



THE LOTUS AND THE LION  
BUDDHISM AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE

J. JEFFREY FRANKLIN



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and  
the Lion

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ALSO BY J. JEFFREY FRANKLIN

*Serious Play: The Cultural Form of the Nineteenth-Century Realist Novel  
For the Lost Boys*

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and  
the Lion

Buddhism and the  
British Empire

J. Jeffrey Franklin

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ITHACA AND LONDON

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## Preface

The idea for this book grew out of a simple observation in my reading of British literature from the second half of the nineteenth century. I kept encountering signs of Buddhism, signs that generations of critics seemed to have ignored or had read generically as signs of “the Orient” rather than specifically as evidence of the presence of Buddhism in Victorian culture. In the writings of mid century, Buddhism appeared only in passing reference. For instance, in Elizabeth Gaskell’s 1851 novel *Cranford*, the ladies of the town mistake Peter Jenkyns, returning tanned and caftaned from India, for “the great Lama of Thibet” (111). How, I wondered, did Gaskell, whose life and writing revolved around provincial and industrial England, know there was such a person as the Dalai Lama of Tibet? As the century progressed, however, allusions to Buddhism became more visible and more significant in works of literature. Writers of romance novels, especially, began to employ the Hindu and Buddhist concepts of karma and reincarnation. H. Rider Haggard’s best-selling romance-adventure *She* (1887) hinges on a particular understanding of reincarnation, and its sequel, *Ayesha: The Return of “She”* (1905), carries the action into the Himalayas and a Tibetan monastery there. What sources was Haggard drawing upon in his conception of reincarnation, or in his depictions of the ceremonies of a Tibetan monastery?

A series of other discoveries—some small, some revelatory—spurred my further interest. Having been guided to Victorian Buddhism first by works of literature, I then discovered what any professional religious studies scholar knows: that the discipline of comparative religion took shape in the nineteenth



century; that it generated a substantial body of translations, analyses, and commentary, both scholarly and popular; and that its predominant object of study was Buddhism. Looking then at the periodical literature, I found hundreds of journal and newspaper articles published in the nineteenth century about Buddhism. Further, the number of articles increased significantly on a decade-by-decade basis between 1850 and 1900. A survey of them revealed a wide diversity of interests and concerns. Among them were reports of discovered manuscripts by East India Company officials, translations by newly created university chairs of Sanskrit, archeological surveys of ancient Buddhist holy sites in India, and travelogues of visits to Buddhist temples in Japan, Tibet, Siam (now Thailand), and China. There were articles on native religion by Methodist missionaries in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), denuncements of Buddhist atheism by Catholic priests in Dublin, and anti-Catholic comparisons of Catholicism to Tibetan “Lamaism” by members of the Church of England. Many articles summarized the life of the Buddha, while others retold the folkloric Jataka tales about his past lives, birth, and childhood. Commentators summarized, with varying degrees of knowledge and sympathy, central doctrines like karma and reincarnation, and not a few addressed a topic of pointed concern: the perceived compatibility of the Dharma with Darwinian evolutionary theory. Later in the century, there were book reviews of recent scholarship on Buddhism, studies of medieval pilgrimage narratives of Chinese monks to India, and polemics by members of the Theosophical Society claiming Buddhism as their precedent. Even some defenses of Buddhism were penned by those who felt it had been unjustly attacked or who saw it as a viable alternative in an age of doubt. Nothing in a decade of doctoral studies, followed by research for my first book, had given me the slightest inkling that the intellectual and popular cultures of the time had been so steeped in Buddhism.

A similarly eye-opening experience for me came when, during a research trip to London, I visited the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, finding in each hundreds of Buddhist figurines, statues, paintings, scrolls, and manuscripts, the lion’s share of which had arrived there in the nineteenth century. I felt as if I had walked into the “Wonder House” from Rudyard Kipling’s novel *Kim* (1901), and in a sense I had. Rudyard Kipling, after all, had based it upon the Lahore Museum, of which his father had been the curator while in India, and some of its Greco-Buddhist statues of the Buddha, found at Gandhara, are in fact now held and displayed in those London museums.

Why then, I was compelled to ask, was there such a relative paucity of historical and literary research on Victorian Buddhism? With a few exceptions—most notably Christopher Clausen’s essays in the 1970s, Philip C. Almond’s landmark historical book, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (1988), and Donald S. Lopez Jr.’s important work in the 1990s within the field of religious studies—little has been written. What Susan Thach Dean wrote in 1998 still is true: “In the many treatments of nineteenth-century religious controversies,

relatively little attention has yet been paid to the development of knowledge about Buddhism in Britain and to the effect that this knowledge had on the Victorian's view of religion and of the world" (Dean 209). Even the most recent collections on Victorian literature and religion, such as those edited by Judith V. Nixon and by Carolyn W. Oulton, make no mention of Buddhism. The fact that Buddhist themes and allusions were pervasive in works of literature has received almost no serious attention in over a hundred years of criticism beyond that necessary to generate cursory endnote definitions. This situation seems somewhat akin to a critical work on John Milton's *Paradise Lost* devoid of informed cross-references to the Bible or serious investigation of the history of the Reformation and Restoration. Over the years it has become increasingly clear to me that this oversight is neither minor nor accidental. Rather, it represents a pervasive critical lacunae—at least within literary studies—that signifies a culture-specific blindness, a failure of critical self-reflection that demands the analysis given in this book.

On the topic of critical self-reflection, I feel required to acknowledge my own personal background, as it has a bearing on my motivations for writing this book. Like the majority of Victorians, I was raised as an Anglican (more precisely, an Episcopalian), but for over a decade I have been a practicing Buddhist. I cannot be fully aware of the extent to which this may or may not be apparent to my readers. In any case, the fact that I am Buddhist has deeply enriched my experience in researching and writing about Victorian Buddhism and has added personal to intellectual pleasure. Of course, the scholarship must stand on its own, regardless of my own beliefs as a Buddhist. Therefore I have worked to ensure that my arguments and interpretations are supported by textual and historical evidence.

While these scholarly responsibilities should go without saying, experience suggests that perhaps they should be said more often. One can read many a book of criticism in which the theoretical, ideological, or religious commitment of the scholar is all too apparent and yet is assumed to require no disclosure or reflection. In some cases one wishes for greater transparency and for argumentation not predetermined by the author's ideology or religion. It is dangerous to behave as if one is writing from a neutral position, especially with respect to such charged topics as race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and, certainly, religion. Among the most common examples of this in the history of Western letters is the tacit assumption by a critic that his or her immersion in Judeo-Christian culture in no way influences objective consideration of the religions of other cultures. Historically, this presumption has licensed those within a dominant religious group to pass judgment upon another religious group as if that judgment were merely stating a God-given fact, hence masking an exercise of power. One can observe this non-self-reflexive exercise of power by some popular, academic, and clerical critics of Buddhism in the nineteenth century, and I have used scholarship and argument to expose their lack of perspective.

Whether in Victorian England or twenty-first-century North America, what most non-Buddhist Westerners think they know about Buddhism consists largely of cultural stereotypes, many of which originated with the Victorians. Some stereotypes, such as the “martial arts Buddhism” popularized in films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2003) and *The Matrix* (1999), are as much or more a product of twentieth-century Western popular culture as of any Eastern culture and certainly do not represent the historical or doctrinal consensus of Buddhism. Western intellectual culture has developed its own stereotypes about Buddhism. For instance, as a North American Mahayana Zen Buddhist, I might have expected to find meditation as a central feature of Victorian Buddhism, but research suggests that there was little understanding of or interest in meditation within Victorian discourse about Buddhism. This may reflect the preference among Victorian scholars for the Theravada as opposed to the Mahayana canon, and surely it reflects their tendency to construct a textualized Buddhism at the neglect of Buddhist practice. But the expectancy of finding meditation as a central concern is itself a product of a specific culture and history, namely, the history of Buddhism in North America. The first Buddhist denomination to impact American culture in the early twentieth century was the Japanese Zen of such masters as D. T. Suzuki, and the two most influential styles of Buddhism in America today, Zen and Tibetan, both emphasize meditation. Thus a twenty-first-century American intellectual could be mistaken, for good reason, in expecting the Victorians to be concerned with meditation. Understanding, in their historical specificity, the assumptions about self and other that are embedded in such stereotypes is a primary concern of this book.

Unpacking Victorian conceptions and misconceptions about Buddhism, in addition to revealing a great deal about that culture and providing a more informed reading of that literature, has afforded me the indirect opportunity to cast light upon stereotypes that persist to the present day, stereotypes that I too may be reproducing. In this respect, I see myself as only one in a long line of Western writers on Buddhism that began in the nineteenth century with the likes of Hermann Oldenberg, Caroline Rhys Davids, Henry Steele Olcott, and Edwin Arnold. My reconstruction of the Victorian construction of Buddhism unavoidably reflects a certain early twenty-first-century, North American perspective, and, according to my own theoretical commitments, must say as much about my historical context as it does about nineteenth-century Britain, however objective and supportable I have worked to make the arguments of this book.

J. JEFFREY FRANKLIN

*Denver*

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J.J.F.

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The Lotus  
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# Introduction

In the family temple [of the magistrate of Kolang, Tibet], in addition to the usual life-size images of Buddha and the Triad, there was a female divinity, carved at Jalandhur in India, copied from a statue representing Queen Victoria in her younger days—a very fitting possession for the highest government official in Lahul.

—ISABELLA BIRD BISHOP, *Among the Tibetans* (1894)

Should I be considered too bold if I were to go one step farther and suggest that there are really some points in the philosophy of the East, and especially of India, which are fated sooner or later to find their place in, and to exercise a not inconsiderable influence over, the thought of Western nations?

—T. W. RHYS DAVIDS, *The History and Literature of Buddhism* (1896)

## *The European “Discovery” of Buddhism*

It would not be inaccurate to say that Buddhism did not exist in the West until near the beginning of the Victorian period (1837–1901), despite the fact that it had existed for over 2,400 years and was being practiced at that moment by millions of people throughout Southeast Asia, Tibet, China, and Japan. Prior to the early nineteenth century, few Europeans had heard of Buddhism at all, and the few who had heard of it pictured the Buddha as a minor Hindu deity or a celestial sun god in the pantheon of the “exotic Orient.” Of course, Eastern thought long had trickled back toward the seats of Western empires along the same routes used for silk, tea, and opium, but serious engagement with that



thought only began in the late eighteenth century with the first translations of the *Bhagavad-Gita* into French, German, and English.<sup>1</sup> Systematic study of Eastern sacred texts did not begin in Europe until around the 1820s, when collection and translation of ancient Buddhist manuscripts commenced. One of the earliest Western studies to focus exclusively on Buddhism was Edward Upham's *The History and Doctrine of Buddhism*, published in 1829. Only in subsequent decades did "the term 'Buddha' ('Buddoo', 'Bouddha', 'Boudhou', etc.)" begin to "gain currency" in common English usage (Almond 7). As late as the 1860s, but rapidly at that point, Buddhism "hit" Europe in general and England in particular, becoming a widespread topic both in the scholarly and popular literatures that peaked in London's "Buddhism-steeped Nineties" (Caracciolo 30).

Yet, despite this relatively recent dawning of awareness of Buddhism, by the end of the twentieth century there were an estimated 150,000 professed Buddhists in England practicing in 370 different groups representing lineages from Japan, Sri Lanka, Tibet, and Vietnam, among others (Coleman 19, 20). To understand why, according to the British census, Buddhism was second only to Christianity as the most widely observed religion in Devon and Cornwall in 2001, one might begin by asking about the events and discourses that moved John R. Ambereley to write during 1872 in London that "there is no religion the study of which is likely to be so useful to Europeans as Buddhism" (BBC; Ambereley 293). To understand why in the early twenty-first century many of the bestselling books from the religion sections of British and North American bookstores are about Buddhism, one should ask why in the latter decades of the nineteenth century three book-length poems recounting the life of the Buddha were published in London, of which Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (1879) became an international bestseller. If one wishes to understand the chain of events by which the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet is now the patron and figurehead of the British Network of Buddhist Organizations, one well might follow those events back to Brian Houghton Hodgson, an employee of the British East India Company who, while on assignment in Nepal in the 1820s, collected ancient Buddhist manuscripts in Sanskrit, the delivery of which to the Royal Asiatic Society in London in 1835 and to the *Societe Asiatique* of Paris in 1837 launched the serious scholarly investigation of Buddhism in Europe. Within the Victorian period, if one wants to understand from which influences and sources Edwin Arnold created his character of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, or how H. Rider Haggard derived his portrayal of a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in his novel *Ayesha: The Return of She* (1905), then one needs not merely some knowledge of the British Empire in India and Tibet but also some background on the Indian origins of Buddhism and on its history in Tibet, some insight into how Victorians responded

to the figure of the Buddha and, quite differently, to Tibetan “Lamaism,” and some knowledge of the broad range of sources available in England to Arnold and Haggard on Buddhism.<sup>2</sup>

In this book I tell the intriguing and multilayered story of the European encounter with Buddhism, which began in the first half of the nineteenth century and spread throughout British literature and culture in the second half of that century. I analyze the British constructions of Buddhism in popular novels, in particular Marie Corelli’s *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886) and *The Life Everlasting* (1911); H. Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887) and *Ayesha: the Return of She* (1905); and Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (1901). I both treat as objects of analysis and use as sources the primary works within the nineteenth century’s new field of religious studies, comparative religion, two important examples of which are F. Max Müller’s *Lectures on the Science of Religion; with a Paper on Buddhist Nihilism* (1872) and T. W. Rhys Davids’s *Buddhism: Being a Sketch of the Life and Teachings of Gautama, the Buddha* (1877). I comparatively analyze two of the book-length poems that retold the life of Siddhartha Gautama, who lived in northeastern India from approximately 566 to 486 BCE: Richard Phillips’s *The Story of Gautama Buddha and his Creed: An Epic* (1871) and Edwin Arnold’s *The Light of Asia. Being The Life and Teaching of Gautama, Prince of India and Founder of Buddhism* (1879). A somewhat different object of analysis is *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (1877) by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. She was the co-founder of a new religion, Theosophy, that claimed its origins from “esoteric Buddhism” and was highly influential in both England and India. Finally, the last chapter traces the threads of the Victorian “nirvana debate” as they were woven into foundational texts of Western philosophical nihilism, in particular Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power* (1883–1888). Also discussed is a broad range of late-Victorian and Modernist literary texts, most notably Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1901), T. S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” (1922), and D. H. Lawrence’s novels *Women in Love* (1920) and *Aaron’s Rod* (1922), among others.

These texts, in their diversity, represent the range of Victorian responses to and constructions of Buddhism—with important implications for modernism and after. The analysis of them in subsequent chapters demonstrates that Buddhism pervaded, if diffusely, late-nineteenth-century British thought. If it existed largely at the margins and in the background, it even so was a critical component of central Victorian debates—those concerning the British Empire and its colonial obligations, those emanating from the confrontation between Christianity and Eastern religions at a time of religious upheaval in England, and those precipitated by the advent of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Indeed, the topic of Buddhism came to function as one nexus within

Victorian discourse, joining these issues. At a time when the Church of England was losing membership to Nonconformist Protestant denominations, and in the wake of the perceived assault on Christian faith by scientific naturalism, especially Darwinism, concerned Christians were primed to be wary of encroachment by a potentially competing Eastern religion. On the frontlines of empire, missionaries in Burma or Ceylon recognized Buddhism as the primary competition and understood explicitly that British occupation was wedded to Christianizing those populations.<sup>3</sup> The alignment between religion and empire meant that to question the superiority of the Christian faith was tantamount to questioning the God-given right of the British to govern Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists.

On the home-front, Buddhism's compassionate founder and ethical system made it "the most appealing of non-Christian religions to the nineteenth-century mind" and, therefore, the most threatening alternative religion (Clausen, "Victorian" 13). The threat was intensified by the fact that many Victorians came to see Buddhism as compatible with evolutionary science, in sharp contrast to the dominant position across Christian denominations. This aligned it with the widely perceived nemeses of faith: materialism, science, and atheism. When Victorian Anglicans, Nonconformists, and, to a lesser extent, Catholics took a respite from inter-denominational contests and looked up from the immediate, shared threat of Darwinism, they recognized Buddhism as the next most dangerous enemy. Buddhism was the first non-Christian religion to be considered a threat to the West in its own home territory. Thus understanding the role of Buddhism in nineteenth-century Britain provides unique insights into the Victorians, their religious and social obsessions and fears, their aspirations and their prejudices, their self-understanding and their understanding of other cultures and religions.

I want to start the story of Victorian Buddhism with a relatively insignificant event, or rather with a chain of minor events that nevertheless are indicative of larger patterns. In 1797, Colonel Colin Mackenzie, an operative working under the auspices of the East India Company, visited the site of the ancient Buddhist Stupa at Amaravati, which had been in use from the third century BCE until perhaps as late as the fourteenth century, by which time Buddhism had died out in the country of its birth.<sup>4</sup> By the eighteenth century, nearly all signs that Buddhism ever had existed in India had been effaced; no living Indian knew the locations of most of the ancient Buddhist holy sites. Those sites would be recovered and preserved against loss through the efforts of European archaeologists in the nineteenth century. Though as part of colonial usurpation, and in the process of appropriating Buddhism as an artifact of Western knowledge, Europeans drove the effort to locate, unearth, collect, and archive the ancient record of Buddhism in India, which was on the verge of being lost to Buddhism and to world heritage. As part of this process, Colonel Mackenzie

expropriated from the Stupa eleven stone bas-reliefs illustrating scenes from the time of the Buddha, and in 1821 he sent them to the Indian Museum in Calcutta. Nine of them were sent on to the East India Company collection in Leadenhall Street, London; to those were added 121 more, and in 1874 some of them were erected in the Sculpture Court at the Southern Entrance of the new India Museum in South Kensington. As a child, Rudyard Kipling, having been shipped by his parents from India back to England for education, spent many hours in that museum, as Kipling reports in his autobiography, *Something of Myself* (1937). In 1879–80, the collection was divided between the new Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum, where for sixty years they were on display in the main stairwell. I believe it is safe to speculate that every British author treated in this book, along with millions of other Britons, saw these and other Buddhist artifacts in one or both of these locations. I will use this small example as the ground for making several related points.

First, concerning the Western “discovery” of Buddhism, Philip C. Almond’s *The British Discovery of Buddhism* argues in short that European scholars, predisposed by the ingrained Protestant belief that true religion is word and book-based, constructed through translation and analysis of the Buddhist canon an idealized textual Buddhism. He writes: “Originally existing ‘out there’ in the Oriental *present*, Buddhism came to be determined as an object the primary location of which was the West, through the progressive collection, translation, and publication of its textual *past*” (Almond 13). European scholars asserted the precedence of their textualized Buddhism over the indigenous practices of actual Buddhists in Asia. This represented a form of imperial appropriation of the religious other, a form of discursive violence that supplemented the physical violence of conquest and occupation. At its farthest remove from the violence that defines it, “discovery” must be understood as “construction”: the process by which nineteenth-century British culture assimilated or failed to assimilate elements of Buddhism. And it is this very process that is the subject of this book.

This is a book about British culture and the British construction of Buddhism—not about indigenous Buddhist practices in Asia in the nineteenth century, nor about an ahistorical abstraction one might label “real” or “true” Buddhism, except to the extent that Victorians indeed did construct such an abstraction. My interest is in the fact that the young Rudyard Kipling’s first exposure to Buddhism was in London, not India or Tibet or Japan; that he wrote the novel *Kim* for the most part from Rottingdean in Sussex; that most of the textual sources on which he drew were written and published in England, not Asia. My focus is upon the textualized Buddhism fashioned by Englishmen, which unavoidably said as much about nineteenth-century Britain as it did about Buddhism. Thus my objects of analysis are the very texts that Almond demonstrates appropriated Buddhism.

As a result, one risk that I confronted in the writing of this book was of perpetuating the assumptions and prejudices of my subjects—an unavoidable risk any historically based study must negotiate. One way that I have tried to ameliorate this risk is by treating works of comparative religion in a way similar to my treatment of literary works, not assuming that the former were objective or factual while the latter were strictly imaginative. Indeed, I have found imaginative misinterpretations of Buddhist doctrine in works of comparative religion, and I have found works of literature striving to be faithful to the historical record or the doctrinal consensus of Buddhism. All of these texts are cultural artifacts of that time and place, and I read them as such in relationship to one another. In all one can find signs—sometimes virulent, sometimes unintended—of the racism and cultural chauvinism that served the interests of the British Empire. After all, colonial invasion and occupation provided both the occasion and one motivation for the formation of the field of comparative religion: to gather knowledge in order to control. It was part of the textual appropriation of the Oriental other in order to form “the imperial archive”—what today we call “intelligence gathering” (Richards 1).

At the same time, however, in reading the works of comparative religion I developed considerable respect for its mission as expressed by its most even-handed proponents. That mission, in short, was to treat all religions as worthy of respect and to apply historical and textual analysis to each, even Christianity. As Max Müller wrote to his Christian readership in 1872, with a nice turn of reverse psychology: “Those who would use a comparative study of religions as a means for debasing Christianity by exalting the other religions of mankind, are to my mind as dangerous allies as those who think it necessary to debase all other religions in order to exalt Christianity” (Müller, *Lectures* 21–22). Scholars like Max Müller, and like T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, were able to build a body of translations and analysis that only could have come from the type of access colonial occupation afforded. They were able to bring together for comparative compositional analysis documents and artifacts that had been separated in time by hundreds of years; separated geographically between the northern Buddhism of Tibet or China and the southern Buddhism of Southeast Asia; separated doctrinally between the northern Mahayana and southern Theravada schools; and separated linguistically between the northern Sanskrit and the southern Pali. In this way, they distinguished what they judged to be the culture-specific elements of indigenous Buddhist practice from those elements that were duplicated across nations/cultures/languages and, therefore, that appeared to them most authentic. This was the basis for the idealized, textual Buddhism they “discovered.” Yet, their work set the standard that still is relied upon by scholars of comparative religion today.

Therefore, while striving to remain critical, I compare Victorian literary representations of Buddhism to the best nineteenth-century scholarship. If one

is to be able to assess various Victorian uses of key Buddhist concepts and doctrines, then one needs some standard definitions against which to compare them. It seemed reasonable to use definitions drawn from the best Victorian scholarship, not only because of the generally high quality of that work, but because one then is drawing upon a context-specific baseline. On the other hand, this may heighten the risk of uncritically re-inscribing Victorian prejudices.

Responding to this double-bind, I chose to supplement Victorian scholarship through comparison with twentieth and twenty-first-century sources, those written by renowned practitioners of Buddhism, both from Asia and from the West, and those by scholars of Buddhism working in Western universities. In this way, and borrowing a method from comparative religion itself, I triangulated sources in order to posit an abstraction that might be called “the historical and doctrinal consensus” of Buddhism. I deploy this abstraction throughout this book whenever I claim that a particular literary representation of karma or reincarnation, for instance, is or is not consistent with the predominant understanding of those concepts within Buddhism. I do this with full awareness that this abstraction reproduces the textualizing impulse of Victorian scholarship, ignoring denominational differences within Buddhism, and, though based on authoritative sources, unavoidably is in part my own construction. Without this or a similar assumption, however, it becomes impossible to comparatively analyze any context-specific use of Buddhist concepts—impossible to understand how the Victorian uses of “nirvana,” for example, compare to a Buddhist norm.

Returning, then, to the question of how to understand the “discovery” of Buddhism, while concurring with Almond’s conclusions, I want to complicate his thesis by making a point familiar from recent postcolonial theory: in constructing Buddhism in their own image, the Victorians were at the same time making their self-image subject to reconstruction by other races, cultures, and religions. The very nature of colonial contact opened Britain to what I have called a “counter-invasion” of the West by the East, and the resulting engagement with Oriental culture profoundly changed British culture. The counter-invasion had been building momentum for centuries as East-West trade and diplomacy gradually increased, but it culminated in the nineteenth century. This timing seems tied for obvious reasons to the fact that the British Empire had emerged in the first half of the century as the preeminent military and economic power in the world. As celebrations of the victories and duties of empire appeared with increasing frequency in journalism and literature, crescendoing around Queen Victoria’s assumption of the title of Empress of India in 1876, an appropriately paradoxical counter-strain of fear also arose over the effects of Eastern ideas and products flowing back toward England.

Many Victorians recognized the counter-invasion as it was taking place. Ernest J. Eitel, writing in 1884 as the Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, warned: “The history of Eastern Asia is the history of Buddhism. But

the conquests of Buddhism are not confined to Asia. The grand system of philosophic atheism, which discards from the universe the existence of a creating and overruling Deity and in its place deifies humanity, has, since the beginning of the present century, entered upon a course of conquest in the West, in Europe and America" (Eitel 3). The fear of counter-invasion was fanned by exaggerated comments such as the following, which originally appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on 25 April 1890: "It is known that the philosophy of Buddha has of late years won many adherents in Europe. What is less known is that the religion of Buddha is likewise beginning to spread in Europe. . . . Prominent persons call on me every day to tell me that they have been converted to Buddhism. I have been told that the number of Buddhists in Paris alone is 30,000" (*Literary Digest* 162). If, as some have argued, Romantic writers "embraced the Orient in a reconciling vision of wholeness," portraying it as a mysterious font of ancient wisdom, writers after the Opium War of 1839 and especially after the Indian Mutiny of 1857 were more likely to portray it as the seat of "corrupt and effete civilizations" whose decadent, nihilistic, or enervating ideas posed a threat to Western ideals (Batchelor 253; Lopez 2). As the novelist Wilkie Collins's evangelical old-maid Miss Clack puts it in *The Moonstone* (1868), with greater aptness than she understands, "How soon may our own evil passions prove to be Oriental noblemen who pounce on us unawares!" (Collins 198). Oriental nobleman—whether Brahmins, rajas, lamas, begums, yogis, or pashas—lurk at the margins of many Victorian texts, not to mention Indian jugglers, spies, assassins, and hookah-smoking caterpillars. These figures were signs of a process of cultural transformation underway in Britain as an unforeseen byproduct of the counter-invasion to which empire opened the doors.

The process I am describing is akin to the familiar postcolonial concept of "hybridity"—the relationship between colonizer and colonized within which the boundary of difference separating two nations, races, cultures, or religions becomes the connection of identity joining the two. As an antecedent to postcolonial theory, Mikhail Bakhtin theorized hybridity linguistically in terms of a "verbal-ideological decentering," which can "occur only when a national culture loses its sealed-off and self-sufficient character, when it becomes conscious of itself as only one among *other* cultures and languages" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 370). Homi Bhabha develops the concept as "a difference 'within' identity, an 'in-between' reality" separating and joining two cultures in a colonial relationship that generates a "*productive* ambivalence" between the self and "that 'otherness' which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity" (Bhabha, *Location* 13, 67). The original nineteenth-century meaning of "hybrid" was as genetic cross-breeding, as in "Kipling's use of the term 'mule' to describe English-university-trained Indians," and with unavoidable reference to miscegenation



(Lahiri 99). Taking his cue from this point and building on the work of Bhabha, Robert C. J. Young focuses on racial hybridity in works such as *White Mythologies* and *Colonial Desire*. He demonstrates that the boundary between colonizer and colonized always is dangerously and excitingly permeable. The threat/promise of interpenetration, whether culturally or sexually, operates not only from the colonizer to the colonized but bi-directionally. This understanding of hybridity as a forced and unequal co-dependency between colonizer and colonized provides a model for explaining the impact not only of the self upon the other but of the other upon the self.

With this general definition in mind, I am most interested in pursuing the implications of the observation that “hybridity” “first entered social science via the anthropology of religion, through the theme of syncretism” and is “meaningless *without* the prior assumption of difference, purity, fixed boundaries,” and “sacred origins” (Pieterse 223, 226). Different sacred origins come into conflict, and into the dialogue that invites hybridization, when two religions first come into contact. Contact leads to a “translation” between the two religions—how is Buddha like Jesus?, how is nirvana like heaven?, for instance—and this “desacralizes the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy” (Bhabha, *Location* 228).

Consider the example of Victorian Anglicanism and Singhalese Theravada Buddhism. From early in the nineteenth century, news and commentary from British-occupied Ceylon blended political debate over colonial control with religious issues of Christian missionary access and indigenous Buddhist resistance. Buddhism thus became a topic about which some in Britain needed to be knowledgeable. Pioneers of Buddhist studies, such as Eugène Burnouf and George Turnour, had worked as members of the Ceylon Civil Service. Missionaries and tourists wrote letters, travelogues, reports, polemics, and, at least in the case of Samuel Landgon’s *Punchi Nona* (1884), novels back from Ceylon. Founders of Theosophy H. P. Blavatsky and H. S. Olcott became among the first Westerners to publicly take layman’s Buddhist vows while on a visit to Ceylon in 1880. They already had mixed elements of Buddhism into their new “hybrid religion,” a subcategory of syncretism historically and culturally unique to late-Victorian Britain. Olcott went on to become a champion of the Singhalese Buddhist revival in opposition to pressure by Christian missionaries, mostly Anglicans and Methodists.<sup>5</sup> He wrote and distributed *A Buddhist Catechism* that still is used by Buddhists in Sri Lanka today, thereby creating a multi-hybrid of Buddhism mixed with his Protestant orientation and a Catholic genre. Thus my use in this book of the concept of hybridity is a specific application with special reference to religions.

My theory of cultural counter-invasion assumes the bi-directionality of hybridity and focuses on the impacts of colonization upon the colonizer. The British “discovery” of Buddhism was at the same time the beginning of the counter-invasion of Britain by Buddhism, or the discovery by Buddhism of



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