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*International Religious Organizations in a Colonial World: The Maha-Bodhi Society in Arakan*¹

Introduction

Shortly after Mme Blavatsky's death in May 1891, a London correspondent for the New York *Sun* interviewed the Irishman Capt. Charles Pfoundes, who was running the first Buddhist mission in the west on behalf of the Jōdo Shinshū *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* (Buddhist Propagation Society). Pfoundes was a very public critic of the Theosophical Society (henceforth TS) and its claim to represent "esoteric Buddhism", but Annie Besant's transition from secularism to Theosophy posed severe, and ultimately successful, competition to Pfoundes' mission.² Here is what he had to say about his competitors:

I apprehend," he said to the Sun correspondent, "that the theosophists will divide into several branches. First, there will be the Olcott following, and as he is entirely played out with the Hindoo and Parsee factions he must teach Buddhism. Mrs. Besant will have her clientele too. She is now miscredited with the extreme socialistic and anarchistic elements which belong to the secular party, because she is believed by them to have taken up transcendentalism. She will have a small following of spiritualists. Bertram Keightley will probably control the Adyar section, which has recently been vacated by Olcott, and his school will be Hindoo mysticism in Ceylon. The Rev. J. Bowles Daly, a former clergyman of the Established Church and a B.A. of Dublin University, who has been a sort of jackal for Olcott, will have a following whom he will feed upon Cingalese Buddhism and anti-Christian education in America. There will remain the Mark Q. Judge crowd, and opposed to them Professor Cones [Elliott Coues] and his following will represent the agnostic theosophic element.³

Our interest here is not with the accuracy of Pfoundes' specific predictions: many of the details were wrong, but something of the general picture did come to pass, if not as quickly as Pfoundes hoped. What this interview points to, however, is that it was entirely possible for a contemporary, moving in much the same world, to analyze the TS as a series of emerging factions and leaderships, tied to different ideological positions and local strengths. Although in polemic moments Pfoundes was perfectly capable of inveighing against Theosophy as an essentialized unity, when he thought about it as someone who was himself part of an international religious organization he had no difficulty in recognizing that it was not a single homogenous thing. As it might have been put in Buddhist terms, like everything else, the TS was compounded, devoid of an essence—and hence impermanent.

It is this very compound and impermanent quality that makes the TS of such interest today. Like Walt Whitman ("Song of Myself"), it was large, it contained multitudes—but only for a time. We touch on Theosophy whether we are researching the Irish literary revival, the origins of Buddhism in Britain, educational reform in Ceylon, Steiner/Waldorf schooling or the contemporary New Age. Often, in fact, it is not those who remained within the changing bounds of organizational membership and ideological orthodoxy who give it significance, but those who left individually, the organizations which split from the TS, and those who were influenced by Theosophy without ever being members.

This chapter focusses on one such organization, the Maha-Bodhi Society⁴ (henceforth MBS), which was "theosophical with a small t": founded by one-time TS member Anagarika Dharmapala, it used many of the organizing techniques of the TS and indeed had Colonel Olcott as its most prominent speaker. Its conception of world Buddhism, too, is at least as closely shaped by the TS' perspective of a shared but disparate essence as it is by (for example) Orientalist views of a pristine original Buddhism to be recovered through archaeology and

scholarly work; intra-Theravadin networking processes and Buddhist Councils;⁵ or Japanese attempts at exporting particular sects' versions of Buddhism.

However, at least within Buddhist Studies, research too frequently falls back into seeing such bodies as the TS or MBS as unified wholes. We regularly tell their stories in the top-down terms of founders, texts, orthodoxy and organizational history. Even when we are critical of the substance of these narratives, we often share this “view from the center”, the view most easily found in an organization's own records and often stabilized by later generations of loyalists. It is relatively easy to do so, but to do this falls substantially short of what we should expect of ourselves in terms of the critical ways we have learnt to think about religion.

To anticipate, a critical view of international religious organizations⁶ is one which asks not only about the founders, but also about the other members, both individually (e.g. plebeian, women or subaltern participants) and collectively (what networks either adopted or were formed within the organization?) It asks not just about official texts, but about what ordinary members actually said and wrote (and within official publications, which books galvanized them and which left them cold, which sections of the journal did they read avidly and which did they skip over). It asks not just what the official line was, how it changed and was refined, but equally how it was challenged, what other perspectives were expressed using the official language, and how did people work with the contradictions of the ideology. Lastly, it asks not just how the center saw the organization develop, grow, take action, form alliances and so on, but how this looked from the necessarily multiple perspectives of other groups within such a complex organization, held together by such loose threads.

This critical perspective may be particularly important for the period of “global Buddhism” and the globalization of other religious movements, in which international organizations were sustained across huge differences of class, race, gender and power, and across vast geographical and cultural distances. This was primarily achieved through the

comparatively tenuous medium of books and periodicals, the formal structures of committees and branches, a handful of indefatigable travelers, celebrities and networkers and occasional meetings and conferences. This form, perhaps, acquired such significance because it was always a fudge, a more-or-less-conscious glossing-over of differences which could (mostly) be contained so long as the branch paid its dues, the center published the next issue, and there were regular visits tying all the disparate strands together. However, this relatively rigid form was filled with the *flows* which Tweed has argued we have to see as primary in a translocative theory of religion,⁷ and which take center stage in our own attempts to research the first western Buddhists in Asia and the first Buddhists in the west.⁸

This chapter introduces the Maha-Bodhi Society and sets it in the wider context of international organizations of the period. It discusses the MBS specifically as a “borning organization”,⁹ a space which enabled the formation of new religious and political networks, organizations, leaderships or ideologies in ways that often diverged substantially from their official ideologies and organizational structures. This concept, drawn from social movement studies, can of course be used to characterize Theosophy as a whole: the multiplicity of bodies which were “theosophical with a small t” is a product precisely of this phenomenon. The chapter then moves to the *Arakanese* element within the Society, in terms of its relationship with the Burman sangha, what we characterize as an “independent religious foreign policy” expressed in various parts of India, and its tensions with the parent MBS. It concludes with some reflections on how we can understand such organizations more generally.

The Theosophical and Maha-Bodhi Societies as international religious organizations

The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century formation of what is sometimes called “global” Buddhism, with a dual emphasis on pan-Asian or modernist Buddhisms in Asia and the spread of Buddhisms to the west, can hardly be understood without attention to the development of

new kinds of international religious organizations, from the Jōdo Shinshū's Buddhist Propagation Society to Ananda Metteyya's Buddhasasana Samagama and his Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Such experiences were of course paralleled by other globalizing Asian religions,¹⁰ and drew on a wider background of international movements and organizations, ranging from liberal-democratic, socialist and anarchist networks to freethought, Christian missionary and temperance bodies.

Founded by Anagarika Dharmapala (David Hewavitarne) in May 1891, the Maha-Bodhi Society was an international Buddhist organization present in many Asian countries and some western ones. Its explicit goals included the establishment of Buddhist centers at the four traditional sites of Buddhist pilgrimage in India: the sites of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, first preaching and death. Given the near-absence of Buddhists in India¹¹ and the social marginality of the Chittagong tribal Buddhists and Dalit converts of the period, these centers were intended for—and to be funded by—Buddhists outside India.

The MBS was thus organized around a new kind of Buddhist internationalism, in which India took the role of a Buddhist holy land that enabled the formation of a pan-Asian and indeed global Buddhist identity. As Dharmapala put it, echoing European nationalist formulations such as that in *Deutschland Über Alles*, “In all Asia from the banks of the Caspian Sea to the distant islands of Japan, from the snowy regions of Siberia to the Southern limits of the Indian Ocean the blessed influence of the Dharma spread [...]”¹²

As is well known, the project of asserting Buddhist presence at and control of the temple at Bodh Gaya, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, rapidly became extremely contentious in relation to the Mahant (the incumbent priest at what had become a Hindu temple), the British authorities and ultimately a resurgent Hinduism in which the TS, in its Hindu turn under Annie Besant, played a role. As with other such international organizations, however, the blocking of

the MBS' explicit goal enabled it to fulfil a wide range of "latent" or indirect purposes, most notably as enabling the formation of new kinds of internationally-linked, lay Buddhist actors.

This period saw the rise of a new type of international organization: alongside the TS, the MBS and organizations such as Pfoundes' Buddhist Propagation Society we find bodies devoted to everything from temperance (the Independent Order of Good Templars) to working-class politics (the International Workingmen's Association). In terms of technological and industrial development such, organizations were made possible by cheaper and faster travel, communications and the relative deregulation of printing (removal of taxes on printed material, some lifting of censorship). As international organizations they were also enabled by the imperial relationships that many resisted: the increased flows of people and transport, the spread of European languages and cultural points of reference, and to some extent comparable legal and financial systems. Such organizations also have to be understood as the extension on a new scale of something analogous to what Charles Tilly called a repertoire of contention: a particular combination of modes of formal organization, public meetings and demonstrations, petitions, media statements and so on which he understood as having been developed in the west by the 1830s and subsequently spread via imperial relationships.¹³

Such associations shared a number of qualities, such as the capacity to form organizations which spanned continents in more than nominal ways, a focus on periodicals as a primary form of activity, and a tendency to spawn rival organizations or future networks. Perhaps their most important common feature is the fact of organizing itself—in particular, organizing on the basis of formal membership and technical equality between members (in most cases irrespective of class, gender and race but also cutting across traditional status barriers) and doing so on a public stage, consciously attempting to recruit members. Such societies offered a new way of existing within modernity, based around common commitment to a goal (however distant—prohibition of alcohol, Buddhist control of Bodh Gaya, socialism, the World Master). This enabled new

kinds of sociability in the here and now between people from different social positions who could not have done so without this structure, often with distinctive modes of interaction, such as vegetarianism or temperance, and overlapping commitments to, for example, pacifism or women's rights.¹⁴ This new mode of sociability both overlapped with traditional modes of organizing and enabled new possibilities for members of previously subaltern social strata.¹⁵

This enabled such organizations to play a powerful role. In the history of global Buddhism, the TS and MBS were critical catalysts despite their primary purpose lying elsewhere: their journals, branches and correspondents mapped out, but also constituted, many of the networks that became global Buddhism, so that if we are researching (for example) the formative period of Buddhism in England, we turn not only to the explicitly missionizing focus of the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* and the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland but also to the London branch of the MBS and the Buddhist Lodge of the TS, while theosophical periodicals and the *Journal of the Maha-Bodhi Society* are key research tools. This point is familiar to researchers in practical terms, but here we want to tease out some implications which are not always taken fully on board.

Local Actors, Movements and Organizations

For one thing, the process worked very differently in different places. To take one example: in Ireland, unlike many countries, Theosophy was *not* a basis for the development of Buddhism, even though Irish Theosophists abroad at times became Buddhist and many Dublin Theosophists were as much at home in London. The Irish networks that adopted Theosophy had other fish to fry—culturally and politically—for which Buddhism would not have served them.¹⁶ Ireland had representatives of the MBS and the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland, but other than a brief mention of money being sent for “propaganda”, there is no indication that either group engaged in the kind of missionary activity that was going on in

London.¹⁷ Instead, when a Buddhist center was finally set up in Dublin for a few years from the later 1920s on, it seems to have been run in association with the Unitarian-derived Order of the Great Companions, and was set up on the initiative of reformist Asian Buddhists.¹⁸

Local actors, in other words, had different purposes from the main organizations, and we cannot read their politics off from the strategies of the center in any simple way—or, put another way, the unintended and indirect consequences of these organizations were as often the result of the strategies of local actors as they were of the central organizations’ “mission creep”. More broadly, if the new kind of organization offered unparalleled possibilities for energetic organizers such as Olcott and Besant, Dharmapala and Marx, this was in no small measure because they offered such a range of possibilities to ordinary members for organizing themselves and achieving their own purposes. New networks could be formed, cutting across existing local boundaries; things could be said and done relying on the prestige of what was still in practice mostly a fairly distant center. The interest and enthusiasm available for the wider organization was a powerful resource:

[T]oo little attention has yet been paid to the ways in which the Maha Bodhi Society and the Theosophical Society functioned as umbrella organizations within which a variety of local socio-political agenda[s] were pursued at various locations linked by these societies, or to how these organizations facilitated the travel of local Asians through port cities, travel that was undertaken for a number of reasons including commerce, intellectual exploration, the cultivation of political / activist ties, and the development of religious institutions. The diaries of Anagarika Dharmapala make very clear how crucial local involvement at each nodal point was to the movement of these societies’ leaders, but also that locals associated with the Maha Bodhi Society and the Theosophical Society could pursue their own aims on a wider regional basis through connection to these trans-regional societies and their patronage arrangements that made possible travel as well as liaison with foreign visitors.¹⁹

As the examples of the Buddhist Theosophical Society in Ceylon²⁰ or the Arakanese MBS show, such aims were often those of a developing national or sub-national elite. Frost writes:

Entrepôts like Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Rangoon and Singapore witnessed the emergence of a non-European, western-educated professional class that serviced the requirements of expanding international commercial interests and the simultaneous growth of the imperial state. Learned elites drawn from the ranks of civil servants, company clerks, doctors, teachers, public inspectors, communications workers, merchants, bankers and (above all) the legal profession began to form themselves into intelligentsias by immersing themselves in discursive activity, and quickly developed habits of intellectual sociability that became organized and systematic. The *Bhadralok* of Calcutta, the Theosophists of Madras and the *peranakan* (local born) Chinese reformers of Singapore, to name but three of these groups, shared similar concerns for reform and oversaw parallel campaigns for religious revival, social and educational improvement and constitutional change. Associational life and journalism flourished in this environment, both in the bureaucratic centres of the British Empire and beyond [...] to such an extent that one can fairly speak of a transformation in the public sphere across the Indian Ocean²¹.

If this point is also not unfamiliar in general, we still know relatively little in most cases about the way this process worked in practice in terms of these international religious organizations and the formation of what was to become global Buddhism. One key issue is the often dramatic contrast between top-down accounts of these organizations, as they were imagined or represented from the center (by their organizational leaderships and in their periodicals, but also in metropolitan perspectives and later reception) and how they appear when viewed through the lens of the individual religious careers and local networks which at times operated

through them or were stimulated by them, but can hardly be described as deriving from the core.²²

In this context the TS and MBS can be thought of as “borning organizations”. This is not simply a matter of the multiple goals pursued by individual actors who passed through organizations, the emergence of new organizations and networks from the parent organization, or of what might be thought of as instrumental, latent or emergent organizational goals (such as the development of future nationalist elites), but at its deepest represents a tension between “movement” and “organization”, of a kind familiar from other religious contexts such as spiritualism as well as from social movements, and which enabled the formation of new organizations from the same socio-cultural milieu.

In other words, while the organization’s center typically identified itself with the movement as a whole (and indeed in this period often used this language), we should not fall into the same trap. We can see how multiple movements might feed into a single organization and indeed be central to its emergence (for example, the encounter between Theosophy’s international networks and reforming actors within specific Asian Buddhist milieu was often a necessary condition for new “global Buddhist” initiatives). Conversely, as is well known for the TS, a single organization could give birth to a multiplicity of other bodies—both competing TS organizations but also the MBS, other Buddhist organizations, the Anthroposophical Society, the Golden Dawn, etc.—and contribute to wider movements both literary and political.

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We should also remember that whole movements could exist *without* substantial or effective organizations at all. Despite anarchist involvement in the First International, for example, Anderson has shown the much more informal character of the links that connected Asian and European anarchists in this period.²⁴ Spiritualism, too, was largely a bottom-up movement in this period²⁵—arguably part of Blavatsky and Olcott’s genius was to marry

spiritualism's existing focus on celebrity and periodicals to models of centralized organizing. Something similar can be said of the freethought movement, which was crisscrossed by periodicals and formal societies, but equally marked by independent discussion halls and alternative school projects.²⁶ At moments of split—such as the collapse of the First International—the nature of these tensions within the wider movement could reveal themselves, often contradicting the organization's own official perspective. This, of course, is another way of describing the complexities of splits, successor organizations and networking outcomes.

Social movement theory marks this distinction by speaking of social *movements* (networks of individuals, informal groups and formal organizations²⁷) and social movement *organizations* which form part of such movements. The extent to which an individual organization dominates a whole movement—and the extent to which movements prioritize organization—is highly variable. In our period, organization-building was almost a popular pastime:

The fashion for organizing spread well beyond Rangoon. In 1899 the western city of Akyab could boast of the presence of the Arakan Jubilee Club, the Hypocrisis Club, a literary society, and a half dozen others, not to mention the presence of the Young Arakanese Students' Club of Rangoon. [...]

[B]y the late 1890s Buddhist organizations would eclipse all others in the number of associations, membership, and activity.

Buddhist associations sprang up across colonial Burma in the hundreds at the turn of the twentieth century. [...] While some of these were large-scale organizations with branches in multiple towns, like the educational, Pali-examination, and rice-donating associations [...] these were well outnumbered by the local and spontaneously formed associations of lay Buddhists that peppered the

small towns and villages. Associations became not just the focus of much popular attention, but the driving force behind social movement and innovation.²⁸

Even where such bodies did form part of wider organizations, as we shall see, central control could be very weak by today's standards. Thus, in relation both to local branches and independent bodies the movement-organization tension becomes an important analytical tool for thinking beyond a single committee.

These issues can be usefully explored through studying how a local organization operated in the broad context of anti-colonial, pan-Theravada Buddhist networking, in this case the Arakanese branches of the Maha-Bodhi Society, particularly in the two decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century.

Arakanese and the Early Days of the Maha-Bodhi Society

The Burmese division of Arakan, today's Rakhine province, had been an independent kingdom up to the late eighteenth century, when it was conquered by Burma. It was ceded to Britain less than half a century later following the First Anglo-Burmese War, and included in British Burma following the second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852. Perhaps predictably, Arakanese elites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century did not always see their interests as being identical with those of Burmese Buddhists.

However, Arakan's early inclusion into the British Empire meant that it developed much more quickly in financial terms than elsewhere in Burma. Akyab (now Sittwe) quickly became a cosmopolitan port with a substantial number of Indian, Chinese and European businessmen who expanded into Arakan in the early nineteenth century in order to capitalize on the growth of the new province. There was a massive increase in rice production and export from Akyab between 1825 and 1852, the profits from which not only developed the city, but expanded the

connections between Arakan and other port cities under East India Company rule. By the late nineteenth century, Akyab could boast both a multi-ethnic cosmopolitan community and the presence of a number of newspapers and journals. Moreover, there was a growing population of Arakanese businessmen in Calcutta, Arakanese working for the colonial government and a number of young English educated Arakanese studying at Calcutta University.

The Maha-Bodhi Society found its origins in interactions between Olcott and Dharmapala. After Olcott's famous work among Buddhists in Ceylon and an important joint trip to Japan in the spring of 1889, Dharmapala and Olcott met with a group of Buddhist representatives from Japan, Burma, Chittagong and Ceylon in January 1891 to originate the idea of an organization uniting Asian Buddhists. Dharmapala immediately proceeded to Bodh Gaya, where he embarked on a mission to preserve the site of the Buddha's enlightenment that would become central to the MBS,²⁹ while Olcott traveled through Burma where he formulated the platform of a united Buddhist alliance.³⁰ Dharmapala officially formed the Maha-Bodhi Society in Ceylon in May of that year.

Despite the prominent place that Burma, Japan and Ceylon play in this story of the move from Theosophy to the MBS, Arakanese played an important role in those early days. On his fateful first visit to Bodh Gaya, Dharmapala met another pilgrim who had much the same experience and mission. Kiripasaran, an Chittagong-born Buddhist monk who at times identified as Arakanese and Bengali, "cut his finger, making a vow to the Buddha, and a day later sold his sandals and umbrella in order to purchase oil to light the lamps at the shrine."³¹ He had dedicated himself to the revival of Buddhism in Arakan and India and was working among the large community of Arakanese, Magh and Chittagonians in Calcutta at the time. While Kemper highlights the fact that Dharmapala did not pursue the relationship with Arakanese and Chittagonians in Calcutta as much as with Bengalis because of his own elite

biases, the Arakan-Chittagong-Calcutta-Bodh Gaya connection would play an important part in the early history of the MBS and Buddhist organizing in Arakan.

After founding the Maha-Bodhi Society in late 1891 Dharmapala met Kiripasaran again in Calcutta on his way back to Bodh Gaya, this time taking four Sinhalese monks to the site. It seems likely that Kiripasaran and Dharmapala look inspiration from each other's work and built a bridge between Arakanese and the nascent project of pan-Buddhist organizing.³² But the connections had started even earlier. Six months prior in February 1891, immediately after Olcott's visit to Burma and en route to Australia, the Buddhist lay elders of Arakan, represented by U Tha Dway, had telegraphed Olcott asking him to visit and provided funds for his trip.³³ The trip had to be delayed until November 1892, but proved a watershed for Buddhist organizing in Arakan and for the MBS itself.

Even in the lead up to this first visit it is clear that local interests and approaches did not always perfectly ally with the visions of translocal organizing. While the more cosmopolitan elite organizers sought Olcott's presence, they insisted that Dharmapala must accompany him. As Olcott recounts in his diary,

I have been amused in looking over my papers of that period to see the reason why. The Arakanese people had heard so much of my work in Ceylon that they wanted me to come and help them in the same way, and wrote to that effect in strong and complimentary language, but—and this is the humorous part of the affair—as they had never had any religious dealings with a white man other than a missionary, and had never seen or heard of a white Buddhist before, their Oriental suspiciousness was excited and their leaders wrote Dharmapala that they wished him to come with me. [...]

“The Colonel's presence alone,” writes one of our friends to Dharmapala, “would not be enough to popularise the projects of the Maha-Bodhi Society. You have to consider that our priests and laity have had no experience whatever, whether with white or European

priests or Buddhists, so you have to come and tell us how faithfully and earnestly the Colonel has worked for the Buddhist movement. Our priests have power over the people in spiritual affairs, so you have to tell Colonel Olcott to embrace every opportunity for making friends with our priests.” In another letter the writer thus describes the character of his people: “They are liberal and generous, they usually display their joy in outbursts of enthusiasm, devotion, energy, and generosity to the fullest extent, especially when it is a question of the interests of their country or their religion. On the other hand, they are suspicious and wary about strangers.”

Their invitation having been accepted, the local Arakanese editors prepared the way with fervent articles in their English and vernacular journals after this fashion: “He is well worth hearing, and has all the ancient lore of the Buddhist religion at his fingers’ ends ... All the Poongyees (Buddhist monks) and chief priests of the town and district ought to do all they can to welcome and assist this great European High Priest of Buddhism. ... In fact the Colonel knows more than the Brahmin High Priests about the Laws and Institutes of Manu, and all ancient Scriptures and religions of Hindustan and Burma”—which, if not at all true, is at least enthusiastic enough in all conscience, and carefully hides the “wary and suspicious” side of the national character!³⁴

The reversal of white privilege, clearly quite amusing to Olcott, is telling about the complexities of local trajectories of translocal projects. Whereas Olcott’s white skin had been highly prized as a marker of the importance and validity of the Buddhist revival in Ceylon, here Olcott’s white status was a potential threat to Buddhist revival work, marking it as foreign and illegitimate to Arakanese sangha and laity alike. They highly desired his enthusiasm and his expertise, and perhaps the connections and methods he and Dharmapala brought, but the project of Buddhist organizing in Arakan was wary of things too foreign.

The visit was carried out in November of 1892 with Olcott and Dharmapala together. They were enthusiastically received, lecturing across the province to receptive audiences and

winning over the local sangha. Arakanese were apparently very receptive to the vision of the Maha-Bodhi Society, especially the project at Bodh Gaya. As Douglas Ober explains this likely stemmed from the long history of Arakanese and Chittagonian pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya.³⁵ They formed a branch of the MBS, one of the earliest, as well as a ladies' auxiliary. They also donated generously during this trip. Donations of Rs 50,000 were pledged, and Olcott left Arakan with Rs 4,000 in hand.³⁶ It had been a Burmese donation of Rs 10,000 for missionizing work that had inspired Olcott to host the meeting that would lead to founding the MBS; in one short trip, the Arakanese had pledged five times as much. Dharmapala and Olcott were clearly impressed with the financial generosity of the Arakanese and interpreted it as a wholesale endorsement of their plans and their leadership, which as we will see may not have been completely accurate.

Shin Chandra and the MBS

While the lay people were offering their rupees and their gold, the monks made a donation of their own that would ultimately prove equally significant. During their visit to Akyab, Dharmapala and Olcott suggested that the Arakanese should send some young monks to live in Bodh Gaya to help support the revival of Buddhism in India.

In order to fulfill the request of their two honorable guests, monks and laymen of Sittwe promised that they would explore among monastery complexes in Sittwe and reply within seven days. On the fifth day, Dharmapala, Col. Olcott, and prominent persons in the town came to Sandimar-Rama Monastery, while Sayadaw was teaching Shin Chandra and Shin Suriya. Laymen of Sittwe introduced their honorable guests to Sayadaw and explained the reason of their visit. Sayadaw instantly agreed their plan with delight and asked Shin Chandra who was attending next to him if he was willing to go to Mizzima [India]. Shin Chandra had seriously considered the plan and in a brief moment he answered to Sayadaw

that it would be better if his friend Shin Suriya came along with him instead of going there alone. When they asked Shin Suriya, he answered that he would go if his friend Shin Chandra was along with him.³⁷

Chandra, being the Sanskrit/Pali for moon, was thus joined by Suriya, or sun, on a mission to preserve Buddhism in India and support the Maha-Bodhi Society. The two novices traveled to Calcutta with an Arakanese minor colonial official, Tha Dway, who had originally invited Olcott to Arakan, accompanied by two groups of 30 lay pilgrims. The Moon and Sun novices lived at Bodh Gaya in 1892–1893, and helped clean up the site and reestablish a Buddhist presence there. After attacks on Buddhists by locals in February 1893, the MBS rented a small place for them to live there, but the space proved unsuitable, and they moved to a building which had been donated by Arakanese merchants in Calcutta.³⁸ They eventually asked Dharmapala for permission to return to Akyab, and set out for home. However, this was not to be the end of Shin Chandra's efforts in India. According to his successor:

One day a Mandalay based newspaper featured an article entitled "*Sasana* will prosper in India" which said that "the two novices, Shin Sanda and Shin Suriya from the Sandimayama monastery, Akyab, Arakan, were now studying in India by the invitation of Mr. Dharmapala, the head of Mahabodi Society. When they became grown-ups and educated, the *Sasana* will shine in India as if the 'Sun and Moon' appear. That is why Burmese should support Maha Bodhi Society."³⁹

After seeing the news, Shin Chandra felt ashamed of his failure and return. After a discussion with the abbot and a search for new donors, he set out again for India. Shin Chandra returned to Calcutta and received an education in Sanskrit, Pali and "modern sciences" at a monastery run by another Arakanese monk there. This did not end his interaction with the MBS; he helped

Dharmapala with the 1908 legal battle for Buddhist control of Bodh Gaya, and in particular the Burmese Rest House there, by interviewing King Thibaw, the Burmese king in exile in Ratnagiri, about the history of the rest house. Nor, as we shall see, would this be the end of the Arakanese contribution to Buddhism in India.

Arakanese Networks in the Maha-Bodhi Society

Dharmapala saw Arakan as an important early base of support for the Maha-Bodhi Society, as represented in early issues of the *Journal of the Maha-Bodhi Society* (hereafter *JMBS*). The *Journal* consistently listed Arakan representatives separately from those for Burma, while the statement of goals included the establishment at Bodh Gaya of a monastery for bhikkhus “representing the Buddhist countries of China, Japan, Siam, Cambodia, Burma, Ceylon, Chittagong, Nepal, Arakan, and Tibet”.⁴⁰ Mention is made of the Buddhist flag being introduced in “Burma, Siam and Arakan”;⁴¹ Dharmapala writes proudly “To the Buddhists of Burma, Ceylon, Tibet, Sikkim, Chittagong, Arakan and Japan I have personally delivered the great message”;⁴² while in more mundane mode, the advertizing rates section comments “This Journal has a circulation throughout India, Ceylon, Burma and Arakan [...]”.⁴³

This perspective was one shared by at least some Arakanese Buddhist organizers: Olcott noted on his first visit that those he met were “generous, enthusiastic, patriotic, religious, and—suspicious of foreigners”.⁴⁴ A snippet in an early issue of the *Journal* sets the tone:

BUDDHISM IN ARAKAN.

Buddhism appeared in our country during the life-time of our Lord Gautama Buddha: and it is believed that the famous image of the Lord, now in Mandalay [sc. following the Burmese conquest], was molded after His visit to the Arakanese King Srirāja. There is no historical evidence to support this, and ought therefore, to be taken for what it is worth.

But Buddhism was firmly established as a state religion after the third Convocation [supposedly called by Asoka, i.e. in the third century BCE]. [...]

Tradition says that the Arakanese are descendants of a Colony of Kshatriyas who came to Arakan about thirty centuries ago from India.

Since its introduction Buddhism has always remained as the national Religion.⁴⁵

The piece was signed Kaung Hla Phru, who was assistant secretary to the Akyab MBS.⁴⁶

Similarly, we read in 1895 of one of the secretaries of the Akyab society, Tun or Htoon Chan:

Arakan History.—We are informed that Mr. Tun Chan, B.A., B. L., has, in course of preparation, a history of Arakan from the most authentic sources. In order that it may be a thoroughly trustworthy and standard work of reference, Mr. Tun Chan has undertaken an immense amount of literary research.

To write the history of one's own native land is surely a most commendable undertaking, and Mr. Tun Chan will earn the gratitude and encomiums of his countrymen for so valuable a legacy. We wish him success in his arduous undertaking.—*Arakan News*.⁴⁷

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the Akyab MBS organizers were relatively elite figures.⁴⁸ Of Kaung Hla Pru, cited above, we subsequently read:

Kaung Hla Pru, of Akyab, who at the commencement of the Mahá-Bodhi work rendered excellent service to the cause in Arakan, has passed the Burma Myook's [native magistrate] Examination, coming fourth in the list. We wish him all success, and trust that he would again show that energy in the furtherance of the cause.⁴⁹

Individual donors mentioned include Dr Moungh Tha Noo, Asst. Surgeon, Akyab (Rs 50) and Moungh Mra Tha Dun, Pensioned Myook, Akyab (Rs 50).⁵⁰ The *Journal* reported that in the funeral procession of Moungh Tha Noo's wife, the cortege was "preceded by a body of Police, Phongyis [bhikkhus] and Luyis [elders]."⁵¹ An apparently more plebeian "Lah Paw Zan, Bailiff" (Rs 10, twice⁵²) turns out to be relatively well-heeled himself:

Personal.

Buddhist alms-giving.—This is the ninth year that Maung Hla Phaw Zan Bailiff, of Akyab, Arakan, in accordance with the Buddhistic spirit of liberal alms-giving, has occupied himself during the eight days cold weather vacation in feeding the Buddhist priests.⁵³

Along with the historian Htoon [Tun] Chan (BA, BL), figures who appear regularly in the list of committee members / representatives⁵⁴ are Chan Htoon Aung, Advocate⁵⁵ and U Mra U, the latter perhaps the Arakan Society's most high-status member:

U Mra U, Akunwoon, Vice-President of the Arakan Maha Bodhi Society, a most energetic, able and devoted Buddhist, has been deservedly honoured by H.E. the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, with the title of A.T.M., the highest known in Arakan.⁵⁶

U Mra U was clearly also a very wealthy individual:

The Vice-President of the Akyab Maha-Bodhi Society, Mr. U. Mra U, A.T.M., has, according to the *Arakan News*, made his son and his grandson to enter the order of Buddhist novices. For over a fortnight Akyab has witnessed a spectacle hitherto unprecedented in the annals of the town. Feeding of Buddhist priests, giving alms to the poor, distributing

Buddhist literature, &c., marked this event. The *Arakan News* says that the total expenditure has been about ten thousand rupees.⁵⁷

Other details confirm this sense of a local educated elite. In 1895 U Mra U was an Extra Assistant Commissioner; later, perhaps, a Superintendent in the Excise Service (1922–27). By 1925 Htoon Chan (BA, BL) had also become an advocate. He also brought out at least three editions of an “Arakanese Calendar” (by 1918); was cited by Maurice Collis as an authority on history. Kaung Hla Pru was working in the Assistant Commissioner’s Office in Akyab in 1895. Dr Moungh Tha Noo, who served as a civil surgeon combatting plague and was introduced to the Prince of Wales, appeared in *Who’s Who in Burma*, which gave a run-down of his family:

A.T.M. K.S.M, Civil Surgeon, (retd.) ... Son of the late U Myat Tha Dun, 1st Grade Myook, and nephew and son-in-law of the late U Shwe Tha, I.S.O, K.S.M., A.T.M., District Superintendent of Police. ... Prominent relations in Government Service: U Shwe Zan Aung, B.A., K.S.M., A.T.M. Deputy Commissioner and first Buran Commission of Excise, not retired, Cousin and Brother-in-law. Dr. Tha Doe, M.B., Ch.B. (Edin.) Assistant Medical Superintendent General Hospital Rangoon, Eldest son. U Hla Baw Thu, A.T.M., King’s Medallist, 1911, District Superintendent of Police, not retired. Brother-in-law. U Saw Hla Pru, B.A., B.L., A.T.M., Additional Deputy Commissioner and District Magistrate, Tavoy. Son-in-law.⁵⁸

Given these connections, it is entirely plausible that “[a]t Akyab the whole European community turned out to meet [Olcott], and the Commissioner of Arakan had a number of European gentlemen to meet him at a private dinner.”⁵⁹ These well-connected and comfortably well-off Arakanese Buddhist organizers had their own agendas, which—if they coincided with Dharmapala’s for a while—were hardly dependent on him in the longer term.

Arakan and Chittagong

Arakan Buddhists had long had a second point of interest in what was then India:⁶⁰ the Chittagong Hill Tracts (in present-day Bangladesh) had been a point of refuge for leading Arakanese groups following the Burmese conquest, and in the mid-nineteenth century reformist Arakanese monks had played a leading role in the revival of Buddhism among the Barua and Chakma groups in Chittagong.⁶¹ A Chittagong branch of the MBS had been among the first to be founded,⁶² perhaps on foot of Olcott's private lecture to "a company of Maghs (Boruahs) of Chittagong" in Akyab,⁶³ while later that same year Dharmapala could write "The Bhikshus of Burmah, Siam, Japan, Arakan and Chittagong have promised to support the movement [the MBS]".⁶⁴

There was a longer back-story: "In 1885 an excellent Buddhist Journal was started in Bengali, in Chittagong".⁶⁵ In the same issue, celebrating ten years of the Society, the *JMBS* quoted the *Indian Mirror* thus: "The revival of Buddhism in this country may be said to have commenced with the foundation of the Maha-Bodhi Society in Calcutta, although isolated bodies had been working silently to the same end *at Calcutta, Chittagong and other places*".⁶⁶ By this point, Calcutta had its own Buddhist diaspora: "There are about 2,000 Buddhists in Calcutta, natives of Arakan, Burma, Chittagong and Ceylon, and they are the only people who have no place of worship in the metropolis of the British Indian Empire".⁶⁷

The MBS began with close connections to this milieu; this community was organized by the Arakanese monk Kiriparasan, whom Dharmapala had met in Bodh Gaya. Kemper observes that the Chittagong Maghs celebrated Wesak together with the MBS in the early years, and that the Society held events at their vihāra, as well as sharing Bengali patrons. However, after this initial honeymoon "he showed little interest in including this community of Indian Buddhists

in his efforts to recover Bodh Gaya”.⁶⁸ Kiriparasan founded a separate organization, the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha.⁶⁹

Up until the mid-1890s the *JMBS* listed a Chittagong representative; when in 1891 the Society convened an international Buddhist conference at Bodh Gaya, the Chittagong delegates included this representative (Krishna Chandra Chowdry, listed as secretary for a “Buddhist Association”) along with Girish Chandra Dewan, given as “Chakma Sub-Chief, Hill Tracts” and Amal Khan Dewan.⁷⁰ Dharmapala seems to have consciously cultivated the Chittagong chieftains: when the young Kumar Bhuvanmohan Roy came to study in Calcutta, the *Journal* made flattering comments on his “very intelligent and amiable appearance”.⁷¹ When a couple of years later the same man, now chief, was promoted to Rajah by the British crown, the *Journal* congratulated him and noted that it “shall henceforth feel proud to call our friend a Rajah”.⁷²

The Arakanese MBS: Asserting Independence Through Religion?

In this period, when religious self-assertion had not yet turned fully into national independence movements, Arakanese Buddhists seem to have been pursuing something of an independent foreign policy vis-à-vis Burman Buddhism. They were early supporters of Dharmapala—indeed taking the initiative in contacting Dharmapala to invite Olcott to Akyab and “prepar[ing] the way with fervent articles in their English and vernacular journals”.⁷³ Clearly, however, these journals were not Arakanese MBS ones but other, pre-existing Arakanese periodicals.

More generally, the Society (or its individual members) already had significant organizational expertise: for example, it was able to organize for Olcott to speak before a crowd of thousands at a pagoda festival.⁷⁴ Immediate steps taken following its formation (along with the previously discussed fundraising) included setting up a ladies’ auxiliary society⁷⁵ “through

the perseverance of Mi Thit Sa and Mi Ngway U, (the latter had been on a pilgrimage to Buddha Gaya)”,⁷⁶ and shortly thereafter establishing its own journal:

The Arakan Maha Bodhi Society.—Under the beautiful and appropriate name of *Bodhimandine*, the Arakan Maha Bodhi Society has started a monthly journal, the first number of which was published on the 1st of January. Started in the interest of the Burmese-speaking people, it should have a large circulation in Arakan and Burma. We wish the journal every success. Subscriptions should be made payable to Kaung Hla Pru, Assistant Secretary, Arakan Maha Bodhi Society, Akyab.⁷⁷

As Dharmapala recognized, then, the Akyab Society had made major contributions in the early years of the MBS:

Arakan Maha-Bodhi Society.—Since the beginning of the year 1893 we have received every possible support from our good brother Buddhists of Akyab. If not for the liberality of the Burmese people, I could not have carried on the great work of the Mahá-Bodhi Society with the help of Ceylon Buddhists alone, who, with commendable generosity, have given me all help since the commencement of the movement, and they have shewn the greatest devotion in contributing money to the Mahá-Bodhi Fund. I expect aid from the Burmese and Arakanese, and by the united efforts of the Buddhists of Asia, we shall again resuscitate Buddhism in India.⁷⁸

Indeed, in 1892–93 Arakan vied with Burma (Rs 1,272 as against Rs 1,297) for donations to the Society, far ahead of any other countries.⁷⁹ This funding of course represented a connection to Colombo, but the Akyab branch also followed through as key supporters of the MBS’ move to a Calcutta base, a politically significant move given the Society’s understanding of India as

the Buddhist holy land, and therefore the terrain on which pan-Asian Buddhism was to come together:

[T]he Akyab Maha-Bodhi Society contributed its share and the premises in 2, Creek Row, were engaged in December 1892. It was a meritorious work this establishment of a Buddhist headquarters in the metropolis of India. The Arakan Buddhists deserve thanks for having contributed to the Maha-Bodhi Fund.⁸⁰

Asserting Independence from the International MBS

As with the BTS and TS, however, the Arakanese eventually parted ways with Dharmapala. The subscription history tells one story: after 1892–93, no further Arakanese donations appear until 1900–01 (Rs 13), while Burma recorded substantial contributions in 1894–95, 1896–97, 1898–99 and 1899–1900 (Rs 1,101; 1,345; 930 and 773 respectively).⁸¹ This financial silence hints at Arakanese MBS interests lying elsewhere than with the central body. It can be set against a certain flow of snippets from the Arakanese press in the *JMBS*, together with congratulatory comments on Tun Chan's Arakanese history and other personal items relating to Akyab MBS figures—suggesting perhaps a sense on Dharmapala's part that a closer alliance was still possible.

However, the undercurrent of division between Dharmapala and the Akyab branch remains. Dharmapala's report contains a reference to the Rs 4,000 donated to Olcott in 1892 as being held in trust by Arakanese members.⁸² The control of funds seems to have held with it a sense of a control of agenda as well. By 1902, there was still a conflict over the money collected in 1891. Something of this is present in the article quoted above, thanking the Akyab branch for its contribution towards the Calcutta headquarters, because the article continues

About Rs 4,000 were deposited in the Bank of Bengal in the name of the officers of the Akyab Maha-Bodhi Society. The General Secretary [Dharmapala] made application to Mr. U. Mua [Mra] U., A.T.M., President, and Mr. Mounng Chan Htoon Aung, Advocate, the Secretary of the Branch, requesting that this money may be allocated to either of the following: (1) to build a Dharmasala at Isispatna in Benares (2) to build a Rest-house near the railway station in Gaya for the use of Bhikkhus and pilgrims (3) to purchase a printing press for the use of the Maha-Bodhi Journal and Buddhist texts in Devanagri [sic].

Although over a score of times were written to these gentlemen, no response till now of any kind was received in reply thereto. We hope the Fund is quite safe in their hands and trust that they would remit the amount for the Maha-Bodhi work in India for which it was intended.⁸³

It may well be that the Akyab Buddhists did not see Benares or Buddhist publishing in Devanagari (a script few in Arakan could read) within their understanding of Buddhist revival. Such projects, like Olcott's white status, may have elicited their suspicion of the foreign. While it is clear that they continued to support the project of expanding Buddhism in India, with their support of Kiripasaran and Chandramani, it is not clear that they supported Dharmapala's leadership or the right of the central organization to decide on the use of funds. But given how Dharmapala and Olcott read the original donations as an endorsement of their efforts, this control of funds was seen by the center as a betrayal. It is not clear whether the real basis for this conflict was financial, organizational or more politico-religious in character, but (given the status of the Akyab organizers) it is unlikely that it represented either simple embezzlement or an abandonment of interest: most probably they simply turned their interests elsewhere.

By 1904, the conflict between the two had come to a head and Dharmapala felt justified in publicly condemning and shaming the Akyab members in comparison with other, more centrally compliant branches:

The Akyab Maha-Bodhi Society has been requested by the President of the Maha-Bodhi Society, to remit the fund which is at present in the Bank of Bengal, Akyab, for the use of the Society's work in India. The Mandalay Maha-Bodhi Society donated Rs. 12,000 to build the Maha-Bodhi Dharmasala at Buddha-Gaya, and the Lanka Maha-Bodhi Society have contributed since 1891 over Rs. 33,000 at different times for the work of the Society in India. The Trustees of the Akyab Maha-Bodhi Fund are the leading Buddhists of Arakan to whom several communications have been sent urging them to forward the money for paying the bills of the contractor who built the Dharmasala at Isipatana.

The fund was raised for the Maha-Bodhi work in India in October of 1892; and yet the Trustees are making every effort to appropriate the fund for their own use. For 12 years we have made every exertion to get the fund for the work in India; about a hundred letters have been written to different officers of the Society, but without any effect.⁸⁴

While there was never a formal split between the Akyab branch and the parent MBS, it is clear that there was a divergent interpretation of purpose and tension over the control of both funds and agenda from the beginning. The center was unable to affect this process substantially. This changing balance was due in turn to the *effectiveness* of transnational organizations like the MBS (and TS) in mobilizing local actors—who then articulated new purposes for themselves.

In particular, the Arakan MBS is an example of the new assertiveness of *lay* Buddhists (often educated and bilingual) and the articulation of new kinds of politics locally in this period. International religious (and other) organizations had disseminated the new mode of organizing very effectively throughout much of the world-system, and theosophical organizations of all kinds played a significant role in this. However, they were more effective at unleashing these new kinds of popular agency than they were at channeling it in the directions intended by the center. As Turner has written elsewhere:

Burmese, particularly those in Rangoon and Arakan, were initially quite taken with Olcott's rhetoric and Dharmapala's efforts, creating the first branches of the Maha Bodhi Society and providing much of the early funding for the fledgling association. However, by the late 1890s, such international projects no longer held the Burmese imagination. They were overshadowed by more pressing local problems and local efforts. The internationally focused Buddhist efforts that gained longer support came from two of the earliest Europeans to ordain monks; U Dhammaloka, an Irish sailor who became a popular preacher and reformer, railing against the threats of Christian missionaries and the dangers of drink, and Ananda Metteyya, a Scottish chemist and occult practitioner who sought to create a Buddhist mission to Europe based out of Rangoon.⁸⁵

The Akyab MBS' interests shifted toward promoting other white Buddhists, ones perhaps easier to fit into local agendas, at least initially. In 1899 they housed the Bhikkhu Asoka (Gordon Douglas), one of the first Europeans ordained as a Buddhist monk, and after his death formed a library out of his book collection. Moreover, at least one stalwart of the Arakan MBS appears in the later history of globalized Buddhism. The *JMBS* tells the tale:

A European Buddhist in Arakan.

Mr. Allan MacGregor, a European Buddhist, arrived here on the 6th instant. Arrival of this gentleman was eagerly expected by Dr. Maung Tha Noo, with whom Mr. MacGregor had been in communication for some time. [...] It is said that this gentleman, for whom a costly silken yellow robe has already been prepared at the cost of Dr. Maung Tha Noo, is going to be ordained here as a Buddhist priest.⁸⁶

This was Ananda Metteyya, who would go on to found the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland and send his own mission to Britain.⁸⁷ We recall that in 1895 Maung Tha Noo “is a member of the Akyab Mahá-Bodhi Society. He takes a great interest in the welfare of the movement, and was foremost in helping the formation of the Mahá-Bodhi Library”. Ananda Metteyya had his own agenda in turn, and found other sponsors outside Arakan, but this ordination marks both a continuation of Arakanese commitment to Buddhist globalization and the abandonment of the MBS itself as a vehicle for such activities.

Conclusion: From Arakan to Ambedkar

The networks which constituted the Arakan MBS already had their own organizational expertise and publications, and it was they who took the lead in inviting Olcott. Through the MBS, they were able to establish links independent of the Burman Buddhist centers in Mandalay and Rangoon with the new would-be organization of world Buddhism. Arakanese MBS members were involved in establishing the international MBS’ new center in Calcutta and its early activities at Bodh Gaya; these initiatives overlapped with the development of a long-standing relationship with Chittagong Buddhists and fitted into a broader perception that “Chittagongian, Magh, Arakanese, or Rakhine” constituted a single ethnic group, whether in the Calcutta diaspora’s vihāra, the reforming temples of Chittagong or the lay organizations of Akyab.

This chapter has argued that this period saw the birth of a new kind of transnational religious organization. The MBS was theosophical with a small t, precisely because the significance of this organizing form went far beyond the TS itself. Local organizers could use it to form new kinds of networks and pursue their own agendas in new ways—as the Arakanese were in turn to do with the MBS. The traditional “view from the center”, focused on founders, texts and organizational history, misses these local agendas: yet local actors, with their own

purposes, were necessary if transnational religious organizations were to spread; and as the Arakanese story shows, the central organization could often exert little real control when agendas diverged. If theosophy, or the MBS, became significant, it is precisely because they were able to offer something new and valuable to local networks, for shorter or longer periods. This chapter has sought to explore something of how this interaction appears from the periphery, in a moment when theosophical organizing practices enabled the formation of new kinds of local elite networks in the contested context of Buddhist globalizing within colonial Asia.

Coda

A final twist in the tale comes with the Arakanese novice, Shin Chandra, sent to develop the MBS presence at Bodh Gaya. Sponsored by the Arakanese merchant U Kyi Zayi on his return to India, he stayed first at “the Arakanese Maha Bodhi Society building” and later at a vihāra built by U Kyi Zayi for the Arakanese-Indian monk Sayadaw Mahawira, who oversaw Shin Chandra’s education. In time Mahawira would establish a monastery in Kushinagar, one of the four Buddhist holy places in India where Dharmapala sought to establish the MBS. Shin Chandra, ordained as Chandramani in 1903, became chief abbot here after Mahawira’s death. Eventually becoming the senior Buddhist monk in India, he officiated at the historical mass conversion ceremony of perhaps 500,000 Dalits to Buddhism under BR Ambedkar, marking a very different return of Buddhism to India.⁸⁸ If in ways no participant of the 1890s could foresee, U Chandramani’s eventual career exemplifies the way in which Arakanese Buddhists appropriated the MBS’ view of India as the Buddhist holy land, but ultimately asserted their own (and Dalit) agendas as the organizational vehicle of the MBS was abandoned.

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² Brian Bocking, Laurence Cox and Yoshinaga Shin’ichi, “The First Buddhist Mission to the West: Charles Pfoufoues and the London Buddhist Mission of 1889–1892,” *DISKUS* 16, no. 3 (2014): 1–33.

³ The report was republished in the *Virginia Chronicle*, vol. 5, no 100 (Anonymous, “Madame Blavatsky’s Successor,” *Virginia Chronicle*, June 3, 1891, 5, <http://virginiachronicle.com/cgi-bin/virginia?a=d&d=T18910603.1.5#>).

⁴ There is no consistency in how “Maha-Bodhi Society” is written, (not least because European diacriticals were used, giving forms such as *Mahā-Bodhi* and *Mahá Bodhi*). If anything, *mahābodhi* would be most in keeping with present-day anglicizations of Pali and Sanskrit. We have opted for Maha-Bodhi Society and MBS for simplicity.

⁵ Tilman Frasch, “Buddhist Councils in a Time of Transition: Globalism, Modernity and the Preservation of Textual Traditions,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 14, no. 1 (2013): 38–51.

⁶ Today we might say “transnational”, by analogy with “transnational social movements” (see e.g. Cristina Flesher Fominaya, *Social movements and globalization: how protests, occupations and uprisings are changing the world*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), but in a world which largely consisted of empires, “internationalist” meant something rather more subversive than it does in today’s world where the vast majority of states claim legitimacy as national entities, so that we typically read *international* as *interstate* and expect such bodies to be fairly official.

⁷ Thomas Tweed, “Theory and Method in the Study of Buddhism: Towards ‘Translocative’ Analysis,” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 12 (2011): 17–32; Thomas Tweed, “Tracing Modernity’s Flows: Buddhist Currents in the Pacific World,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 43, no. 1&2 (2012): 1–22.

⁸ See our collaboration with Brian Bocking in the broader “Dhammaloka Project” (Brian Bocking, Laurence Cox and Alicia Turner, *A Buddhist crossroads: pioneer western Buddhists and Asian networks, 1860–1960* (London: Routledge, 2014); and <http://dhammalokaproject.wordpress.com>).

⁹ Charles M Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 100.

¹⁰ E.g. Nile Green (2013), “Forgotten Futures: Indian Muslims in the Trans-Islamic Turn to Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 72, no. 3: 611–631.

¹¹ For exceptions see Douglas Ober, “‘Like Embers Hidden in Ashes, or Jewels Encrusted in Stone’: Rāhul Sāṅkrtyāyan, Dharmānand Kosambī and Buddhist Activity In Colonial India,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 14, no. 1 (2013): 134–148.

¹² *JMBS* 7, no. 4 (August 1898): 36–37.

¹³ Charles Tilly, “Repertoires of Contention in Britain and America, 1750–1830,” Center for Research on Social Organization working paper, University of Michigan, 1977. Perera and others have identified both the Maha-Bodhi Society and the Buddhist Theosophical Society in Ceylon as NGOs, pointing to the importance of funding from foreign, particularly western, sources but also their religious and social service agendas: Sasanka Perera, “Non Governmental Organizations in Sri Lanka: The Dynamics, the Impact, the Rhetoric and the Politics,” *Dialogue-Colombo- 25* (1999): 3. Perera, however, emphasizes the impact of Christian organizational models alone; while this is clearly important for understanding e.g. the development of BTS schools, we want to point to the wider development of new organizing models, transmitted not least via the TS: see also Laurence Cox, “The Politics of Buddhist Revival: U Dhammaloka as Social Movement Organiser,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 11, no. 2 (2010): 173–227.

¹⁴ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-De-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹⁵ See Alicia Turner, *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2014), chapter 4 for a detailed discussion.

¹⁶ Laurence Cox, *Buddhism and Ireland: From the Celts to the Counter Culture and Beyond* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), chapter 4.

¹⁷ Cox, *Buddhism and Ireland*, chapter 5.

¹⁸ Laurence Cox, “Buddhism in Ireland: the inner life of world-systems,” *Etudes irlandaises* 39, no. 2 (2014): 161–172.

¹⁹ Anne Blackburn, *Ceylonese Buddhism in colonial Singapore: new ritual spaces and specialists, 1895–1935*. Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series, no. 184 (Singapore: Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 2012), 23.

²⁰ Laurence Cox and Mihirini Sirisena, “Early western Buddhists in colonial Asia: John Bowles Daly and the Buddhist Theosophical Society of Ceylon,” *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions* 3, no. 1 (2016): 108–139.

²¹ Mark Frost, “‘Wider opportunities’: Religious Revival, Nationalist Awakening and the Global Dimension in Colombo, 1870–1920,” *Modern Asian Studies* 36, no. 4 (2002): 937.

²² Indeed for some times and places we even get the impression that a local “global Buddhist” milieu may have taken it on itself to invite Olcott or Dharmapala and constitute a TS or MBS branch as part of its own development and self-assertion on a wider stage. However, it can be hard to identify such situations given that the records of the international organization are that much more likely to be preserved, digitised etc.

²³ There are of course methodological issues here. English and French-language sources are more likely to have survived, to have been digitized and to be available to researchers, while turn-of-the-twentieth-century periodicals in Asian languages often require linguistic skills beyond competence in the present-day written language. Similarly, centralized sources—the journal of an international society or a national colonial newspaper, as against the journal of a local branch or a regional newspaper—are also more likely to have survived, to be digitized and available (and, again, to be published in English or French). The fact that even colonial-language and predominantly “centralist” sources can be read against the grain to reveal much greater internal diversity and contention, and the results achieved by research programmes such as that of Anne Blackburn or Yoshinaga Shin’ichi, suggest that we probably still underestimate the power of local actors and purposes. The comparison with existing work on such organizations in Britain, the US or Ireland (where academic resources are that much greater, linguistic issues and source availability present fewer problems) is another helpful corrective in this regard—all, of course, tending to highlight that the self-representation of international organizational centres cannot easily be taken as an accurate reflection of reality.

²⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London: Verso, 2005).

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- ²⁵ Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul / History Workshop, 1986).
- ²⁶ Stan Shipley, *Club Life and Socialism in Mid-Victorian London* (Oxford: History Workshop, 1972); Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005 [1980]).
- ²⁷ Mario Diani, "The concept of social movement," *Sociological Review* 40, no. 1 (1992): 1–25.
- ²⁸ Turner, *Saving Buddhism*, 76.
- ²⁹ Steven Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation: Anagarika Dharmapala and the Buddhist World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 186–93.
- ³⁰ Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, vol. IV (1895), 266–82, online at <http://www.minhtrietmoi.org/Theosophy/Olcott/OLD%20DIARY%20LEAVES%204.htm>; Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1996), 127–29.
- ³¹ Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation*, 207. Mitra Baura's work on the complex constructions of ethnic and national Buddhist identities in Chittagong and Arakan sheds greater light on the politics of Buddhist identification in this period. D. Mitra Baura, "Thrice Honored Sangharaja Saramedha (1801-82): Arakan-Chittagong Buddhism Across Colonial and Counter-Colonial Power," *The Journal of Burma Studies* 23 (forthcoming).
- ³² For a fuller discussion of Kiripasaran's background and contributions see Douglas Fairchild Ober, "Reinventing Buddhism: Conversations and Encounters in Modern India, 1839 - 1956" (PhD diss., The University of British Columbia, 2016), chapters 4 and 5.
- ³³ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves* IV, 287. This may be the same U Tha Dwe as the EAC (Extra Assistant Commissioner) who helped write Burmese Buddhist law in Akyab (Andrew Huxley, "Three Nineteenth-Century Law Book Lists: Burmese Legal History from the Inside," *Journal of Burma Studies* 13, no. 77–105 (2009)); if so, the Burmese and Arakanese stories are much more closely intertwined. However, further research is needed to demonstrate the identity of the two U Tha Dwe/Dway s.
- ³⁴ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves* IV, 482–84.
- ³⁵ Ober, "Reinventing Buddhism," 123–25.
- ³⁶ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves* IV, 508–9.
- ³⁷ Aye Thein, *Naingna akyo pyu apo kan yadana myo* (Yangon: Gone tu sape, 2007), 97–98. Translation by Wai Phyto Maung.
- ³⁸ Hari-Bala-Kushinayone [Sayadaw Nyanissara], *Mizzima-daytha-tharthana-phyu-a-tayay-akyone* [Missionary Experiences in Majjhimadesa] (Yangon: Pyinnya A lin pya sarpay, 1993), 73–83. Cf. Aye Thein, *Naingna akyo pyu*, 96–102. For more on the status of this building and competitions between different Buddhist groups in Calcutta see Ober, "Reinventing Buddhism."
- ³⁹ Hari-Bala-Kushinayone [Sayadaw Nyanissara], *Mizzima-daytha-tharthana-phyu-a-tayay-akyone* [Missionary Experiences in Majjhimadesa] (Yangon: Pyinnya A lin pya sarpay, 1993), 72. Translation by Wai Phyto Maung.
- ⁴⁰ E.g. *JMBS* 1, no. 7 (November 1892): 1.
- ⁴¹ *JMBS* 1, no. 9 (January 1893): 3.
- ⁴² *JMBS* 2, no. 10 (February 1894): 4.
- ⁴³ E.g. *JMBS* 3, no. 4 (August 1894).
- ⁴⁴ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves* IV, (November 1892), 503.
- ⁴⁵ *JMBS* 1, no. 5 (September 1892): 7.
- ⁴⁶ *JMBS* 1, no. 10 (February 1893): 1.
- ⁴⁷ *JMBS* 4, no. 5 (September 1895): 33.
- ⁴⁸ This is true at least so far as they can be traced, which may be circular.
- ⁴⁹ *JMBS* 4, no. 12 (April 1896): 100.
- ⁵⁰ *JMBS* 2, no. 3 (July 1893): 8.
- ⁵¹ "Dr. Mounng Tha Noo is a member of the Akyab Mahá-Bodhi Society. He takes a great interest in the welfare of the movement, and was foremost in helping the formation of the Mahá-Bodhi Library." *JMBS* 4, no. 3 (July 1895): 23.
- ⁵² *JMBS* 1, no. 11 (March 1893): 8.
- ⁵³ *JMBS* 3, no. 10&11 (February–March 1895): 77.
- ⁵⁴ These three also appear as part of the initial welcoming committee for Olcott's founding visit: *Lucifer*, vol. 11, no. 65 (January 1893), reprint from the *Arakan News*: 427.
- ⁵⁵ He was still in this position in 1925: Anglo-Burmese Library, "Thacker's Directory 1925 – Akyab," transcribed and published 2011, <http://abldirectories.weebly.com/1925-akyab.html>.
- ⁵⁶ *JMBS* 1, no. 10 (February 1893): 3. "(1) Ahmitdan gaung Tazeik-ya Min (meaning 'Recipient of a Medal for Good Service'), indicated by the letters A.T.M. after the name much as the Companionship of the Bath in England is indicated by the letters C.B." Sir Roper Lethbridge, *The Golden Book of India: A Genealogical and*

Biographical Dictionary of the Ruling Princes, Chiefs, Nobles, and other Personages, Titled or Decorated, of the Indian Empire (London / NY: Macmillan, 1893).

⁵⁷ *JMBS* 3, no. 10&11 (February–March 1895): 75.

⁵⁸ *Who's Who in Burma, under the Distinguished Patronage of H.E. Sir Harcourt Butler, Governor of Burma: A Biographical Record of Prominent Residents of Burma with Photographs & Illustrations* (Calcutta & Rangoon: Indo-Burma Publishing Agency, 1927), 166.

⁵⁹ *Lucifer*, vol. 11, no. 65 (January 1893), 428.

⁶⁰ Swapna Bhattacharya, "A Close View of Encounter between British Burma and British Bengal" (Paper to 18th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Lund, 2004).

⁶¹ Baura, "Thrice Honored Sangharaja Saramedha." The Arakan-trained Chittagong native bhikkhu Saramitra / Saramedha Mahasthavir had moved to Chittagong and was beginning to purify monastic practices there by 1864. His students were present in Calcutta at Kiriparasan's *Dharmankur* vihara (Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation*, 274). Paul Williams, *Buddhism: The Early Buddhist Schools and Doctrinal History: Theravada doctrine*, vol. 2 (London: Taylor and Francis, 2005). See also Bhattacharya, "A Close View of Encounter", 13.

⁶² *JMBS* 1, no. 2 (June 1892): 1.

⁶³ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves IV* (November 5, 1892), 501.

⁶⁴ *JMBS* 1, no. 6 (October 1892): 7.

⁶⁵ *Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World* 10, no. 8&9 (December 1901–January 1902): 76. (This is the new title of the *Journal of the Maha-Bodhi Society*.)

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 72, our emphasis.

⁶⁷ *JMBS* 3, no. 10&11 (February–March 1895): 86. Douglas Ober notes that, in fact, the vast majority of these 2000 Buddhists listed in the census were Chinese and not of South or Southeast Asian origin.

⁶⁸ Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation*, 29.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 208; Ober has written much more extensively on this conflict. Ober, "Reinventing Buddhism," 170–77.

⁷⁰ *JMBS* 1, no. 12 (April 1893): 4.

⁷¹ *JMBS* 3, no. 10&11 (February–March 1895): 75.

⁷² *JMBS* 6, no. 3&4 (July–August 1897): 17.

⁷³ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves IV* (September 1892), 483.

⁷⁴ *Lucifer*, vol. 11, no. 65 (January 1893), reprint from the *Arakan News*, 428.

⁷⁵ This is the first report of a separate women's Buddhist association in Burma for this period. Turner, *Saving Buddhism*, 180n17.

⁷⁶ *JMBS* 1, no. 9 (January 1893): 1, citing the *Arakan Echo*.

⁷⁷ *JMBS* 1, no. 10 (February 1893): 1.

⁷⁸ *JMBS* 3, no. 12 (April 1895): 91.

⁷⁹ Image from *Maha-Bodhi and United Buddhist World* 10, no. 8&9 (December 1901–January 1902): 81.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 78. Arakanese sources mention an early MBS building in Calcutta funded entirely by local Arakanese businessmen, perhaps preceding the Creek Row building.

⁸¹ Image from *Maha-Bodhi and United Buddhist World* 10, no. 8&9 (December 1901–January 1902): 81.

⁸² Anagarika Dharmapala, *Report of the Maha Bodhi Society, From 1891 to 1915* (Calcutta: Maha Bodhi Society, 1915), 12–13.

⁸³ *Maha-Bodhi and United Buddhist World* 10, no. 8&9 (December 1901–January 1902): 78. This parallels an earlier complaint along similar lines levelled at the Mandalay MBS (*JMBS* 7, no. 3 (July 1898): 20).

⁸⁴ *Maha-Bodhi and United Buddhist World* 13, no. 7&8 (November/December 1904): 1.

⁸⁵ Turner, *Saving Buddhism*, 18.

⁸⁶ *Maha-Bodhi and United Buddhist World* 10, no. 8&9 (December 1901–January 1902): 71.

⁸⁷ John L. Crow, "The White Knight in the Yellow Robe: Allan Bennett's Search for Truth" (MA thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2009); Elizabeth Harris, *Ananda Metteyya: The First British Emissary of Buddhism. The Wheel*, vols. 420–422 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1998).

⁸⁸ Chan Khoon San, *Buddhist Pilgrimage* (Kuala Lumpur: Majujaya Indah, 2009); Himanshu Prabha Ray, "Creating Religious Identities: Buddhist Monuments in Colonial and Post-Colonial India," *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3, no. 2 (2008): 145–167.