CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

2444 AN Buddhism

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By 1900, Buddhists in Asia, or at least some Buddhists in Asia, had decided to formalize a traditional way of measuring time. Events were often described in Buddhist texts as having occurred a certain number of years after the death of the Buddha or, in Buddhist terms, after his passage into nirvana. In English-language publications beginning in the late nineteenth century, Buddhist writers would often provide the year of publication in Buddhist terms: A.N., that is "After Nirvana" (or sometimes, B.E., "Buddhist Era"). According to this reckoning of time, one that was not universally accepted across Asia, the Buddha had passed into nirvana in 544 BCE. 1900 AD = 2444 AN.

Despite this declaration of chronological independence, in 2444 AN much of the Buddhist world was under European colonial control, or the threat of such control. Buddhism was in crisis across Asia, reeling from or plunging toward events that would shape Buddhism throughout the twentieth century and to the present day. It is important to note, however, that in 2444 AN, or 2558 AN, there was no single Buddhism in Asia. Each of the Asian nations (or colonies) had its own form of Buddhism and each faced its own challenges.

It would require a monograph to document everything that was happening in the Buddhist world in 1900. This essay can therefore only provide a brief and superficial sample, looking at just three moments in three different countries. However, in order to understand what was occurring in 2444 AN, it is important to understand something about what had occurred in the previous 2,443 years.

THE BUDDHA AND AFTER

According to his traditional biographies, the Buddha had been born as a prince in what is now southern Nepal. At the age of twenty-nine, he renounced his future throne to go out in search of a state beyond birth and death. After six years of ascetic practice, he achieved enlightenment, becoming at that point the "Buddha," a Sanskrit term that means the "awakened one." He soon attracted a group of disciples, which eventually evolved into a monastic community (*saṃgha*). He also established (as the story goes, grudgingly) an order of nuns. And he also attracted a

number of wealthy and powerful patrons, including rulers of some of the kingdoms of northern India. After teaching his doctrine (*dharma*) for some forty-five years, he passed into nirvana at the age of eighty. Modern scholarship generally rejects 544 BCE as the year of his death, although there is no consensus about the precise date; some scholars place his death as late as 400 BCE plus or minus twenty years.

The Buddha had exhorted his monks to go forth and teach "for the benefit of gods and humans," and Buddhism spread throughout most of the Indian subcontinent in the centuries after his death, an expansion supported by the patronage of the Emperor Aśoka of the Mauryan dynasty, who ruled India (and much of what is today Pakistan and Afghanistan) from 269 to 232 BCE. Buddhism also spread to Sri Lanka during this period. Buddhism would eventually spread to China in the first century CE, to Korea in the fourth, to Japan in the sixth, and Tibet in the seventh century. It also spread to Southeast Asia, becoming the state religion of what are today Myanmar (Burma) and Vietnam in the eleventh century, and the state religion of what is today Thailand in the thirteenth (although there is evidence of Buddhism throughout Southeast Asia, including modern Indonesia, centuries earlier).

In order to understand the state of Buddhism in 1900, it is important to specify not only where Buddhism was in Asia, but also where it was not: India. Although the Buddha had lived his long life in India, although Buddhism had spread from India across Asia, although the four most important places of pilgrimage in the Buddhist world—the place where the Buddha was born, the place where he was enlightened, the place where he gave his first sermon, the place where he died—were all in India (his birthplace is now in Nepal), Buddhism as an active religious institution had died out in India by the late thirteenth century. When the Europeans arrived in India (Vasco da Gama landed on its western coast in 1498) Buddhism was largely an archaeological artifact, with the four great pilgrimage sites in ruins. Thus, Buddhism existed all around India but Buddhism no longer existed in India, although all the Buddhist lands of Asia venerated India as the source of their religion. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, European scholars—first, officers of the British East India Company, and later French and German scholars—would enter this empty space and repopulate it with a Buddhism of their own imagining.

For much of the period of European contact with the Buddhist world, extending back to Marco Polo in the thirteenth century and before, Buddhists were classified—along with all other non-Christians, non-Jews, and non-Muslims—simply as idolaters. Because the Buddha has a different name in each Buddhist land and because each region has its own conventions for representing him in painting and sculpture, various European missionaries and travelers assumed that the pagans of Asia worshipped a variety of idols, with names like Fo, Xaca, and Sommona Codom (all, in fact, simply local names for the Buddha in China, Japan, and Thailand). It was only at the end of the seventeenth century that it was discovered that the various names and images represented the same figure, and even then, whether he was a god or a historical personage, and if a historical personage, where and when he lived, remained in question. It was only at the beginning of the nineteenth century that European scholars—now able to read with some degree of accuracy Buddhist scriptures written in Chinese, Mongolian, Tibetan, Pali, and Sanskrit—knew with certainty that the Buddha had been a historical figure and that he had lived and died in India.

Based on their readings of Buddhist texts, and their own enlightenment sensibilities, they painted a portrait of the Buddha whose image would be reproduced around the world and up to the present day. For them, the Buddha was a philosopher who declared that there was no God and who set forth a path to freedom that he opened to all. He condemned the meaningless rituals and the haughty avarice of the Hindu Brahmins (who seemed uncannily like Roman Catholic priests) and he rejected their caste system that restricted sacred knowledge to those of high birth. He described an ethical universe, where each was a master of his fate, with no need to fear a capricious God. He discovered these truths through his own efforts, without the need for divine revelation, and he never declared himself to be divine. This was the view of the Buddha put forth by the first, and most influential, European monograph on Buddhism of the nineteenth century, *Introduction à l'histoire du Buddhisme indien* (1844), by Eugène Burnouf, holder of the first chair of Sanskrit in Europe, at the Collège de France. Burnouf and others created the idea of a classical Buddhism, one that had died out in, or been driven from, India. It was now dead, and all the various forms of Buddhism existing in Asia in the nineteenth century were pale reflections of it, tainted by the admixture of all manner of local superstitions.

It was at the end of the century that the idea began to take shape, first in Europe and later in Asia, of a single world religion called "Buddhism." Its classical age, long past, had been forgotten in Asia but had been recovered by European scholars. The various national Buddhisms of Asia were all offshoots of the ancient Buddhism, the Buddhism of the Buddha. Although all were forms of Buddhism, in the eyes of European scholars, some were better than others. In 1900, the Buddhism that remained closest to the source was that found in the British colony of Ceylon. In 1900, the Buddhism that was farthest from the source was that found in Tibet. It was so deviant that it did not warrant the name "Buddhism;" it was called "Lamaism." Tibet was not a British colony.

TIBET

In Tibet, 1900 was the Iron Mouse year of the fifteenth cycle. The thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thupten Gyatso (Thub bstan rgya mtsho, which means "Ocean of the Buddha's Teachings") was twenty-four years old. Tibet was unique in the Buddhist world for its institution of the incarnate lama (*sprul sku*, pronounced "tulku"), in which a great Buddhist teacher would be identified from one generation to the next. This was not the standard Buddhist doctrine of rebirth, according to which all beings wander from lifetime to lifetime among the six realms of *saṃsāra*, as gods, demigods, humans, animals, ghosts, or denizens of hell. Incarnate lamas are considered enlightened beings who choose their place of rebirth, returning to the world as human teachers in lifetime after lifetime to compassionately dispense the dharma. The practice of identifying children as the incarnations of deceased masters may date from as early as the twelfth century. By the fourteenth century, all sects of Tibetan Buddhism had adopted the practice of identifying the successive rebirths of a great teacher; the Dalai Lamas were only the most famous. There were some 3,000 lines of incarnation in Tibet (only several of whom were female).

The incarnations of the Dalai Lama began (at least in historical time) in the fifteenth century. It was the third Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso (Bsod nams rgya mtsho,

which means "Ocean of Merit") who received the name *dalai* from a Mongol khan; *dalai* means "ocean" in Mongolian. The first four Dalai Lamas had been important figures only within their own sect of Tibetan Buddhism, the Geluk (*dge lugs*, "System of Virtue") until 1642, when the fifth Dalai Lama, with the backing of a Mongol warlord, became the ruler of Tibet. He was the most famous of the Dalai Lamas, the builder of the Potala Palace in Lhasa. But his successor had little interest in the monastic life. He was deposed and assassinated at the age of twenty-three.

The institution of the Dalai Lama presented a unique model of political succession. From one perspective, it provided a kind of supernatural continuity, as the same enlightened being returned to the throne from generation to generation over the centuries, invested with a level of charisma exceeding that of more ordinary kings. At the same time, it lacked political efficiency. After the death of the previous Dalai Lama, a regent was appointed to find the new child. This entailed sending out search parties throughout the land, collecting reports of births attended by auspicious portents, and toddlers who, after they learned to talk, spoke of their past lives. Once the boy was identified (usually three to five years after the death of his predecessor), he had to be educated in the vast corpus of Buddhist doctrine as well as the affairs of state. It was only around the age of twenty that the new Dalai Lama would become ruler of the nation. During the decades between one Dalai Lama and the next, Tibet was ruled by the regent.

If the Dalai Lama were to die for some reason, the regent would continue in his role, searching for the next incarnation and overseeing his education, while serving as de facto ruler of Tibet, his reign extended. And as it happened, in the nineteenth century, four Dalai Lamas in a row died young: the ninth at age nine, the tenth at age twenty-one, the eleventh at age eighteen, the twelfth at age nineteen. Scholars suspect that more than one of these deaths were assassinations, probably by poisoning. A similar fate awaited the thirteenth Dalai Lama as the end of the nineteenth century approached.

In 1895, at the age of nineteen, the thirteenth Dalai Lama became head of state. Soon thereafter, his regent offered him (or a member of his circle, according to some accounts) a beautiful pair of boots. Hidden in the heel of one of the boots was a talisman intended to bring about the death of the Dalai Lama. The plot was said to have been revealed by the state oracle, a monk periodically possessed by the spirit of a wrathful deity who was a protector of the Dalai Lama. When the plot was discovered, the regent, himself an important incarnate, was arrested and executed by drowning. To insure that he did not return in the next lifetime, his line of incarnations was declared ended. Surviving an attempt on his life by black magic, the thirteenth Dalai Lama became the first Dalai Lama in a century to survive into his majority. However, he faced more quotidian threats.

The Manchu rulers of China had held firm control over Tibetan foreign relations during much of the eighteenth century. During the nineteenth century, as the Qing Dynasty moved toward its demise, the Chinese presence in Tibet was weak, and weakening. The British, long established in India, regarded Tibet as a buffer state between their Raj and Russia. By the end of the century, they were concerned about possible Russian influence in Tibet. One of the tutors of the thirteenth Dalai Lama was Agvan Dorzhiev (1854–1938), a monk from the ethnically Mongol region of Buryatia near Lake Baikal. In 1898, Czar Nicholas II had presented him with a

watch in recognition of the intelligence he had gathered during his time in Tibet. After returning to Tibet, at the behest of the Dalai Lama, in 1900 he led a delegation to the czar, meeting with him at his summer palace in Yalta in 1901. They returned with a shipment of Russian arms.

Alarmed that Tibet might fall under Russian influence, the British demanded greater trade relations with Tibet. When these were refused, British troops under the command of Colonel Francis Younghusband crossed into Tibet in December 1903. Over the next six months they made their way toward Lhasa, encountering along the way Tibetan forces armed with matchlock rifles, swords, and spears. In a series of skirmishes and battles, some 3,000 Tibetans were killed. By the time they reached Lhasa, the Dalai Lama had fled to Mongolia. Negotiating with the senior monk of the Geluk sect, they extracted a trade agreement that allowed the British to establish trade stations in two Tibetan towns (but not in Lhasa).

From Mongolia, the Dalai Lama traveled to China, where relations between the Tibetan leader and the Qing court continued to deteriorate, beginning with his refusal to kowtow at the feet of the Empress Dowager. Eventually, he began the long journey by horse and palanquin back to Tibet; the Chinese sent troops in pursuit. When he reached Lhasa, they were close behind and so he continued south toward India, with his entourage fighting a rearguard action against the Chinese to prevent his capture. Thus, in 1910, just seven years after he fled to Mongolia and then to China to escape the British, he fled to British India to escape the Chinese. He would spend two years there, for the most part in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, but was also the first Dalai Lama to visit the holy sites of Buddhism, including Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha achieved enlightenment.

During his time in British India, he established a close friendship with Sir Charles Bell (1870–1945) and from their conversations and what he observed of British administration, he devised a series of reforms that he hoped would both modernize Tibet and lead to its international recognition as an independent state. Upon his return in 1912, the Dalai Lama began to institute these reforms, including building a modern army. In 1913, after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, Tibet and Mongolia signed a treaty, thus signaling their status as independent states. However, the Dalai Lama's attempts at modernization met with strong resistance from the monastic establishment of his own Geluk sect. He died in 1930, leaving behind a chillingly prescient prophecy of the fate that awaited Tibet.

The end of the century marked the beginning of the end of what is now referred to as "old Tibet," although, as always, this is only clear in retrospect. Surviving the black magic that Victorian scholars saw as central to the "Lamaism" they described, in the first years of the new century the thirteenth Dalai Lama faced a more formidable foe in the form of the colonial powers: the contemporary colonial power of Britain and the future colonial power of China, whose troops would invade Tibet in 1950, when the next Dalai Lama, the fourteenth, was fifteen years old. Without a modern army to defend its borders and without allies to come to its aid (Tibet had remained neutral during the Second World War), the traditional Tibet that the thirteenth Dalai Lama had sought to maintain through modernization, the Tibet that was the proud preserve of rich traditions of Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist practice, and Buddhist art, would fall. Of the 7,000 Buddhist temples and monasteries in Tibet in 1950, only a handful remained standing by the end of the Cultural

Revolution in 1976. Like the thirteenth Dalai Lama, his previous incarnation, the fourteenth Dalai Lama fled south, pursued by Chinese troops, crossing the border into India on 30 March 1959. Unlike his previous incarnation, he has never returned to Tibet.

BURMA

According to Buddhist cosmology, we live in an age of degeneration, moving inexorably toward a period of constant strife and warfare. Predictions of the decline appear often in Buddhist literature. The most famous of these is attributed to the Buddha himself. When he grudgingly admitted women to his community, establishing the order of nuns, he predicted that had he not done so, his teaching would have remained in the world for 1,000 years. Because he admitted women, it would only last for 500. According to Buddhist doctrine, there have been buddhas in the past, and there will be buddhas in the future. The reason that there are no records of previous buddhas or their teachings is because a new buddha does not appear in the world until the teachings of the previous buddha have completely disappeared from the world. It is only when the path to enlightenment has been forgotten that a new buddha appears to find the path again and teach it to others. The death of a buddha, or, in the language of the tradition, his passage into nirvana, marks the beginning of a period of slow decline, a period of increasing amnesia. It is said in some Buddhist traditions in Southeast Asia that the condition is sufficiently serious that for centuries it has been impossible for anyone to achieve enlightenment.

If this were not bad enough, the human lifespan is declining. It is said that when the Buddha appeared in the world the human lifespan was 100 years. It is steadily declining and will do so until it reaches ten years; Buddhist texts present an apocalyptic vision of a world ruled by fourth-graders. It is only when the lifespan begins to increase again—according to some accounts until it rises to 80,000 years—that the next Buddha, named Maitreya, will come. This doctrine has led not only to expressions of despair but also to millennial aspirations, various forms of waiting for Maitreya. In Burma, the *weikza* or wizards engage in forms of meditation, incantation, and alchemy in order to extend their lifespans to the advent of Maitreya, when they will become his disciples. In the intervening centuries, they act as healers and exorcists.

Britain went to war with Burma three times in the nineteenth century, conquering more and more of the country each time. In the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824–26, Burma lost some of its own previously conquered territories in the west. In the Second Anglo-Burmese War of 1852, all of Lower Burma fell to the British. In the Third Anglo-Burmese War, lasting only three weeks in November 1885, the rest of Burma fell and the entire country became an extension of the British colony of India. The king was deposed and sent into exile. In 1895, the *saṅgharāja*, the "king of the community," the supreme patriarch of the Buddhist monks of Burma, died, and there was no king to appoint his successor. The exile of the king was an event of major significance for Buddhism in Burma. Traditionally, one of the most important duties of the Burmese king was the protection of the *sāsana*, the Buddhist institution. This was done by royal patronage but also by royal decree. It was the king who had the authority to convene a council to settle disputes and to enforce the *vinaya*, the

code of conduct that is the foundation of Buddhist monasticism. When Lower Burma fell in the Second Anglo-Burmese War, many monks migrated to the north in order to come under the protection of King Mindon (1808–78), leaving behind their temples and parishioners.

When Mindon's son and successor, Thibaw Min, was deposed in 1885, the monastic community of Burma had no protector. If Burma had been conquered by a Buddhist power, the *saṅgha* would come under the protection of the conquering monarch. However, the British viceroy, Lord Curzon, did not provide such protection. In 1895, the second most powerful person for Burmese Buddhists, the *saṅgharāja*, died. His successor was elected but was not recognized by the British until 1903 and even then, they conceded his authority only over Upper Burma. This disruption in the Buddhist order of things would have far-reaching consequences.

There had long been a tension in Buddhism between study and practice, that is, between the memorization and exegesis of the scriptures and the practice of meditation. There were longstanding debates about which was more important, with preference generally given to study. If the teachings were not maintained, how would one know what to meditate upon? Prestige in the monastic community also derived from scholastic achievement. Meditation also received less emphasis because of the belief that the achievement of nirvana was no longer possible. In Burma, it was believed that no one had achieved nirvana since 1337. At the turn of the century in a Burma without a king and without a *saṅgharāja*, this would change.

One of the most important monks of this period was Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923). Already a renowned scholar of the Buddhist canon at the time of the Third Anglo-Burmese War, he viewed the fall of Burma to the British, and the profound threat that it posed to the survival of Buddhism, from the perspective of Buddhist cosmology: the coming of the British was a sign that the world was entering the next stage of the degenerate age, when the teachings of the Buddha would be completely forgotten and lost to the world. Without a pious and powerful monarch to protect Buddhism, that protection had to be found elsewhere. Traditionally, over the long history of Buddhism and across the Buddhist world, the study of the scriptures and the practice of meditation had been the exclusive purview of the monastic community. The role of the laity, always the vast majority of Buddhists in a given country, was to support the monastic community with their offerings. In a symbiotic relationship that stood at the heart of Buddhism across Asia, the role of monks and nuns was to maintain their vows (especially the vow of celibacy) and thus remain suitable recipients of the offerings of the laity. In this exchange, monks and nuns received material support and lay people received merit, that is, good karma, which would lead to a happy rebirth in the next lifetime. With these two roles long established, study and meditation did not have a natural place in lay Buddhist life.

But with the dharma without royal protection and under threat of extinction, Ledi Sayadaw sought to preserve it by dispersing it as widely as possible, extending it even to the laity, and in both of its forms, the study of scripture and the practice of meditation. Lacking the support of the king, he looked to the commoners, attempting to democratize the dharma in order to save it. Making use of the newly introduced printing press, he began writing pamphlets that set forth the complicated categories of Buddhist philosophy, called the *abhidhamma*. He also "revived" a simple form of meditation practice called *vipassana*, or "insight" meditation.

Through his efforts and those of other important monks, centers were established where lay people could study and meditate. It is this movement at the beginning of the twentieth century—motivated by fear of the British—that spawned the practice of "mindfulness" that swept through the self-help community in Europe and America at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In certain circles, this form of meditation is known simply as "the Burmese method."

SRI LANKA

The history of Buddhism is often told in terms of its councils. The first council, according to tradition, was held shortly after the Buddha's death, with 500 enlightened monks convening to remember and memorize everything that the Buddha had taught during the forty-five years of his ministry. The second council is said to have taken place 100 years after the death of the Buddha. Here the issue was the monastic code of conduct, with the community of monks dividing into two groups over such apparently minor matters as whether a monk is allowed to carry salt in an animal horn, eat when the shadow of the sundial is two fingerbreadths past noon (monks are not supposed to eat anything after noon), drink milk whey after mealtime, and use mats with fringe. The group that opposed those practices was known as the Sthaviranikāya or the "section of the elders" and the group that condoned them was known as the Mahāsāṃghika, the "great assembly." The Theravāda tradition of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia traces its origins to the former group (although recent scholarship has shown the connection to be more tenuous than previously thought). In oblique ways, the Mahāyāna Buddhism of China, Japan, Korea, and Tibet is connected to the latter group. If the second council took place 100 years after the Buddha, it would have occurred some time in the fourth century BCE. More than two millennia later, at the end of the nineteenth century, an American set out to heal the schism. His name was Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907).

He was raised in a Presbyterian family in New Jersey and served in the Union Army during the Civil War, appointed to the commission that investigated the assassination of Lincoln. Working as a journalist in New York City, he occasionally reported on "spiritualism," the beliefs and practices connected with communicating with the spirits of the dead, something very much in vogue in the last half of the nineteenth century. In 1874 he made a trip to Chittenden, Vermont to investigate paranormal events occurring in a farmhouse belonging to the Eddy brothers, who were said to be able to summon spirits. There he met the Russian émigré and medium, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–91). Their shared interest in spiritualism, psychic phenomena, and esoteric wisdom led them to found the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875, an organization that would bring the teachings of the Buddha, at least as interpreted by the Society, to a large audience in Europe and America over the subsequent decades. For Blavatsky and Olcott, Theosophy was an ancient wisdom that was the root and foundation of the mystical traditions of the world. This wisdom had been dispensed over the millennia by a group of Atlantean masters called mahatmas, or "great souls." In the modern period, these masters had congregated in a secret location in Tibet. Madame Blavatsky claimed to have studied under their tutelage there over the course of seven years and to have remained in psychic communication with them.

By 1878 Blavatsky and Olcott had shifted their emphasis away from "spiritualism" and the investigation of psychic phenomena toward a broader promotion of a universal brotherhood of humanity, claiming affinities between Theosophy and the wisdom of the Orient, specifically Hinduism and Buddhism. In 1873, a debate had taken place in Sri Lanka between a Buddhist monk and a Methodist minister. Five years after the debate, an account was published in Boston, entitled *Buddhism and Christianity Face to Face*. Olcott read it and determined to join the Buddhists of Ceylon in their battle against Christian missionaries. In 1879 Blavatsky and Olcott sailed to India, proceeding to Sri Lanka (at the time, the British colony of Ceylon) the next year, where they took the vows of a lay Buddhist; Olcott was presumably the first American to do so. Olcott would enthusiastically embrace his new faith.

Olcott took it as his task to restore true Buddhism to Ceylon and to counter the efforts of the Christian missionaries on the island. In order to accomplish this aim, he adopted many of their techniques, founding the Buddhist Theosophical Society to disseminate Buddhist knowledge (and later assisted in the founding of the YMBA or Young Men's Buddhist Association) and publishing in 1881 *A Buddhist Catechism*, modeled on works used by the Christian missionaries. Olcott shared the view of many enthusiasts in Victorian Europe and America, who saw the Buddha as the greatest philosopher of India's Aryan past. The Buddha's teachings were regarded as a complete philosophical and psychological system, based on reason and restraint, opposed to ritual, superstition, and sacerdotalism, demonstrating how the individual could live a moral life without the trappings of institutional religion. This Buddhism was to be found in texts, rather than in the lives of the modern-day Buddhists of Sri Lanka, who, in Olcott's view, had deviated from the original teachings.

Olcott's close confederate in his mission was Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933). Although his family was Buddhist, he was educated in Christian schools run by Anglican missionaries. He met Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott during their first visit to Ceylon. In 1884 he was initiated into the Theosophical Society by Olcott, and later accompanied Madame Blavatsky to the headquarters of the Society in Adyar, India. In 1889, he traveled with Colonel Olcott on his lecture tour of Japan. On a trip to India in 1891, he was shocked to see the state of decay of the great pilgrimage sites of India, all under Hindu control, and most especially Bodh Gaya, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment. He became a founding member of the Mahabodhi Society (named after the temple at Bodh Gaya), which called on Buddhists from around the world to work for the return of the great sites to Buddhist control, a goal that would only be achieved after his death. In 1892, the Society launched its journal, calling it *The Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World*. In 1893 Dharmapala attended the World's Parliament of Religions, held in conjunction with the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. Although only one of several Buddhist representatives, his excellent English and Anglican education made him an effective spokesperson for the dharma, demonstrating both its affinities with and superiority to Christianity. The *St. Louis Observer* of 21 September 1893 reported, "With his black, curly locks thrown from his broad brow, his keen clear eyes fixed upon the audience, his long brown fingers emphasizing the utterances of his vibrant voice, he looked the very image of a propagandist, and one

trembled to know that such a figure stood at the head of the movement to consolidate all the disciples of Buddha and to spread the 'Light of Asia' throughout the civilized world."

In 1885, Olcott had set out on the mission of healing the schism he perceived between "the Northern and Southern Churches," that is, between the Buddhists of Ceylon and Burma (Southern) and those of China and Japan (Northern). He believed that a great rift had occurred in Buddhism 2,300 years earlier and that if he could simply have representatives of the Buddhist nations agree to a list of shared doctrines, it might be possible to create a "United Buddhist World".

By the end of the century, the old division of the peoples of the world into four nations—Christians, Jews, Mahometans, and Idolaters—had been displaced by the new idea of "world religions." According to this formulation, there were two kinds of religions, world religions (*Weltreligionen* in German) and local religions (*Landesreligionen*). Although there was, and continues to be, debate about which religions merit the "world" category, there was consensus from the outset that Buddhism was a world religion. The Buddhists of Asia, however, seemed largely unaware of, or at least uninterested in, this fact. For Colonel Olcott, there could not be a single Buddhism until the great North-South wound had been healed.

He was unsuccessful in his first attempt, but set out again in 1891, armed with a list of "fourteen items of belief" (he also referred to them as "Fundamental Buddhistic Beliefs"). Item #14 was: "Buḍḍhism discourages superstitious credulity. Gauṭama Buḍḍha taught it to be the duty of a parent to have his child educated in science and literature. He also taught that no one should believe what is spoken by any sage, written in any book, or affirmed by a tradition, unless it accord with reason" (Olcott 1915: 95).

Olcott traveled to Burma, Sri Lanka, and Japan, where he negotiated with Buddhist leaders until he could find language to which they could assent. But these were only three Buddhist countries, and only one, Japan, represented the Northern branch. Shortly thereafter, a rift occurred in Sri Lanka. At the turn of the century, the Buddhist leaders of Sri Lanka, including his former disciple Dharmapala, turned on the man known as "the white Buddhist."

In 1905, the leading Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka withdrew his imprimatur from the fortieth edition of Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism*, declaring that seventeen of the answers were "opposed to the orthodox views of the Southern Church of Buddhism." Dharmapala was particularly emphatic in his repudiation of Theosophy. In 1906, he published an essay entitled, "Can a Buddhist Be a Member of the Theosophical Society?" The short answer was "no." In his obituary of Olcott in 1907, he said that Olcott never understood the fundamentals of Buddhism, perverting it by mixing in various Hindu and occult doctrines. Elsewhere, in an essay entitled "Theosophical Degenerates," he writes, "Theosophy is a Eurasian pantheism, it is neither purely Eastern nor Western. It is an 'occult' mixture given to the credulous world by a band of impostors, who deceive the world by plagiarising Buddhistic Pali phrases and Vedantic metaphysics." This essay ran in the July 1906 issue of *The Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World* (Vol. XIV, No. 7: 106); the title page said, "Buddha Year 2450." By the turn of the century, at least in Sri Lanka, the Buddhists no longer welcomed the white man who sought to speak on their behalf. They could speak for themselves, in English.

CONCLUSION

These vignettes from Tibet, Burma, and Sri Lanka are not meant to be exhaustive. A different, and equally consequential story could be told for almost every country in Asia. In China at the turn of the century, a growing community of intellectuals saw Buddhism as a form of primitive superstition impeding China's entry into the modern world. In 1898, the emperor had issued an edict ordering many Buddhist temples (and their often substantial land holdings) to be converted into public schools. Although the order was rescinded in 1905, a number of Buddhist schools and academies for the training of monks were founded on monastery property in an effort to prevent their seizure and the establishment of secular schools. The monastic schools set out to train monks in the Buddhist classics, with those monks then sent out to teach to the laity (as Christian missionaries did).

In 1868 in Japan, the shogun was deposed and the emperor restored to power. One of the first acts of his new Meiji government was to establish Shinto as the state religion, with the emperor as its head priest. New policies included a suppression of Buddhism in a movement that was called "abolish Buddhism and destroy Śākyamuni [Buddha]" (*haibutsu kishaka*). Buddhism was attacked as a foreign and anachronistic institution, riddled with corruption, a parasite on society, and the purveyor of superstition, blocking Japan's entry into the modern world. Thousands of Buddhist temples were eliminated and thousands of monks were returned to lay life. The assault on Buddhism continued in 1872, when the Meiji government removed any special status from monkhood. Henceforth, monks had to register in the household registry system and were subject to secular education, taxation, and military conscription. The government also declared that monks could eat meat and marry.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Buddhist intellectuals, reeling from these changes, strove to demonstrate the relevance of Buddhism to the interests of the Japanese nation by promoting a New Buddhism (*shin bukkyō*) that was consistent with Japan's attempts to modernize and expand its realm. This New Buddhism was represented as both purely Japanese and purely Buddhist. It was also committed to social welfare and public education and supported the expansion of the Japanese empire. Beginning with the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 and continuing until the defeat of Japan in 1945, Buddhist leaders consistently called for the restoration of true Buddhism (which existed only in Japan) to the rest of Asia. It was yet another failed attempt, this time from a different colonial power, to create a United Buddhist World.

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