion’s Roar, 27 January 2017. www.lionsroar.com/were-not-who-you-think-we-are/

\(^ {12}\) Han, 2017. Han specifically cites the Berkeley Bussei publishing the poetry of Jack Kerouac in the 1950s, which displays the mixing and adaptation of Shin Buddhist history in America, despite the fact that Han says the BCA has been labelled the “perpetual foreigner” in American Buddhism.

\(^ {13}\) Han, 2017.

\(^ {14}\) Coleman, 2001, 6.
historical myths. Baggage Buddhism, as a categorization is Śūnyatā, as individuals never fit comfortably within these created limits, and sometimes even move between as the socio-cultural situation changed; for instance, the Jōdo Shinshū leadership in Hawai'i which originally promoted the adaptations of Ernest Shinkaku Hunt, and then later fired him during a time of increased Japanese nationalism for promoting supposedly anti-Japanese beliefs. These typologies may be useful for academic analysis, but they should merely be viewed as a framing device, with the realization that groups and individuals rarely fit normative narratives. More importantly, scholars should recognize the distinctly racialized history of the designations used to separate Buddhisms; how can separate Buddhisms, especially those delineated largely by race, ever be equal?

Moving Forward

Every academic study opens up further avenues to analyze. First, this study is an intellectual history, which means a study of practice and ritual adaptations would also be useful, and possibly bring to light further changes being made in the early 20th century. Second, a study of Buddhist opponents, thus displaying the tenor of American culture, would be useful; a study of Buddhist opponents would display the interdependent ways religions adapt to their critics and be useful in displaying the critiques of American culture as well as the spaces where Buddhists were able to fit themselves. Throughout this work, I have mentioned many names, and despite my efforts to situate each of these authors, many of them demand further study in their own right.

15 Hunter, 1977, 171,
Biographies of Dwight Goddard, Manly P. Hall, and others would be extremely useful for the historical narrative. I also noticed throughout my primary sources that the majority of those writing in *Theosophical Journals* were women; simultaneously, the majority of articles in *Zen Notes* and other later Zen publications from the United States were written by women. A further study based on gender and the attraction to Metaphysical religion, and Buddhism, would be of great interest. Finally, I believe that the methods utilized in my study could be applied in the time periods following 1955. If the same adaptations were being undertaken during a time of popularity, then this would suggest success; whereas, if different doctrines were being discussed, or there was very little change doctrinally, this may suggest that adaptation is not necessary in boom times, but only during perceived “low points” in historical record. Further research is imperative, not only for the advancement of historical and Buddhological record, but especially in times of religious essentialization and rising racial tensions.
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