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Dynamics and Stability in the Encounters between Asian Buddhists and European Christians

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ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is to theorize broadly about how cultural encounters between Asian Buddhists and European Christians spurred various efforts to demarcate, systematize, and stabilize religious traditions. It focuses on the dynamics seen in Buddhist responses to contact situations from the sixteenth century onwards in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and Japan in order to map out some patterns of interaction among these communities. Theories of cultural imitation and independence do not suffice to theorize interreligious encounters in these cases. Using select examples, this paper will contend that Asian Buddhists often responded to various kinds of European interventions by redefining and reimagining the Buddhist tradition in new ways in order to argue for its continued validity and to secure its stability in the face of external encounters and pressures.

KEY WORDS Buddhism, Missions, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Japan, Polemics, Colonialism

Throughout the history of Buddhism in Asia, Buddhist traditions of practice, thought, and material culture have interacted with competing traditions found in shared cultural locales. Scholars have for many years researched and argued about the mutual influences and polemics existing between Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism in India; Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism in China and Korea; Buddhism and Shinto in Japan; as well as Buddhism, Brahmanism, and Animist traditions in Southeast Asian lands. To some degree, any analysis of the interactions of broadly conceived, reified religious traditions is doomed to overlook the countless cultural particularities and intra-religious diversity that close

scholarly investigations of religious traditions at specific times and places will inevitably turn up. There is, nevertheless, theoretical value in analyzing religious contacts and exchanges between religious traditions at the macro level. The present essay examines interreligious contacts between Asian Buddhists and European Christians during periods of western incursions in Asian lands between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. It presents an attempt to theorize in broad terms about how the cultural encounters between Buddhists and Christians spurred various efforts to demarcate, systematize, and stabilize religious traditions. At the same time, it seeks to utilize more dynamic concepts to account for some notable historical changes in the religion, while departing from common scholarly explanations that attribute external "influences" as causal factors.

In other words, the main purpose behind this essay is to theorize about the interreligious contacts between Buddhists and Christians during an important period in the historical development of both traditions. Within this focus on contact, greater attention will be given to the dynamic and stabilizing effects that these encounters had upon Buddhism in different Asian lands. As long as we keep in mind that the direction of influence went both ways between Buddhists and Christians, and that it was most certainly *not* the case that only the Western agents of colonizing empires possessed the agency to introduce dynamic changes within Asian societies, it is possible to direct our attention to what Buddhists did in response to their interactions with European Christians in the centuries leading up to and including modernity. This focus on the encounters and entanglements of religions from the sixteenth to the twentieth century will intentionally avoid relying on a model of Buddhist imitations of cultural influences from the West. In other words, although we will explore Buddhist responses

to interactions with European Christians, this does not mean that the latter were solely responsible for spurring or shaping them. Buddhists and Christians all had roles to play in contact situations, and they all were affected by those interactions.

Given the substantial and growing scholarship on the development of modern Buddhism, there are numerous and largely tacit assumptions made about how encounters with European Christians introduced far-reaching changes into Buddhist thought and practice from the sixteenth century onwards. This essay will briefly explore the historical conditions of these interreligious contacts before turning to a theoretical examination of the dynamics and stability in Buddhist traditions that resulted from these encounters. Information taken from various contacts made between Buddhists and Christians in different times and places will permit us to develop certain models that can assist us in exploring the specifics of particular case studies without necessarily explaining or describing all of their specifics. Our goal is to develop a theoretically informed approach to investigating how interreligious contacts could play a role in introducing new strategies for altering and stabilizing Buddhist traditions in the face of external challenges to their legitimacy. Such an approach will also enable us to move beyond the well-worn debates on whether external influences or local agency should be credited with spurring religious changes in modern Buddhism.

I. Historical Encounters between Buddhists and Christians

Although there is historical evidence suggesting that encounters between Buddhists and Christians took place in earlier centuries around the

Mediterranean and in parts of India and China, these groups had more frequent and sustained contacts during the European colonial expansion into Asia starting from the sixteenth century. European powers including the Portuguese, Dutch, British, and French pursued various paths to obtain wealth and influence by maintaining a colonial presence in Asian lands. A great deal of diversity existed when it came to the structures of colonial power and the responses of the colonizers and the colonized to their encounters in different times and places. Nevertheless, European colonialism in Asia generally sought to conquer and control other people's lands and goods, which led not only to the extraction of wealth from those territories but also the complex restructuring of economies and cultures where colonial power was exercised (Loomba 2005, 8–9). The aspects of restructuring culture that are most relevant here are the ways that people transformed Buddhist traditions in conjunction with contacts made with Christian ones. Although such contacts were usually forced upon Buddhists by European powers who entered Asian lands, to attribute the resulting religious changes to an abstract model of "influence" and "imitation" fails to consider how Buddhists could, in the words of the historian Frederick Cooper, pragmatically "build lives within the crevices of colonial power, deflecting, appropriating, or reinterpreting the teachings and preachings thrust upon them" (Cooper 2005, 16). Degrees of Buddhist "agency" must therefore be qualified by the conditions of European intrusions and interventions into their homelands.

Even where European colonial and imperial interventions were driven by economic and political considerations, religious interests were also almost invariably at work. European states actively encouraged and supported Christian missionary efforts, as in the case of the Portuguese promotion of the Church in Asian lands, or alternatively permitted missionizing by their countrymen to take place in the lands they controlled, like the British

throughout their empire. Missionary efforts could be unevenly practiced and could meet with different levels of success or failure. Different Christian organizations—both Catholic and Protestant—were involved in missionizing to Asian Buddhists. Yet these diverse instances of religious outreach and contact made by European Christians spurred interreligious contacts with Asian Buddhists and introduced various dynamics in the conceptions and expressions of Buddhism in recent centuries. Different methods used to understand and convert Asian Buddhists drew clearer distinctions between religious traditions and intensified their expressions. Before considering the Buddhist responses to interreligious encounters, we should first review the history of these encounters.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, missionaries, soldiers, and chroniclers from Portugal—or at least sponsored by the Portuguese Crown—traveled across Asia to further the imperial ambitions of their king, the universal ambitions of their Church, and their individual ambitions for gaining wealth and social status (Berkwitz 2017, 38). In these contexts, the Portuguese (including Europeans who worked in Asia under Portuguese patronage—the *Padroado*—for religious activities) actually began the process of encountering and describing Buddhism in Asian lands from Sri Lanka to Japan. Following Vasco da Gama's discovery of a sea route to India in the final years of the fifteenth century, Portuguese ships travelled further east in the sixteenth century to "discover" new lands and new goods for commercial trade. Portugal's empire in Asia was limited largely to forts and factories in urban areas along the coasts, with important bases in Goa, Colombo, Malacca, Macão, and Nagasaki, forming a rough outline of its *Estado da Ìndia*. Other informal Portuguese settlements served to fill in the Asian seaborne empire. The *Estado da Ìndia* had the purpose of providing protected havens, acquired through conquest or forceful persuasion, from which maritime trade and communications could be

dominated and controlled (Disney 2009, 146). Missionaries associated with the Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian, and Jesuit orders in the Catholic Church soon followed the sailors and soldiers who established outposts for the Portuguese Crown in several Asian port cities. Supported by other Portuguese agents, these missionaries undertook efforts to spread the gospel of the "true faith" of Christianity to the "heathens" and "infidels" who lived in Asian lands. This kind of missionary rhetoric combined with other forms of evangelism to bring about dynamic responses by Buddhists in premodern Sri Lanka, China, and Japan to interreligious contacts. These responses could run the gamut from showing courtesy and a willingness to engage in dialogue with Christian missionaries, to polite distrust and even an eagerness to directly confront the missionaries in debates to demonstrate the superiority of Buddhism (Harris 2012, 277).

We can obtain a sense of what these early Portuguese interventions in Asia were like based on the writings of letters and books by the clerics and civil servants themselves. Although these writings were chiefly directed to other Christian clergy and officials connected with the *Padroado*, their discourse provides insights into the actions and attitudes of Portuguese-sponsored missionaries in early modern Asia. Clergy such as Luís Frois (1532–97), Alesandro Valignano (1539–1606), and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) were among the authors who sought to learn about the Buddhist religious customs and beliefs of the native populations where they resided. While residing in Japan and China, these authors engaged local informants about the traditional religions, making studies of them to varying degrees. For example, the Jesuit Frois studied the *Lotus Sūtra* for two hours a day over the course of an entire year under the guidance of a former Buddhist abbot, and was able to provide his superior Valignano with additional information about the "inner" doctrines of the Buddhist religion (App 2012, 61). Valignano also sought out information directly from Japanese

informants about Buddhism in an effort to better understand its teachings so that he may more effectively dispute them in his lectures and writings to the Japanese. Similarly, in China, the Italian Jesuit Ricci engaged Chinese interlocutors to learn about what their native traditions taught about God, creation, and the human soul, among other topics relevant to his efforts to promote the Christian religion. Around the turn of the seventeenth century, Ricci composed and published a major tract in Chinese called *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, in which he created an imaginary debate between a western scholar and a Chinese scholar. Based in part on arguments that arose in a debate between Ricci and a leading Buddhist monk named San Huai, this text served to show how the Christian Gospel was consistent with Confucian teachings and superior to supposedly erroneous Buddhist ones (Ricci 2016, 4–5).

A consistent theme among the writings of early missionaries in Buddhist Asia is that although there may be some surface resemblances between Christianity and Buddhism, they should in no way be seen as equivalent or interchangeable. Learning about Buddhism, whether from informants or texts, made it possible for Europeans to detect certain similarities between the “true faith” of the Church and the vaguely “diabolical” Asian one of the Buddha. For his part, Valignano argued that any such similarities between Buddhism and Christianity should be disregarded, since the former is akin to darkness while the latter represents the light (Berkwitz 2017, 47). Although some Portuguese-sponsored authors deduced that Buddhism must have been a corrupted form of the “true faith” spread to Asia much earlier, the consistent message in the writings of the missionaries and the civil servants is that one should not confuse false teachings and “brutish” rites for Catholic teachings and rites.

Attempts to demarcate the one “true” religion from “false” ones like Buddhism were frequently undertaken by the Portuguese in Asia. This

could be done rhetorically and even by colonial dictates. For example, writing in the 1630s, the Franciscan Paulo da Trindade described examples of both kinds of efforts. In recounting a famous dispute by Fr. João de Vila de Conde with several Buddhist monks in the audience of the chief king of Sri Lanka, the friar is depicted as having posed numerous questions about the natures of God, paradise, angels, and sin in a debate over the truth of Christian versus Gentile Law. The reader is told that even the most learned of the monks were unable to answer the friar's questions, but were confused and ashamed for not being able to defend the Law they professed (Trindade 1967, 30–31). Trindade also contended that the agents of the Portuguese Crown should expel from its territories the sorcerers, drummers, chief monks, masters of "gentile ceremonies," and preachers who work to foment paganism by inducing the inhabitants of Sri Lanka to perform sacrifices to the Devil and turning new Christians back to their old idolatries and superstitions (Trindade 1967, 167). Such a call echoed the proclamation of the Council of Goa in 1567 to destroy all heathen temples and religious literature in the *Estado da Índia*, and to expel non-Christian priests from its territories. Although this was the official policy of the *Padroado*, it was only variously enforced depending on the degree of power held by Portuguese authorities.

Portuguese imperialism in Buddhist Asia was weakened in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was largely replaced by other European powers that finally caught up with and surpassed Portuguese naval and military technologies. These included the Dutch, who seized control in Sri Lanka for about a century and a half, but otherwise did not have much interaction with Buddhists as a colonizing power. The interreligious contacts made by the British and French with Buddhists in later centuries were at times equally disruptive as their predecessors, and they also involved efforts to define and demarcate religious difference in

Asian lands. British colonialism in Buddhist Asia was arguably focused more heavily in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, as they were located near India, the "Jewel in the Crown" of the British Empire. It also maintained a substantial presence in Hong Kong and Singapore. The British intervention in Asia took place from roughly the early eighteenth century up to the middle of the twentieth century. Although the imperial interests of the British were more commercial than religious in nature, there were still attempts by evangelical Christian groups to convince Buddhists to give up their religion. In Sri Lanka, Wesleyans and other Protestant missionaries believed that Buddhism should be destroyed to save people's souls from an eternity of suffering in hell (Harris 2012, 280). Consequently, the horror they felt from witnessing "idolatrous" Buddhist practices motivated many British missionaries to condemn the local religion in strident terms. Other encounters with Asian Buddhists took place as the empire spread eastwards to bring what the British deemed as "civilization" and trade to those lands.

The British government, however, did not prioritize Christian missions in its interventions into Asian lands. Indeed, the East India Company, which initially developed the British presence in and around India, was reluctant to upset the cultural status quo for fear of causing harmful effects on trade. Consequently, many British civil servants sought to acquire knowledge of local cultures, languages, and traditions, including religious ones, so as to govern more effectively as a colonial power. This included investigating what came to be called "Buddhism" in British "Ceylon" and "Burma," to use their colonial-era names. Notable western scholars of Buddhism in the nineteenth century, such as T.W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922), utilized local texts and informants to decipher the basis for religious belief and practice in British-controlled territories like Ceylon. In some cases, the knowledge they acquired about Buddhism from textual sources were then used to critique what actual Buddhists did and said, highlighting objectionable

practices as “idolatry” to help advance missionary goals of conversion to Christianity (Harris 2006, 65). In other cases, the “pure” Buddhism as depicted in ancient Buddhist text sources was both celebrated for its commendable ethical outlook and used to denigrate the contemporary practices of Buddhists (Harris 2006, 134–137). This contrast drawn between an ideal textual Buddhism and the allegedly degenerate forms of the religion as practiced across Asian lands served missionary interests to replace a moribund Buddhist religion with a thriving Christian one, while it also spurred Buddhists to adopt a more textually based version of their own religion (Almond 1988, 40).

Positive appraisals of Buddhist texts by some Western scholars, in turn, encouraged local Buddhists to present and defend their traditions increasingly in terms of the ancient texts that were valued and validated by colonial agents. Scholarly preferences for older, supposedly more authentic scriptures drew greater interest and attention toward canonical works, while non-canonical and vernacular works were often treated as less critical for the self-presentation of the tradition. Meanwhile, discussions and debates with European Christians about the subject of “religion” served to promote a reified, ideological entity called “Buddhism” that could be called upon to respond to the questions and critiques offered by Christians (Scott 1996, 12). Whether British scholars took a generally negative or a positive attitude toward Buddhism, their research had inherent value not only to those colonial agents who sought to strengthen their control over the local populations, but also to local Buddhists who looked for ways to assert the value of their own tradition in the face of religious polemics and a secularizing state that worked to marginalize the one-time centrality of religious institutions in Buddhist societies.

Meanwhile, the French exercised their colonial interests in the other side of the Southeast Asian peninsula, maintaining degrees of authority

in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam—"Indochine française"—between the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Equally invested in introducing Catholicism and *la civilisation* into Buddhist lands, the French were also concerned with reinforcing their own political presence in the shadow of Thai, British, and Chinese authorities in neighboring lands. French officials generally sought not to supplant Buddhist institutions but rather to strengthen them in order to protect their territories from the encroachments of neighboring powers. As a result, French scholars founded scholarly institutions such as L'École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) to pursue research into the history and literature of Buddhist cultures, and even to train local Buddhist monks to become more knowledgeable about their textual traditions. One instance of the latter can be seen in the establishment of a Pāli language school—*École de Pali*—in Phnom Penh in 1914 for the sake of subverting the dominance of Thai monastic education in the region and enhancing the study of Buddhism throughout its colonial Southeast Asian territories (Ladwig 2017, 279). The history of colonial French encounters with Buddhists illustrates the impossibility of separating the goals of researching and promoting Buddhism in French Indochina with those of developing overseas markets that would strengthen France's economic and political power in the wider world.

French missionary interests in Southeast Asia were equally present and should not be overlooked either. After all it was French missionaries who made the initial incursions into "Indochina," albeit under Portuguese sponsorship. Alexandre de Rhodes (1591–1660) was one of these early French missionaries who lived and worked to convert a largely Buddhist population in the kingdom of Tonkin. Like many missionaries in seventeenth-century Asia, Rhodes was dismissive of Buddhism. He concluded that the Vietnamese accepted the "superstitions" of China and the "idolatry" of India, leading them to make offerings to "false gods" in "foul temples"

(Rhodes 1999, 66). Subsequently, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, French missionaries began traveling to and working in French Indochina under the auspices of the French crown. By the late nineteenth century, French missionaries established themselves as the *avant garde* of French efforts to introduce "civilization" into Vietnamese and Khmer lands. And despite the growing anticlericalism of Freemasons and others in France that sought to rein in Catholic missions abroad, the establishment of schools, hospitals, orphanages, and other ostensibly humanitarian efforts in French Indochina largely came from Catholic missions (Daughton 2006, 86–88). The missionary presence of the French in the Buddhist lands of the Vietnamese, Khmer, and Lao peoples was another dynamic effect that stimulated changes in local traditions that were not always made in imitation of European habits.

The histories of encounters between European Christians and Asian Buddhists from the sixteenth century onwards are too varied and detailed to be treated in any sort of comprehensive fashion here. Instead, this general outline serves to sketch the contours in which we may recount more specifically the occasions and results of interreligious contacts between these groups. European visitors to Asian lands spurred dynamic changes in the Buddhist religion, while also stimulating attempts by Buddhists to crystalize these traditions into more resilient and defensible forms. Whether Asian Buddhists were reacting to challenges from hostile missionaries or to the secularizing space of a colonial civil society, they took steps to define and demarcate their traditions from western ones in order to lend greater stability to their religious and cultural identities. The dynamics of interreligious contacts with Europeans compelled Asian Buddhists to make efforts to protect and preserve their traditions in the face of challenges made to their claims to authority and truth.

II. Dynamics of Demarcating Buddhism

Scholarly assessments of the dynamics between Buddhists and Christians from the sixteenth century onward usually emphasize how the impact and influence of Christian missions introduced far-reaching changes into Buddhism across Asian lands. While some scholars have shown that Buddhists could develop and revive their religious traditions without being reliant on or pushed by Europeans (e.g. Blackburn 2010), it is still common for scholars to attribute Buddhist modernity to Western Christian influences. The basic premise behind this view is that the heavier the influence of European colonialism in a particular territory, the more substantial the impact on local Buddhist traditions. While there is some logic to such a stance, it also overemphasizes the role of Europeans and underestimates the ability of Asians to make innovations to their religion on their own terms and in their own ways. In order to fairly evaluate how intercultural interactions led to dynamic transformations of Buddhist traditions (as well as Christian ones), we must be careful to note how, despite the presence of Christian missionaries, soldiers, and civil servants in Asian lands, Buddhists themselves were largely responsible for developing their traditions by way of defining and enacting them in both new and old ways.

In one of the more influential approaches to assessing these interreligious contacts, numerous scholars have followed the lead of the anthropologist Gananath Obeysekere in positing and looking for the presence of “Protestant Buddhism” in colonized lands. First coined in 1970 by Obeyesekere, Protestant Buddhism was held to signify a markedly new form of Buddhism that arose in Sri Lanka in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under the influence of British missionaries. It is intended to carry a double meaning, referring to forms of Buddhism that adopted the religious values and Victorian sensibilities of Protestant Christians

while also *protesting* against the presence of the British missionaries and colonizers on the island. It was, in other words, both modernistic and nationalistic, seeking to appropriate the privileges assigned to a middle class educated in missionary schools, while aspiring to establish the foundation for an independent nation fit to govern itself and preserve its local religious and cultural traditions in the process. For Obeyesekere, Protestant Buddhism is a conspicuous example of modern religious change in Sri Lanka, and one that undercuts the traditional role of Buddhist monks by holding that responsibility of every individual Buddhist to care for the welfare of Buddhism and to strive to attain liberation for oneself (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988, 7).

The implicit dynamics of Protestant Buddhism, moreover, assume that through the direct influence of British missionaries and educators, Sri Lankan Buddhists were led to reinterpret their religion along rational and egalitarian values. Rituals in large part become devalued as the traces of older superstitions, while ethical practice and knowledge of scripture are seen to form the basis of a more authentic version of tradition. This is accompanied by a new emphasis on internalized and individualized Buddhist practice, wherein laypersons are expected to permeate their daily lives with the religion and make Buddhism permeate their society as a whole (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988, 216). The attractiveness of such a theory is not surprising. The appearance of religious changes in Buddhist societies colonized by European Christians is thereby given a neat historical explanation. Namely, the presence of missionaries and their anti-Buddhist discourse shamed and compelled Asian Buddhists to mimic the religious values and practices of their colonial overlords. Scholars who were looking to document changes in Buddhist traditions could point to the presence of European Christians as the spark that led directly to their modern transformations. And a number of scholars followed suit by

producing studies of Protestant Buddhism in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the Buddhist world.

Nevertheless, some scholars began to question the explanatory power of this concept. In 1991, John Holt wrote a review essay of Gombrich and Obeyesekere's *Buddhism Transformed,* in which he called into question why a heuristic category had become reified into a historical phenomenon that could be studied empirically. Holt also pointed out that the "Protestant Buddhism" of Sri Lankan Buddhist laypersons continued to emphasize ritual activities, religious holidays, and the adoption of certain monastic practices, none of which were particularly Protestant in nature (Holt 1991, 308–309). Subsequently, other scholars have challenged the terms by which Protestant Buddhism is deployed in research. Anne Blackburn, for example, pointed out how the prestige awarded to the Pāli language and the focus on the "scriptures" of the Buddhist Canon (*Tipiṭaka*) actually started prior to the intervention of scripturally-minded Western Orientalists (Blackburn 2001, 200–201). This important realization means that when Sri Lankan Buddhists were giving renewed attention to their Pāli canonical texts in the eighteenth century, they were not merely imitating Protestant Christians and their stress on the guidance of scriptural texts. More generally, Buddhist Studies scholars in the twenty-first century have come to recognize that the tropes of "Protestant Buddhism" may actually inhibit the dynamic continuities and changes at work when Buddhists exercised their own agency to introduce religious changes distinct from the historical influences of colonial power (Turner 2014, 6–7).

One might argue, however, that the debate over "Protestant Buddhism" has been too narrowly focused on the issue of local agency and colonial resistance, while also exaggerating the theoretical implications of Obeyesekere's descriptive category. The backlash to "Protestant Buddhism" is not unwarranted, since the term has taken on a life of its own and is

conducive to historical misunderstandings. Nevertheless, this debate has offered scholars only two real options for the analysis of modern religious change and exchange—imitation or independence. The former sees Buddhists as simply reenacting and adopting what they saw European Christians doing and saying. The latter views Buddhists as enjoying a cultural autonomy that made colonialism just a minor irritant in a broader trajectory of religious self-determination. If scholars who employ the idea of Protestant Buddhism can be faulted for implying that Buddhists could only imitate the practice and discourse of European Christians, the critics of Protestant Buddhism can also be faulted for downplaying or even ignoring the historical and cultural effects of colonialism in Buddhist lands.

Given these limitations in much of the scholarship on modern Buddhism, it makes sense to direct our attention to the discursive dynamics behind these moments of Buddhist and Christian intercultural interaction. Phrased differently, we should recall that representations of religious change are actually discursive representations that employ rhetorical devices and tropes to construct both change and continuity within the bounds of traditions. While some scholars have interpreted these historical interactions as the causes behind religious imitation, we would do better to take note of how these interactions could spur both dynamism and stability in the demarcation and crystallization of Buddhist identity vis-à-vis Christian ones. Rather than trying to map the directions of religious influence or isolate their origins, we would do well to take a new approach that sets aside reified notions of religious traditions and attends to the dynamic practices associated with religious encounters in their own right.

It is appropriate to stress that Asian Buddhists responded to their encounters with European Christians in different ways out of their various interests and concerns. There was—and is—no singular method or style utilized by all Asian Buddhists to make sense of and react to the introduction

of European Christianity in their lands. However, one important move that many Asian Buddhists made was to discursively differentiate and define expressions of Christianity as "other" or "foreign" to Buddhism. These attempts were the flip side of similar efforts by missionaries to define Buddhist traditions as corrupt or deviant expressions of what counted for them as the "true faith." Challenges made by Christian missionaries to define and defend Buddhist beliefs and practices eventually led to a more defensive posture on the part of Buddhist leaders (Malalgoda 1976, 213–214). In these circumstances, it was practically inevitable that one of the important dynamics in these interreligious interactions would be a heightened sense of religious identity. These moments were obviously not the first time that Buddhists sought to distinguish their traditions of thought, practice, and texts from those found in other religious traditions. Disputes with Hindus, Jains, Daoists, and Confucianists, among others, including localized indigenous traditions, were plentiful in the history of Buddhism across Asia. However, polemical exchanges with Christians, timed with the developments of printing and literacy in early modern Asia, set the stage for a more widespread and sharply defined establishment of Buddhist identity for both elite monastics and ordinary adherents of the Buddha's teachings.

An early example of polemical attempts to define adherence to the Buddha's *sāsana* (i.e. the teachings and institutions associated with the Buddha) appears in an early seventeenth-century work by a layman named Alagiyavanna Mukaveṭi (1552–ca. 1625?). The poet Alagiyavanna was a direct witness to the expansion of Portuguese colonialism in early seventeenth-century Sri Lanka. Following the fall of the Sītāvaka kingdom in 1594, the Portuguese army came to control the lowland districts around the island, displacing Alagiyavanna from his position as a court poet and magistrate. At the same time, Catholic missionaries in the early

seventeenth century engaged in vigorous efforts to educate and convert people to the "truth" of their "holy faith." Converts were encouraged, if not required, to renounce their former Buddhist beliefs and practices as "false," "superstitious," and "idolatrous" before being permitted to embrace the "true" religion of Catholic Christianity. Seeking evidence of a genuine inner transformation that exclusively belongs to that of the Church, Portuguese missionaries refused to tolerate the traditional multi-religious synthesis of external religious practice in Sri Lanka (Strathern 2007, 87). Whereas it had been customary to venerate the Buddha and Hindu deities without making much formal distinction between different religions, the new religious order insisted on exclusive adherence to the Christian faith.

In this turbulent colonial context marked by violence and religious polemics, Alagiyavanna composed a work called *Subhāṣitaya* (Well-Spoken Words) to admonish his Sinhala-speaking audience to hold fast to moral standards and the teachings of the Buddha. The work stands out for its pointed criticism of immoral persons and its direct calls to reject (and not worship) the gods found in other traditions. Alagiyavanna's *Subhāṣitaya* explains that those who reject the Buddha's Dharma do so in favor of worshipping other gods and following the conventions of other ritual systems. Such conduct is, for the poet, further evidence of the sway of ignorance found in early modern Sri Lanka. The failings of these so-called "false views" are specifically denounced in the text.

> Forsaking the refuge of the Great Sage, whose feet rest upon the heads of all gods and persons,
> And venerating other gods [instead], those beings,
> Who guard their false views for the sake of pure liberation,
> Are like those who struggle to draw water from the *dimbula* flower (Berkwitz 2013, 150–151).

This contrast drawn between the greatness of the Buddha, or "Great Sage," and the ineffectiveness of the "other gods" revolves around the issue of who can assist people in attaining liberation. Alagiyavanna asserted that the worship of other beings besides the Buddha is futile. In doing so, he also articulated a new, more exclusive way of defining the Buddhist tradition over against others.

In *Subhāṣitaya*, Alagiyavanna presented a substantive notion of "Buddhism" as a tradition of rites and beliefs associated with the Buddha as opposed to those linked with other deities. Long before the "invention" of Buddhism as a definable "world religion" alongside other so-called religious traditions such as Christianity, Hinduism, and others, the Sinhala poet articulated a Buddhist identity that rivaled and should not be harmonized with other religious practices and beliefs.

> Not accepting the conventions of the Buddha, who is clear and very pure,
> The beings of the world, having deficient knowledge and accepting
> various false views,
> Will come to that City of Liberation,
> Whenever a blind man can see the feet of a fish in the sky
> (Berkwitz 2013, 155).

These so-called "conventions of the Buddha" (*muniňdu samaya*) express a notion of religious identity that is constructed in opposition to other, "incorrect" religious forms. The ninth verse of the work similarly speaks of the "conventions of the King of the Dharma" (*dahaṁ raja samaya*). This coupling of terms for the Buddha and *samaya* is significant, given that a portion of the late sixteenth-century Sinhala text called *Alakeśvarayuddhaya* (Battle of Alakeśvara) that was written by a Christian author mentions adherence to *jesus kristu dēvasamaya*, or "the divine religion of Jesus

Christ" (Strathern 2007, 135). The use of the same term, *samaya*, to connote a religious system that is distinct and superior to others is noteworthy.

Indeed, Alagiyavanna's description of the *samaya* (i.e. "conventions" or "religion") of the Buddha thus represents what may be one of the first expressions of an exclusive notion of Buddhism found in Sinhala writing. The term emerges out of a comparative framework, reflecting a way of talking about "Buddhism" that presupposes the existence of other religious systems, such as those introduced and promoted by Catholic missionaries. Alagiyavanna seems to be suggesting that a person with "correct" views will embrace the Buddha's *samaya*, thereby establishing an affiliation and adherence to the Buddha's thought and practice. The *samaya* of the Buddha is thus comparable—albeit superior, in Alagiyavanna's view—to the beliefs and customs of other religious systems. When expressed in the context of a moral struggle over truth and who may claim to possess it, the depiction of a *samaya* connected with the Buddha comes to reflect a conception of "religion" that is not far removed from a modern understanding of the term. Its development and deployment in the early seventeenth century was a direct result of the Christian presence on the island and the religious polemics that were introduced.

What makes the *Subhāṣitaya* significant here is that it demonstrates how the intervention of Portuguese-sponsored Catholic missionaries can be linked to the dynamic development of a more self-conscious religious identity. In the early seventeenth century, when Portuguese soldiers and missionaries sought to bring more lands and people under their control, Alagiyavanna's poetry began to invoke more moralistic concerns and exclusivist depictions of religious identity. Followers of the Buddha began to be demarcated more clearly from those followers of "other gods." This increased focus on moral and religious self-awareness effectively invented and transformed the very idea of Buddhism in early modern Sri Lanka.

Alagiyavanna made an early contribution to this process, but it would take repeated interventions by other Buddhists coming into contact situations with other religions—mainly Christianity—before a more pervasive and distinct sense of "Buddhist" and "Buddhism" would take root in Sri Lanka.

Later in the nineteenth century, other Sri Lankan Buddhists—both monastic and lay—engaged in practices to defend and demarcate Buddhism from antagonistic Christian missionaries. British colonial control of Sri Lanka permitted evangelical missionary groups such as the Baptists and Wesleyans to enter the island and carry out their various programs with an eye toward converting the local populace to Christianity. Missionaries promoted the virtues of Christianity while denigrating Buddhism in Christian schools, public preaching, and printed tracts (Malalgoda 1976, 193–205; Harris 2012, 290–295). They attacked Buddhism for its "superstitions," "idolatry," and "errors," while contrasting the alleged "truth" of Christian scripture with the falsity of Buddhist texts. In some ways, these encounters mirrored those that took place between Buddhists and Portuguese missionaries two centuries earlier. However, the British missionaries investigated Buddhist texts more closely with the aim of repudiating their teachings more effectively. Missionary scholars such as Daniel Gogerly (1792–1862) and Robert Spence Hardy (1803–1868) studied Pāli and Sinhala in order to access the Buddhist texts that they assumed had shaped the beliefs and faith of Sri Lankan Buddhists. Their written texts, published by missionary printing presses, faulted Buddhism for rejecting the idea of a Creator God and for upholding an immoral goal of annihilation (Harris 2006, 69–73). Although such Christian critiques of Buddhist teachings could frequently contain distortions and misinterpretations, the fact that they were based on direct references to Buddhist texts made it necessary for Buddhists to defend their traditions and, in the process, demarcate them from others.

One such response to nineteenth-century Christian polemics in Sri Lanka was the institution of a large project to edit the Pāli texts contained within the *Tipiṭaka* (“Three Baskets,” or the Theravāda Buddhist scriptural canon). Leading monks, including Hikkaḍuvē Śrī Sumaṅgala (1827–1911), converged at an editorial council in the town of Pelmadulla, where they began sifting through various manuscript copies of Pāli texts and their Sinhala commentaries and glossaries to produce authoritative versions of the Vinaya monastic code of writings (Blackburn 2010, 4–5). The considerable amounts of time and effort invested in this project make sense in light of the anti-Buddhist writings published by missionary scholars such as Gogerly and Spence Hardy that preceded this response. Interreligious debates placed additional emphasis on the quotation and critical evaluation of Pāli texts, which in turn made Sri Lankan Buddhists especially keen to defend the integrity of their religious writings and to produce an authoritative set of texts with which to do so (Blackburn 2010, 6). Although the Pelmadulla council did not complete its original goal of producing a new, complete edition of the Pāli Canon, the organized effort does signal to us how encounters with British missionaries helped to generate more sharply defined religious identities and enhanced the importance of written Pāli scriptures in a colonial setting. Beginning around the nineteenth century, Buddhists across Asia began to depend more on their foundational scriptural texts for demarcating their tradition and their own identities as adherents. Whereas in earlier centuries, these Pāli texts were frequently accessed indirectly through commentarial and narrative texts as well as the preaching by monks in the vernacular languages, Buddhists in the modern period came to view that the direct access to their tradition’s most ancient and authoritative texts was necessary for defining who they were and what they believed.

Elsewhere, in early twentieth-century Cambodia, Buddhist monks also began to place a new premium on the study of the *Tipiṭaka*. This "scripturalist" orientation, whereby the oldest Pāli texts are directly used to define and authorize correct Buddhist conduct, became a dominant paradigm for modern Buddhist reform in Southeast Asia. A good number of Cambodian monks had been influenced by the Buddhist reforms in nearby Thailand, where under King Mongkut's nineteenth-century initiatives, Thai Buddhist monks were being encouraged to consult Pāli texts for knowledge about their religion. Cambodian monks who traveled to Thailand to study were exposed to the reformist ideas and brought them back to their own country. The Cambodian king imported and supported the reformed Siamese Thammayut monastic order in his court, which had the effect of elevating concerns for establishing strict adherence to the words of the Buddha himself, and for purifying Buddhist practice of what were seen as superstitious, magical, and unorthodox accretions of the past (Thompson 2006, 134–135). And later, when French colonial interests expanded in Indochina, Buddhist encounters with the French presence led many Cambodians to resort to the Pāli scriptures as a way of defining what constitutes the truths of Buddhism. In some cases, French colonial control over Cambodia's society and politics caused some Buddhist intellectuals to write critically about the degeneration of morality in their country as well as the need for practicing the Buddha's Dhamma to counter the "un-Dhammic" values and actions that they believed had become pervasive (Hansen 2007, 46). Although French officials tended to maintain a great distance from French missionaries in Indochina, both groups were often blamed for introducing deleterious changes into the local culture.

However, French scholars in early twentieth-century Cambodia took concrete steps to assist local Buddhists in their efforts to reform and purify their religion. Scholars associated with École française d'Extrême-

Orient (EFEO), such as Louis Finot and Georges Coedés, worked to catalog manuscripts in Cambodian temple libraries and to cast a stronger focus on the importance of Buddhist texts for determining “correct” practice and interpretation. The interest of the French in Cambodian Buddhist literature reinforced the scripturalist orientation of monks who were trained in Bangkok. Taken together, the Orientalist preferences of the French and the reformist ideas of modernist monks coalesced around promoting the interpretation and study of the monastic rules and conduct found in Vinaya texts (Hansen 2007, 82–83). Attention to texts on monastic discipline supported efforts to purify the Sangha in Cambodia. Buddhist reforms supported by French officials and scholars in Cambodia resembled those advocated by the Thai Thammayut sect, but were actually motivated to marginalize Siamese influences over the Cambodian Sangha (Thompson 2006, 135). Scholars like Finot, Coedés, and Suzanne Karpelès (c. 1890–1969) directed their attention to canonical Pāli texts and took concrete steps to develop Buddhist education in Cambodia. The founding of a Pāli school and the Buddhist Institute, as well as the dissemination of European scholarly methods, would help to shape the development of modern Buddhist thought and values in twentieth-century Cambodia. Some of the new Mahanikay’s leading monks, such as Chuon Nath (1883–1969) and Huot That (1891–1975?), studied with Finot and became professors at the Pāli school, where they were able to write and edit books related to a reformed monastic discipline.

These examples from Sri Lanka and Cambodia give some indication of how interreligious and intercultural encounters between Asian Buddhists and European Christians motivated efforts to demarcate the boundaries of Buddhist traditions. Distinguishing Buddhism more clearly from other religions, and relying on ancient texts to do so were common patterns of Buddhist responses to colonialism and Christianity across Asia. These

dynamics could involve responses to both antagonistic and collaborative encounters between parties. Whether intentional or not, interreligious contacts in early modern and modern Asia contributed to a sharper understanding of what Buddhism is and how it should be practiced. The result of such contacts frequently led to the dynamic re-imagining of what "Buddhism" represents and includes as both an idea and a social fact. Interreligious encounters frequently led Buddhists to alter their religion on their own terms but in dialogue with the values and views of European Christians.

III. Crystallizing Buddhism in Colonial Asia

The previous section described how various interreligious contacts between Asian Buddhists and European Christians spurred some dynamic changes in how "Buddhism" was conceptualized and practiced in Asia from the sixteenth century onward. These encounters introduced new pressures into Buddhist communities, challenging the bases for the understanding of tradition—in terms of both thought and practice—and provoking responses to define and defend it. The dynamics of modernity, which include processes of 1) disembedding social relations from primarily local contexts and interactions and 2) being forced to reflexively measure tradition against other sources of knowledge that are external to itself, have accelerated in recent decades but began much earlier (Giddens 1990, 21–22, 36–38). Contacts with European missionaries, civil servants, and scholars made it possible, if not inevitable, for Buddhists to weigh alternative, trans-local claims about reality and knowledge that were introduced from outside of local settings. These dynamics would lead Buddhists in different parts of

Asia to respond by seeking to stabilize and maintain their traditions in the face of challenges to their primacy and validity.

While some Buddhists did embrace the claims of European Christians through the adoption of foreign faiths or epistemological frameworks, the dynamics of interreligious contacts also inspired the crystallization and "densification" of Buddhist identities in early-modern and modern times. Efforts to distinguish the Buddha's teachings and institutions from rival ones have reinforced what counts as "Buddhist" in the modern world. Early examples where we see traces of the crystallization of what would eventually be called "Buddhism" include the later writings of Alagiyavanna (as discussed above), wherein he apparently coined the terms "dahaṁ raja samaya" and "muniňdu samaya" to refer to the "conventions/tradition" of the Buddha in contrast to the "false views" associated with worshipping other gods (Berkwitz 2013, 154–155). His poetic work *Subhāṣitaya* explicitly argues, "there is just one Noble Being who is renowned for protecting the world with his compassion," which means that no other beings are comparable to the Buddha or are worthy of as much veneration (Munidasa 2001, v. 94). Exclusive claims on behalf of the Buddha were rare in Sri Lanka prior to the early seventeenth century, but the presence of assertive missionaries who made similar claims to possessing exclusive religious truths helped to generate more distinct claims about the superiority of the Buddhist tradition.

Two examples of the crystallization of Buddhist identities will be illustrated below by discussions of the Japanese Christian apostate Fukan Habian (1565–1621) and the Sinhala Buddhist reformer Angarika Dharmapāla (1864–1933). Their respective writings about Buddhism and Christianity are significant examples of how interreligious contacts could lead to the intensification of notions about Buddhist identity, morality, and truth. Importantly, such stances about what comprises "Buddhism"

are not wholly derivative from European Christian concepts, nor are they generated independently of the intrusions made by European Christians into Asian lands. Scholarship on Asian religions still struggles against older conventions whereby agency is seen as the exclusive property of Europeans, while Asians merely followed their leads. Charles Hallisey's deployment of the concept "intercultural mimesis" helps to guard against the older tropes contrasting Western agency and Asian subjectivity. For Hallisey, it is possible to see instances where "aspects of a culture of a subjectified people influenced the investigator to represent that culture in a certain manner" (Hallisey 1995, 33). This intervention into the history of scholarship suggests that techniques of religious representation could be developed, borrowed, and altered across cultural boundaries. European Christians often relied on local informants for their descriptions of Buddhism, and the responses by Asian Buddhists involved selectively juxtaposing their own representations of tradition with those used by both sympathetic and hostile European Christians.

The writings of Fukan Habian (also called Fukansai Habian or Fabian) present us with another case of an early modern Buddhist who becomes involved in negotiating the boundaries between Buddhism and Christianity and ends up seeking to stabilize the Buddhist tradition. Much like his contemporary Alagiyavanna, Habian converted and wrote about Christianity in the early seventeenth century. He differs from the Sinhala poet, however, in that he later renounced the Christian faith and composed a treatise attacking it. The Japanese Habian was a Zen Buddhist monk who later underwent an intense and prolonged Christian training with Jesuit missionaries for about twenty years. This exposure and experience led him to compose in 1605 the apologetic *Myōtei Mondō* (The Myōtei Dialogues), which appears as a Christian catechism and contains a refutation of Buddhism and other religious traditions in Japan. However, some years

later, Habian became disenchanted with his faith, and composed the polemical, anti-Christian work *Hadaiusu* (Deus Destroyed) in 1620. In both works, he explored the boundaries between Buddhism and Christianity while employing a polemical discourse that stabilized their characteristics in keeping with the catechetical genre.

In his earlier work, Habian employed the style of a dialogue between a Buddhist nun and a Catholic nun who debate the virtues of their respective traditions. When the Buddhist nun presents her view of Buddhist, Shinto, and Confucianist teachings, the Catholic nun counters her points and refutes those native teachings on Christian terms (Baskind 2012, 312). Such a text effectively functions as a handbook for engaging Buddhists and other non-Christians in Japan for the sake of dissuading their adherence to other "false" faiths. Given his previous training as a Buddhist monk, Habian could draw upon his considerable knowledge of Buddhism in order to refute its theoretical underpinnings. For example, when the Catholic nun provides an argument for the exclusive veneration of the Christian God, she cites the first commandment and asserts that one should not revere Buddhas or Shinto *kami* any more, as only "Deus," the omnipotent Creator God of Christianity, can guarantee a good life in this world and the next world (Schrimpf 2008, 42). The existence and acknowledgement of a powerful savior are presented here as proof of the superiority of the Christian religion.

Habian goes on in *Myōtei mondō* to present a critical examination of the different Japanese schools of Buddhism, highlighting their distinctive features while uniformly castigating them for the flaws they have in common. Significantly, a good portion of his anti-Buddhist critique, composed while he was associated with the Jesuits, draws upon the polemics of the priests with whom he resided and studied. Early Jesuits in Japan were shocked and horrified by the idea that Buddhists seemed to embrace a nihilistic

doctrine. Habian asserted that all Buddhist schools are characterized by "emptiness," which in turn means that Buddhists deny an afterlife, any hope for salvation, and any basis for ethical action in this life (Baskind 2016, 24). Inspired by the anti-Buddhist rhetoric in Jesuit works such as Alessandro Valignano's *Nihon no katekizumo (Japanese Catechism)*, the Japanese convert to Christianity employed many of the same arguments to expose the errors of Buddhism to his fellow countrymen. At the same time, Habian could also draw upon his background as a former monk to discuss and analyze some of the finer points in Buddhist doctrine. It is left to the Christian nun, who represents the authoritative voice in the dialogue, to describe the Dharma by quoting various Buddhist texts. The Christian narrator is, for example, able to conclude that the purported emptiness of being in Buddhism means that there cannot be an afterlife and thus the existence of precepts for good behavior is pointless (Baskind and Bowring 2016, 69–70).

Habian's strident critique of Buddhism in terms of Christian assumptions about what constitutes truth and reality led him to redefine and misrepresent the tradition. Having adopted Christian attitudes of religious exclusivism, his *Myōtei Mondō* basically concluded that the alleged errors of Buddhist teachings must be replaced by "true" Christian ones. And yet, within about fifteen years, Habian displayed a radical reversal in his religious identity. He left the Jesuit order and renounced his Christian faith, probably out of resentment toward the Christian Fathers for arrogantly refusing to allow him into the priesthood, although he also may have come to reject the requirements of celibacy that he was expected to maintain (Elison 1973, 155–156). His second treatise, *Hadaiusu*, was written the year before his death and contains a vigorous defense of Buddhism and a repudiation of Christianity. Arguments proffered in his earlier work become turned on their head, all for the sake of demonstrating the superiority of Buddhism

as well as his rejection of a foreign faith that had provoked the hostility of a local ruler.

Contrary to his earlier position, Habian asserts in *Hadaiusu* that Buddhas are no mere humans but akin to gods, fully capable of saving sentient beings (Elison 1973, 263). This claim is an important acknowledgement that Buddhas can fulfill the same role that Christians attribute to their God (*Deus*). Moreover, those who fail to recognize their power and proceed to denounce and abuse the Buddhas are said to suffer their punishments in this world (Elison 1973, 264). Habian's anti-Christian rhetoric serves to reinforce Buddhist truths while also redefining them in terms that reflect and subvert Christian religious claims. Whereas earlier in *Myōtei Mondō* he celebrated the ethical teachings of the Ten Commandments, he later argues in *Hadaiusu* that they are subsumed in the Five Precepts of Buddhism and, as such, have no special value for an individual's moral development (Schrimpf 2008, 49–50). For Habian, the practice of Buddhist moral teachings is sufficient for salvation. In fact, the Precepts are even said to be superior, since they include a prohibition against drinking alcohol, contrary to the Christian Commandments, and may thus help to prevent corruption and licentiousness of the mind (Elison 1973, 281–282).

The interesting case of Fukan Habian, who went from convert to apostate and who supplied written arguments for aligning with different religious communities in the early seventeenth century, illustrates how interreligious encounters between Buddhists and Christians sharpened religious identities and often required people to consciously choose one or the other. Political considerations behind Habian's return to the Buddhist fold aside, his decision to write a polemical disputation to defend the integrity of Japanese Buddhism against the critiques of Christians contributed to the crystallization of the tradition. Much like Alagiyavanna did some ten years earlier in Sri Lanka, Habian composed

a text that explicitly upholds Buddhist teachings and defends them from the hostile claims of its Christian opponents. The production of Buddhist texts that assert the validity of their teachings in the face of external religious challenges shows that encounters with European Christians spurred new efforts to stabilize Buddhist traditions. Even when such encounters triggered dynamic reinterpretations of how Buddhism could be understood and expressed—for example, viewing one's tradition in a more exclusive and well-defined manner—the resulting effects usually involved the crystallization of Buddhist traditions that could answer the challenges of opponents who called its truths and efficacy into question.

Years later, in early twentieth-century Sri Lanka, a lay Buddhist activist named Anagārika Dharmapāla emerged to galvanize support for a Buddhist tradition that was under pressure from European Christian teachings and colonial institutions. Born into a Buddhist family as Don David Hewavitarane but educated in Christian schools like many other members of the urban upper classes, he eventually assumed the name and identity of a "defender of Buddhism" (i.e. Dharmapāla) that renounces the ordinary household life (i.e. *anagārika*). He spent most of his adult life in this interstitial role between monk and layman, having adopted a celibate lifestyle but remaining in the world to promote Buddhism (Gombrich and Obeysekere 1988, 205–206). He grew up with an acute sense of decline in the vibrancy and integrity of Sri Lankan Buddhism. British colonialism was in his view complicit in the degradation of the Buddhist religion. He was exposed to theosophy and collaborated with the American Henry Steel Olcott in efforts to revive Buddhism in Sri Lanka. His work with theosophists supplied Dharmapāla with ample critiques of Christianity and colonialism. These early encounters with Western missionaries and anti-missionaries would help to shape Dharmapāla's views and activism in later years.

Scholarship on Dharmapāla has often depicted him as the architect of "Protestant Buddhism," or the rational reinterpretation of the tradition that both imitated yet also critiqued the religion of British missionaries and their Sri Lankan converts. It can be said that Dharmapāla did exhort his fellow countrymen to renounce the superstitious ritualism of the villages and to embrace the moral self-discipline called for in Pāli Buddhist texts that would strengthen the nation (Seneviratne 1999, 29). He was consistent and uncompromising in his critique of the effects that Christianity had on Buddhist society in Sri Lanka. And his encounters with Christianity helped to crystallize for him a modern form of Buddhism that could be compared with other world religions in terms of its teachings and its international scope. He articulated a notion of Buddhism that was designed to compete with Christianity for the sake of restoring a righteous society that adheres to the moral principles of the Buddha's Dharma.

Dharmapāla disseminated his message of Buddhist revival through newspaper columns, pamphlets, and sermons. He promoted his opinions in, among other places, a column entitled "Things that Ought to be Known" (*dänagatayutu karaṇu*) in the *Sinhala Bauddhaya* newspaper he founded, as well as in English-language outlets like the *Journal of the Maha Bodhi Society* abroad. His works often contained biting critiques of forces that he deemed hostile to Buddhism. These included homegrown superstitions and harmful foreign influences that jointly combined to diminish the morality of Buddhist life and the vitality of the institutions that support it. His voluminous writings include arguments that contrast the "destructive" (i.e. "blood-sacrificing") religions of Vedic Brahmanism, "Muhammadenism," Christianity, Shaivism, etc., and the "non-destructive" religions like Buddhism, Jainism, and Vaishnavism (Dharmapala 1991, 158). According to Dharmapāla, since Buddhism adhered to an ethic of non-harm and non-violence, it could be said to be morally superior to Christianity

and most other faiths. Dharmapāla read English texts about Christianity and other religions, and used this knowledge to formulate his arguments against them. He learned Buddhism from texts that were written mainly by English scholars and utilized the Christian model of world religions that portrayed them as largely coherent and commensurate traditions (Kemper 2015, 12–13). The presence of Christian missionaries in Sri Lanka made their religion a special target for Dharmapāla's ire. But they also provided him with the model for becoming a global missionary for Buddhism, traveling or residing abroad in countries such as India, Japan, England, and the United States. Dharmapāla worked to establish the first Buddhist temple in England, sought to revive Bodh Gaya as a Buddhist pilgrimage site, and spoke at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago. In each case, he was making a case for Buddhism as a world religion that could speak to the needs of all humans as a universal, scientific, and spiritual tradition (Kemper 2015, 218).

Dharmapāla's attempts to restore and revive a purified "Buddhism" revolved around distinguishing it from Christianity and from other religions that, in his view, were spiritually deficient and unsuitable for modern societies. His reliance on western scholarship for his understanding of Buddhism led him to depict the true form of the religion in terms of ancient Pali texts. He maintained that in order to know the Buddha and his teachings, one must go through the entire Tipiṭaka, or the "Three Baskets" of ancient Pāli scriptures attributed to the Buddha (Dharmapala 1991, 94). Dharmapāla did his part to preach and propagate the "truths" of the Buddha's Dharma in Sri Lanka and across the world. But he also called on Buddhist monks to travel across the island and around the world to spread "proper" Buddhism, which to him was free from superstitious rituals and supernatural theism (Seneviratne 1999, 37). For Dharmapāla, the correct

Buddhist path was in harmony with scientific thought and should be followed without seeking the help of God or gods to attain one's salvation.

Dharmapāla's vision of Buddhism as a functional "world religion" with adherents and a missionary presence around the globe owed much to the model of Christianity against which he frequently found himself opposed. He was a fervent nationalist in Sri Lanka but a universalist abroad, dedicating himself to the development of a global Buddhist community. His statements about the true nature and foundations of Buddhism served to crystallize a modern interpretation of Buddhism that has distinct boundaries as a non-theistic, morally pure, and rational tradition. Dharmapāla's legacy for Buddhism in Sri Lanka is mixed, as some scholars connect his missionary zeal and revivalist activities with the modern politicization of the Buddhist monkhood and a virulent form of ethnic parochialism (Seneviratne 1999, 333–336). And yet the depiction of Buddhism as a modern-thinking religion of moral activity undertaken for the benefit of the nation remains influential in contemporary Sri Lanka, and retains currency in other parts of the Buddhist world. The crystallization of modern Buddhism as a rational tradition occurred in dialogue and competition with claims made by European Christians.

IV. Dynamics and Stability in Modern Buddhism

In seeking to take a broad view of the development of Buddhism in the modern world, it is necessary to examine the impacts of interreligious contacts between Asian Buddhists and European Christians starting from the sixteenth century and lasting up to the present. Although this subject is too large to treat in a comprehensive manner here, the examples drawn

from Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and Japan serve to illustrate some of the various internal and external dynamics that spurred demarcation, stabilization, and innovation in Buddhist traditions as a result of encounters with diverse agents and institutions linked in various ways with Christianity. In some instances, the dynamics of interreligious encounters occurred chiefly at the discursive level, with Buddhist and Christian agents trading descriptions and critiques about their own religion and that of the "other". Alagiyavanna offers evidence of how the active presence of Christian missionaries who were supported by colonial agents and who were hostile to Buddhist teachings and institutions spurred dynamic efforts to define and defend Buddhism over against its foreign despisers. Polemical Christian attacks against the alleged falsity and idolatry of Buddhism tended to bring about reactive critiques from Buddhists about the religion of Europeans. Pluralistic approaches that could harmonize or compartmentalize the practice of different religions gradually became challenged by more exclusivist interpretations of religious truths and identities. The evolution of a modern Buddhist identity took centuries of labor, but it was doubtlessly triggered by missionary attempts to establish or impose Christian ones in Asian lands.

External and internal critiques of Buddhism by both Europeans and Asians motivated Buddhists to differentiate their religion, or the "correct" form of their religion, from other possibilities. Critiques of Buddhist "superstitions" and other illegitimate practices gave new impetus to consult Buddhist scriptures and lift up the more authentic and legitimate forms of tradition. In the Theravāda world, Buddhist monks had privileged the ancient Pāli scriptures as the sources of the tradition's most revered truths for centuries. Yet the interests and efforts of European scholars to "discover" what the oldest Buddhist texts had to say about the religion certainly generated more attention to and validation of textual studies. In

some cases, like that of Gogerly and Spence Hardy, Christians sought to read Buddhist texts in order to find inconsistencies and weaknesses that could be exploited to further missionary efforts. In other cases, like that of Finot and Coedés, western scholarship on Buddhist texts and material culture helped to model a reformed vision of modern Buddhism, one that was more responsive to the allegedly more authentic literature and practices of the past. Whether Europeans were hostile, sympathetic, or a mix of both toward Buddhism, their interactions with Asian Buddhists led to new, dynamic ways of developing and differentiating the religion on the basis of models abstracted from ancient texts. In colonial contexts, the "scriptures" of Buddhism became validated and emphasized over other traditional texts such as commentaries, anthologies, and vernacular writings.

Contact situations marked by interreligious encounters gave new energy to self-referential moves to systematize Buddhism and delineate acceptable sources from which one could gain knowledge of it. At times, Buddhists sought to legitimate their religion in terms borrowed from Christian opponents. An example of this intercultural mimesis can be seen in Fukan Habian's *Hadaiusu*, wherein he seeks to undermine Christian claims to superiority by turning their claims of miracles and martyrdom against them. He writes that he never once witnessed anything miraculous in over twenty years of living with the adherents of the Christian God, but that in contrast the "Great Founder" Nichiren was miraculously spared from execution by the appearance of divine light at the moment when he was to be beheaded (Elison 1973, 289). Habian's message here is clear. Miracles are to be associated with those who preach the "true doctrine" of the Buddha, and not with Christian Fathers, despite their claims to the contrary.

Other Asian Buddhists like Dharmapāla would later make similar arguments that praised the truth of Buddhism and denounced the false

claims made by members of other religions. He linked the tendencies of Christians toward eating beef and drinking alcohol with a broader judgment of the immorality of the foreign religion. Such proclamations about the moral superiority of a Buddhism that adheres to the timeless truths of its scriptures are frequently echoed by twenty-first century Buddhists (Berkwitz 2008, 81). Indeed, the dynamics of religious innovation and demarcation, along with attempts to crystallize and stabilize Buddhist traditions, represent an ongoing dialectical process, one that is not adequately described by either cultural imitation or independent agency. Interreligious contacts between Buddhists and Christians played a crucial role in initiating these dynamics for Buddhism in many Asian countries. These same transformations of tradition continue to be made as Buddhists around the world have even more intensive and regular contacts with other religious traditions. The frequency of such dynamics and the often simplistic ways that scholars have accounted for them can make us fail to appreciate how significant they have been for the development of modern Buddhist identities.

This essay has sought to highlight the persistence of these dynamics across time and space in Buddhism, as well as to emphasize that they have taken different forms in different places. Interreligious encounters between Asian Buddhists and European Christians have led to efforts to define and defend the integrity of one's religion on both sides. Buddhist and Christian actors have sought to refute and appropriate aspects of the other tradition in manners that have allowed them to transform and maintain their own religion as they deemed appropriate and necessary. Interreligious encounters would thus appear to motivate religious actors to, on the one hand, resist external critiques and attacks by devoting efforts to defining and defending one's tradition in terms that resonate with others, and, on the other hand, adopt some of the values and viewpoints of other

religions that are judged to enhance and legitimate one's own. Based on the examples cited above, these encounters between Buddhists and Christians generated greater exclusiveness, sharper polemics, and more reliance on the authority of the traditions' oldest written texts. Likewise, they helped spur practices reflecting both religious change and stability, which are inextricably related efforts to maintain one's religious institutions and identity when challenged by the presence of rival alternatives.

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