Converting American Buddhism

Second-Generation Buddhist Americans, Orientalism, and the Politics of Family Religion

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For my father and my children –
one generation before me and one after

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Acknowledgements

When I was a young child, my brother would make fun of me for not understanding the term "inherit." As a kid, any time someone—friend, sibling, or parent—would call me names, I would respond by saying that I inherited it from the name-caller. My brother would pull me aside and say, "You know you can only inherit traits through your parents, right?" Eventually it became a joke and, as only a kid would do, I would invert my brother's taunting by doing it all the more to annoy him. Soon enough, I had inherited all my traits from everyone in my life—even pets!

As I will argue in the chapters that follow, there is a great deal more truth in children's wisdom than we typically think, once we are reminded where and how to look. And I am not just saying that because in this case the child was me! Particularly given my Buddhist point of view on radical relationality, I firmly believe that we are made up of everything we are given—everything we inherit—from all the relationships in our lives. Certainly, as I will argue in this book, we all have the power to re-appropriate and reshape what we are given, but the background that shapes our lives is first and foremost not a matter of choice. This is not so much a moral or political reality first—good or bad—but rather the transcendental foundation of the possibility of all of morality and politics. Even still, I treasure the particular set of tools and values I have been given through all of my relationships; I am able to be proud of my life and projects largely because of these relationships. This book is as much a product of my relationships as it is the result of my own "individuality." I have inherited so much.

The story of this inheritance must begin with my spouse Margaret. Her support throughout has been immeasurable—from doing the bulk of chores on a long writing day, to patiently editing draft after draft until I have no doubt she never wanted to read the phrase "second-generation Buddhist American" ever again. Margaret: this book would not exist without you. You have set an impossibly high bar in your support, but please know, my love, when you decide you would like to write a book someday (as I know you will!), I will be there trying my hardest to be for you everything you have been for me. I look forward to that day, as I look forward to every new day with you.

I am grateful to my children, Bodhi and Eve. Their joy, their stories, and their love inspire. I am in awe.

Every scholar has a lengthy list of academic lineages and debts, and I am no exception. Sheryl A. Kujawa Holbrook, Rudy V. Busto, Ann Hidalgo, Thomas E. Phillips, and many others have all been invaluable for this book. I am particularly grateful for Jane Naomi Iwamura and Santiago Slabodsky for all their support throughout my academic life in addition to their suggestions for this book.

This book would not have existed without the support of all of my very supportive friends. I am particularly thankful for my close friendship with Alex Theiler. We have known each other since we were six, and we are both children of Buddhist sympathizers. Our shared experience and bond not only made surviving as religious minorities possible, but bearable. He has helped me remember old experiences relevant for this book, and reshape positions that do not accurately speak to the collective experience of second-generation Buddhist Americans. Alex: you remind me that we are not alone in this. As such, I also want to thank all second-generation Buddhist Americans—without you, this book would not have been worth it.

Dad: when I first began this book, I had one fear. It was not one of the typical book worries—not being able to finish or getting trapped down some rabbit hole. My one fear was that you would read this book one day and see it as one more critique of how you raised me. You may not know this, but I hear the pain in your voice when you "tease" me for my past comments on your parenting. Given the circumstances, I know and treasure that you did the best you could (and beyond) with the tough situation you were given. I could write that what I am critiquing then and here is not you, but a wider structure of oppression, but I think that would miss the point.

I hope you read this book for what it is—not first and foremost a critique, but a long thank-you note made possible by your patience, love and sense of justice. You gave me all the countercultural values, morals and characteristics—even my stubbornness—that made my critiques of an ageist and colonialist structure even possible. I may have made them my own, but in an important sense, they remain your "hippie" values. I am Buddhist because of you. I do not even know how to begin thanking you for that fact. I know it is wrong that my religiosity is invisible because of what you taught me. I am proud of who I am, and I can be proud of who I am because of your influence. If I can have one prayer in all of these acknowledgements, it is this: for all the flaws and sharpness in what follows, I hope you can also be proud of me.

THE FAMILY ALBUM BURIED IN THE CLOSET

REDISCOVERING A GENEALOGY FROM BUDDHIST AMERICAN CONVERTS TO SECOND-GENERATION BUDDHIST AMERICANS

A Question of Inheritance

"Give me my inheritance, monk." The words are as opaque as they are high-pitched. They are the words of a young child. Breaking the norms of his society, the seven-year-old confronts his father. But what exactly is he demanding?

I get ahead of myself. For those not familiar with the story, according to tradition, when Siddhartha Gotama left Kapilavastu on his journey to seek enlightenment, he not only left behind his royal destiny, but his wife and newborn child as well. Before he left, under his instigation, his son was named "Rahula"—"Fetter." Years later, after becoming enlightened, Siddhartha returned to the area. Yasodhara, Siddhartha's wife, sent her son to ask the Buddha for his royal inheritance. After all, with Siddhartha gone, the child was next in line for the throne. With his characteristic reversal of expectations, however, the Buddha gave Rahula a different inheritance—he brought his son into the monastic order.

Traditionally, the story has been told as a conflict between adults—this is a narrative about a conflict between a desire for royal power and spiritual renunciation, between Yasodhara's and Siddhartha's divergent set of goals.[1] Rahula, a convenient pawn, is somehow lost in the mix. Inspired by modern Romanticism, the story has recently also been sentimentalized and psychologized, a tale of an abandoned and emotionally damaged son that seeks out his father in order to reconnect. Rahula is "humanized" in this view, but only by forcing him into a modern psycho-cultural caricature that pushes the listener to miss the complexity of the situation and the ambiguity and weight of Rahula's demand.

Truthfully, the traditional narrative as it stands gives us little indication of Rahula's internal psychological state when he confronts his father. We do not even know if Rahula wants to be a king or a monk, let alone how he feels in this moment. In fact, the story exploits this lack of transparency. What we do have is Rahula's performance. His demand. Caught in a fight between those with a significant amount more power than him, he knows that he is inextricably linked to his father. While the nature of his inheritance is uncertain, that much is certain—he has an inheritance. Truly, his name is fitting, but he does not simply bind his father to the world. He is also chained to his father. Whether he likes it or not, a legacy is his. But what he does with that inheritance is an open question. This is the double meaning of the chains of authority.

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[1] For a good overview of the history of interpretations of Rahula, consider: Kate Crosby, "The Inheritance of Rahula: Abandoned Child, Boy Monk, Ideal Son and Trainee," in *Little Buddhas*, ed. Vanessa R. Sasson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 97-123.

Practitioners and scholars alike often say that Buddhism is not a religion driven by orthodoxy or orthopraxy—it is a religion of lineages.[1] Buddhism is a religion of inheritance. To legitimize your practice, you need to answer only one question to satisfaction: who was your teacher?[1] Ideally, these chains could be traced back to the Buddha. The power of monks was so closely tied to these lineages that monks commonly retroactively fabricated links in these chains in order to justify their own authority. Buddhism *began* as a religion consisting of a plurality of disputed lineages. Within these conflicts (spread across the history of Buddhism), different groups and individuals artfully constructed narratives that aided in the monopolizing of the authority of the tradition. These lineages were designed to maximize the power of their creators while marginalizing, concealing and casting aspersions on alternate chains of authority and the people behind them.

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[1] The journalist Rick Fields is a good example of a practitioner who openly embraces this viewpoint. This notion has a more complicated history within modern scholarship on Buddhism; scholars like John R. McRae and Alan Cole have argued compellingly that constructed lineages in the history of Buddhism are political constructions that often have no grounding in reality. In this book, I also argue that Buddhist lineages in the United States are also political constructions. However, even in this criticism, we all agree that regardless of specific political dimensions of these lineages (in fact, more properly, because of their political nature), the dominant mode of understanding Buddhist history on the representational level is through the lens of lineages. Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1992), xiii; John R. McRae, *Seeing Through Zen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1-21; Alan Cole, *Text as Father* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 1-4.

Other scholars have long established these claims.[2] What has proven more controversial, however, is extending this insight to modern Buddhism. Unmasking the structures of marginalization (racism, ageism, Orientalism, etc.) in modern Buddhism has met significant resistance both inside and outside the academy. The difference between the ease of critique of earlier forms of Buddhism and modern Buddhism might be explainable by appealing (in the first case) to the chronological and cultural distance and differences between the modern scholarly critics and the critiqued. For some, critiques of the latter might come too close to home (quite literally, as I will later argue).

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[1] It is important to point out that this common question already favors monastic histories of Buddhism over lay histories. How would the histories of Buddhism look different if we began from lay eyes? The lack of discussion of Buddhist family life in any period, for example, suggests that some of the biases I discuss in this book extend well beyond the context of my discussion. While this book can add to the growing literature on lay Buddhisms, the problem is obviously more entrenched than any one particular work can address.

[2] As one example, see McRae, 1-21.

After a long history of being inseparable from power-laden lineages, it would shatter the bounds of credulity to suggest that any forms of modern Buddhism had completely broken from that tradition. In fact, because of the legacy of colonialism, the power disparities within modern Buddhism are all the more extreme and the structures of marginalization all the more concealed. Only the privileged can live in the illusion that their context is free of power differences and the structures of oppression—this is the ultimate fantasy of the privileged. The question is: who are the privileged among modern Buddhists and how do they protect their power?

Many books have already been devoted to answering this question, and by asking the question myself, I do not mean to imply that there are any simple answers.[1] Despite this complicated reality, any successful inquiry into these problems must begin at the global sites and structures of colonialism because they have played the most determinative role in shaping modern Buddhism. The large differences in power within modern Buddhism can largely be explained by appealing to the history of colonial oppression through material means and racial, political, cultural and religious discourse ("Orientalism"). Through this lens, we discover that "rational" Western Buddhism (racialized as white) is the favored son of colonial discourse, and that the weight of this legacy has concealed, marginalized and (in some cases) even destroyed alternate Buddhist lineages.

Thanks to this (post)colonial reality, any narrative of modern Buddhism, even when it focuses on a particular local context, cannot remain purely local; the geopolitical effects of Orientalism permeate every sector of life, from the most public to the most private.[1] In fact, as I argue throughout this book, sometimes an analysis of the most private and domestic sectors can reveal the most about the politics of Orientalism simply because those spheres are assumed to be "beyond politics." I agree with a number of feminist critics who claim that structures of oppression can only be denaturalized (and thus exposed) by considering all of their roots, and in particular, those roots that are so naturalized as apolitical that they are assumed to be beyond critique. As a psychoanalyst might assert, the family safe is the site of a troubling secret.

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[1] Some of the books that consider this topic include: Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Curators of the Buddha* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Joseph Cheah, *Race and Religion in American Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Many postcolonial and poststructuralist scholars of religion have recently argued that the cultural politics of the Enlightenment (through disciplinization, among other things) marginalized religious discourses by making "religion" naturally private and personal (as opposed to reason—presented as public and universal).[2] While I agree with these accounts up to a point, what they miss is that the crucial political and cultural shifts after the Enlightenment did not so much entail a simplistic binary of placing reason above religion, so much as an alliance between multiple parties that favored discourses of reason in certain spheres and particular religious traditions in others. By making the proper place of religion private, and the private apolitical, the patriarch could maintain control through reason in the public sphere, while keeping his religious dominance safe from assault within (and from outside) the private sphere. In this way, both "political" religion in the public sphere and "disobedient" religion in the private sphere are silenced through the same stroke.[1]

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[1] It is important to add, on this point, the perhaps obvious point that the history (and modern reality) of the effects of Orientalism cannot simply be confined to just the "East" and the "West."

[2] Three religious studies scholars that support this viewpoint are Talal Asad, Timothy Fitzgerald, and Russell T. McCutcheon. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 27-54; Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-10; Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 14-26.

As such, in the case of Buddhism and modernity, we should not be surprised to discover that any threat ("domestic" or "foreign") to the dominant Western Buddhist narrative must be neutralized in order for it to maintain its power.[1] Strategies to this end include otherizing ("that is not really Buddhism"), concealment ("who?"), and infantilization ("that's not yet Buddhism"). American children (even within Buddhist households) and Asian Buddhists simultaneously are represented as having too juvenile of an understanding of the tradition to be "fully" Buddhist. These tactics leave only one group as the vanguard of modern Buddhism—Western converts. These converts have constructed an elaborate lineage-narrative to reinforce their own authority. To this end, other lineages must be silenced and all other legacies concealed. The converts' own children are simply collateral damage. The family history must be erased.

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[1] While Aime Cesaire had a different topic in mind, I am reminded of Cesaire's comment about how the European colonizer perfected the methods of oppression abroad in the colonies, only to bring the tactics back home in the 20th century for World War I and II. I might not go so far as Cesaire to make a causal argument, but his discussion of the links between oppression abroad and "at home" is insightful. Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 35-36.

Throughout this book, I refer to the children of these converts in the United States as second-generation Buddhist Americans. While the scholarly use of generational terms has largely been confined to ethnicity, race, and immigration, for this book, I reappropriate these terms to more clearly demarcate a group of Buddhists in the United States first and foremost by *religious* heritage.[2] In other words, second-generation Buddhist Americans are children of Buddhist American converts (i.e., first-generation Buddhists). While I focus on religious heritage in this book, given the politics of Orientalism, race and ethnicity are critically important dimensions in both the popular and scholarly representations of this group, as well as the identity formation of all group members.[1] The modern histories of the use of the terms race, ethnicity, and religion are closely intertwined.[2]

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[1] Of course, neutralization can take many forms, from exotification to assimilation, and despite colonial fantasies that dream otherwise, it is never completely successful.

[2] It is important to recognize this distinction; the term "second-generation" is typically used by sociologists of American

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religions to refer to the children of immigrants to the United States. By second-generation Buddhist Americans, I do not mean to refer to Nisei Buddhists (for example) or other Buddhists that are the immediate children of immigrants to the United States. As much as it is possible to separate the terms ethnicity and religion, I use the phrase second-generation in this context to refer primarily to religious heritage rather than ethnic heritage. For an excellent discussion of religion and ethnic second-generational status, consider Carolyn Chen and Russell Jeung, eds., *Sustaining Faith Traditions* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

[1] It is important to note for this book that while race and ethnicity are related concepts, they are ultimately distinct. In addition to other differences, at the level of dominant representation, modern notions of race are more inflexibly imposed categories, while modern notions of ethnicity provide more room for agency in the process of identity formation; to some degree, people can choose, reject, or transform different aspects of their ethnic heritage as they live their lives. However, in terms of religion, the racialization of religious traditions diminishes (without destroying) the avenues for creative agency among non-white Americans at the representational level, regardless of dominant notions of ethnicity and agency.

[2] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1-20.

As such, while I primarily use the term "second-generation Buddhist American" to identify a group by religious heritage, I am aware that such a use of the term cannot be decoupled from the history of race and Buddhism in the United States. One of the problems in placing second-generation Buddhist Americans within this history is the general absence of demographic data on the group.[1] Since second-generation Buddhist Americans as a separate group have not been formally studied by scholars, the racial and ethnic composition of the group is unclear. Given the diversity of Buddhist practitioners in the United States, a broad definition of second-generation Buddhist Americans as children of Buddhist American converts necessarily includes Caucasian, Asian-American, Latino-American, African-American, American Indian, mixed race, and other Buddhists.

The lack of data on this group alongside the complicating reality of intersectional oppression based on race and religion suggests that the continuities and differences within this group based on race and ethnicity are unclear. Given the realities of structural racism on the one hand, and the importance of ethnic and racial heritage in the process of identity formation on the other hand, one might ask if it is even meaningful or helpful to group Buddhists from a variety of races and ethnicities together by religious heritage. The cultural power held by the term "religion" in modern American society guarantees that religious heritage does matter in the process of identity formation, but the full extent of this influence is uncertain.[1] One of the significant limitations of this work is that all of the named subjects of my analysis of second-generation Buddhist Americans are white. In many ways, these white second-generation Buddhist Americans are able to challenge their invisibility by utilizing the power associated with their white privilege—an option not available to second-generation Buddhist Americans of color. As such, I do not pretend that any of my conclusions about second-generation Buddhist Americans speak for the entire group broadly construed; undoubtedly, second-generation Buddhist Americans of color struggle against structural racism in many forms that I do not name in the pages that follow. As one example, Asian-American second-generation Buddhists are caught within a power-laden Orientalist web of representations that undergirds common simplistic and problematic assumptions about their religious identities and heritage regardless of the full complexity of their true religious identities.

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[1] Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Religious Landscape Survey," Pew Forum website, accessed December 15, 2018, http://religions. pewforum.org.

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[1] Khyati Y. Joshi, *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 118-44.

I wrote this book in part as a challenge to the tendency among white Buddhist American converts to universalize their experiences as the sole “true” Buddhism, and my greatest mistake would be to follow in those particular footsteps. In order to avoid this troubling problem, I use the term second-generation Buddhist Americans in two related ways. First, I use the term as simplistic shorthand for the white children of Buddhist American converts that I consider explicitly in this book, recognizing that they only form a portion of the more broadly conceptualized group of second-generation Buddhist Americans. Their experiences do reveal a significant amount about the religious identities of white second-generation Buddhist Americans; comparing and contrasting those experiences with second-generation Buddhist Americans of color will have to await further work. I discuss one small part of a larger and much more complex whole. Second, keeping this in mind, I use the term as an invitation to further research by exposing the gaps in scholarly understanding concerning the full racial diversity of second-generation Buddhist Americans. This book starts from one place—a place of significant racial privilege—with the hope that the scholarly consideration of this broadly defined group will continue from many other places.

The impetus for this book began with a seemingly simple fact: with few exceptions, neither Buddhist practitioners nor scholars have discussed the experiences of second-generation Buddhists in the United States. Further, both parties have generally assumed that these second-generation Buddhist Americans are either too young to consider on their own or do not even exist in large numbers. While there have been a few studies that have shown birthrates among some American Buddhist groups are slightly lower than the rest of the American population, there is not enough conclusive evidence to justify the assumption that there are not many second-generation Buddhist Americans.

In fact, the opposite is more likely true. Most of the definitive histories of Buddhism in the United States claim that Americans only began to convert to Buddhism in significant numbers in the 1950s and 1960s. Given this reality, rough population growth estimates suggest that the number of converts and the number of their children are comparable. If one includes American Buddhist sympathizers and their children (those who would say that Buddhism has "influenced" their spirituality in some way) within these estimates, the population of children is much larger than the "convert" group.[1]

Over the course of the history of Buddhism in the United States, there have been hundreds of thousands of children with at least one convert parent, and yet popular and scholarly discourses on American Buddhism completely ignore this fact. How have these children related to Buddhism? And why have they been so invisible?[2]

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[1] Compare these estimates to the latest demographic data on Buddhists in the United States presented in the Pew Forum's "U.S. Religious Landscapes Survey" conducted in 2007. It is difficult to estimate the exact percentages of Buddhist American converts and their children from surveys like this one because they fail to ask questions about "convert" and "cradle" religious identities. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Religious Landscape Survey," Pew Forum website, accessed December 15, 2018, http://religions.pewforum.org.

[2] In order to elucidate the role "invisibility" often plays within the maintenance of colonial control, one must begin with an examination of the colonial relationship between difference and the self-same. As Homi Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture*, the colonial order balances atop a narrow precipice. On one hand, the colonizer strives to assimilate the colonized to his order—to his self-identity—as a tactic to emphasize his superiority. Any differences that are threatening to the order must be assimilated, or, since full assimilation is generally an impossible task in reality, more commonly rendered invisible at the level of representation. Connected to this task, the colonized must also be silenced as much as possible so that they cannot challenge this concealment. On the other hand, the colonizer must maintain his difference (as essential) from the colonized so that he can continue to justify the power differential. The colonizer attempts to keep control over the representations of these

To answer the latter question, I present the first half of my thesis: second-generation Buddhist Americans are invisible because they are caught within a global web of representation that is designed to favor particular groups and marginalize others. The center of this nexus of power is the monk-convert lineage. In her book *Virtual Orientalism,* Jane Iwamura describes this chain of authority:

> The Western Pupil... would come to represent the protagonist of the story that would make Eastern spirituality attractive to a popular audience. Without him, the labor of the Eastern sage or Oriental Monk, whose express mission it is to transmit his ancient spiritual heritage, would bear no fruit. The pupil's function in the narrative would come to depend not so much on his

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"essential" differences as much as possible (so as to avoid their reappropriation through resistance) by ridiculing them as unimportant or anachronous to the modern West. While different, the colonizer's logic assumes that the colonized is inconsequential to the present and will disappear in the future (a different form of invisibility). One can find examples of both forms of invisibility of second-generation Buddhist Americans—they are effectively represented, on one hand, as converts (and thus their important differences from their parents are made invisible), and, on the other hand, as immature children who do not yet grasp Buddhism (until they later "convert"), and thus are unimportant to the development of American Buddhism. The irony, as Bhabha argues, is the fact that the colonial system's necessary assumption of this "hybridity" and "camouflage" (what I term here "invisibility") is the site of its undoing. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 121-31.

> capacity to teach, but rather his ethos. It is the pupil's ability to challenge convention and embody the promise of a new cultural synthesis that transforms him into a hero.[1]

In other words, on the level of representation, this relationship is a lineage of authenticity—the pupil's conversion is seen as "real" because of the pupil's ties to the East through a monk. While the convert imbues the representation of the monk with power and authority, this elaborate ruse obscures the fact that the pupil's conversion returns that authority (and all agency) to the hands of the pupil. The monk is a guide, but the convert is the "hero" of Buddhism (or Eastern wisdom more broadly) in its journey to and transformation within the West. There are many heroes in this story, but ultimately, there is only one kind of hero: the convert. As such, in this case, conversion is not about an internal change in belief or a radical psychological shift.[2] In this case, "conversion" is a cultural, political and religious structure designed to reinforce the power and authority of "converts" to determine the future of modern Buddhism, while marginalizing alternate lineages of Buddhist authority that might destabilize that structure.

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[1] Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 51.

[2] Consider, for instance, that "orthodoxy" is not a defining concept for this group; Buddhist converts can believe anything, just so long as they have read the right books and/or studied with the right monks.

Edward Said once famously wrote that the representations of Orientalism shape the "West" as much as the "East," albeit in radically different ways.[1] Indeed, as other scholars have noticed, the Buddhist American convert has been commonly racialized as white and often gendered male.[2] However, fewer scholars have noticed that the Buddhist American convert is, without exception, represented as an (often young) adult.[1] The convert must be old enough to be seen as rational and mature, even while young enough to suggest a promising and developing future in the making. The monk is ancient, in tune with the "old" (even, perhaps, "dying") wisdom of the East, but also so old that he is not seen as a threat.

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[1] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 4-9.

[2] Based on limited demographic information, it is relatively safe to assume that Buddhist American converts are quite racially diverse in reality. There are statistically significant percentages of Latino, Asian, African-American and white Buddhist American converts. The group is also not predominantly male or female. They are more likely to be highly educated and of a higher class status than the average American. Exact social location information is difficult to ascertain, as there have been no in-depth studies of Buddhist American converts (or that have even used "convert" as an explicit category). Future demographic studies of "Buddhists" in the United States must continue to become more nuanced by including previously unasked questions (like "did you convert to Buddhism?" and "has Buddhism influenced your spirituality?") in order to further complicate our understanding of Buddhism in the United States. Regardless, a comparison of the most common representations of Buddhist American converts with this limited data indicates a disturbing discrepancy. At the level of representation, Buddhist American converts are racialized as white and gendered male, even if in reality, this is hardly true. This discrepancy is explicable in the context of colonial and Orientalist politics, in which "whiteness" and "maleness" (like "conversion") are closely bound to the representation of the white male as the agent of history and culture, while all others have no agency and are simply possessed by the tides of history and culture. As such, non-white and non-

The Asian masses (and their religion), however, are represented as infantile, immature and superstitious—children. They can make no claim to "true" Buddhism. The infantilizing dimensions of colonialism have also been discussed before, but here I want to suggest that representations of childhood within the West are inseparably linked to these aspects, and that an examination of the links between

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male Buddhist American converts, much like second-generation Buddhist Americans, are rendered invisible so that "conversion" can become the illusionary pure category of unrestrained colonial agency. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Religious Landscape Survey," Pew Forum website, accessed December 15, 2018, http://religions. pewforum.org.

[1] As examples of the failure to examine the full ramifications of age in the history of Buddhism and conversion in the United States, consider: Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 273-76; Thomas A. Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist? Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures," in *Westward Dharma*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 17-33; Charles S. Prebish, *Luminous Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 233-69.

the two illustrates how marginalized the religious lives of children have been in the West. Neither group is understood to have any agency in connection to religion. In previous eras in Europe, conversion was a family affair; in the modern West, conversion is an individual decision. A child is not understood to be rational, free or mature enough to make such a decision. Much as in the case of colonized peoples, in the circular logic of this structure, these children have no agency (they are only seized/indoctrinated by their surroundings), and so they have no power. In this power structure, ageism and racism are closely tied together.

This process of marginalization (on both accounts) must occur so that the mechanisms of the monk-convert lineage remain dominant and unchallenged. In the case of second-generation Buddhist Americans, they must be rendered invisible, for they draw their lineages to Buddhism principally through their parents rather than through any monk figure. They are not converts.

The second part of the argument of this book argues that these children are not simply victims. A close examination of the lives of these children reveals that they have found subtle but effective ways to affirm their own familial Buddhist lineage against the monk-convert lineage model. Since the parental relationship usually demarcates a fairly sharp power differential between the parents and their children, the children's dissent is restricted and subtle. Their tools to create their own Buddhism are quite limited (in large part to what the parents give them, both materially and discursively). And yet, the tale is one of success, as these children often find ways to affirm their own religious identities in contradistinction to their parents. Paradoxically, they do this by identifying their parents as their primary source for their encounter to Buddhism—theirs is a familial lineage from parent to child.[1] However, this familial lineage cannot be easily reconciled with the monk-convert lineage, and so even just by giving voice to the former lineage, the dominance of the latter is challenged. These children brilliantly use the authority of their parents—the authority that has marginalized the children's religiosity—against itself. The common sentiment "I am Buddhist because of you, but while I am like you, I am not you. I am Buddhist differently" ultimately speaks for itself. It is a demand for one's inheritance.

A Question of Value

In this book, I join a growing number of scholars that have drawn upon the methodological and theoretical tools of postcolonial studies in order to reexamine the complex realities born by the intersection between modernity and global Buddhisms. Since their discipline has no "consensus" methodology that unites the field, at their best, historically, religious studies scholars have drawn on the wisdom of multiple fields in order to better understand their topics at hand. I gladly follow in their footsteps. This book is not a one-way street, however. As I hope my relatively narrow project here shows, both Buddhist studies (and scholarship on Buddhism in the United States more specifically) and postcolonial studies can benefit from the insights of the other.

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[1] Again, this style of Buddhist lineage is not exactly new, since historically the lay passage of Buddhism (while less discussed by scholarship) from generation to generation has always primarily relied upon familial bonds.

However, as the growth in postcolonial Buddhist studies scholarship shows, this dialogue can happen in a number of ways concerning a multitude of topics. Why did I select the religious-political structures that surround second-generation Buddhist Americans? More to the point, what is gained by examining this particular topic?

In order to begin to answer these questions, particularly given my analysis of other personal narratives later in this book, I must begin with my own experience. When I was a child, I could sense my father's discomfort with openly mixing his Buddhism with his family life. At one point, in fact, after overhearing me tell a friend that I was Buddhist, he later insisted to me that I was actually “nothing.” At first, I explained his anxiety to myself by recalling his stories about his negative experiences growing up in the Catholic Church. He did not want to “indoctrinate” us. This is a common reaction among Buddhist American convert parents. However, this response only hints at the larger cultural, political and religious structures at play in the parental anxiety over blending family life with religious life.

Growing up, I did not know many other Buddhist children. I assumed that this was because my family lived in a small city in a relatively rural state. We also did not regularly attend any particular community. It was only much later, after I began to explore online, that I realized that there were significant numbers of second-generation Buddhist Americans. The discrepancy between sheer numbers and public presence was the initial spark for this book. While the task much surpasses this book or even my own ability, this work serves as an initial step toward giving voice to second-generation Buddhist Americans. That task began as a critique of Buddhist American convert dominance and hegemony in scholarship and popular discourse in order to give space for that voice. However, as will become clear in my final chapters, I aspire to push beyond the deconstruction of the representational domain (however useful and necessary) and provide a constructive analysis of second-generation Buddhist Americans' lives. To this end, I examine several narratives by second-generation Buddhist Americans.

One of the additional spurs for this book at face value has nothing to do with Buddhism specifically. Over the past few decades, a theoretical dispute over the nature of resistance has emerged that has crisscrossed a multitude of academic fields and unproductively frozen them all in their tracks.[1] On one hand, inspired by a quasi-Foucauldian heritage, some scholars have argued that all (cultural, religious, political) dissent is so constrained by the forces of power that any mode of resistance inevitably reinscribes and reaffirms those dominant forces. On the other hand, other scholars have insisted on a pure space outside the corrupt world of the colonizer. This pure space can be a staging ground of novelty, hope and justice to break through the structures of colonial power.

While both the "limits of dissent" and "pure exterior" models are pragmatically useful in particular contexts (usually to counter the overemphasis of the other model), both models lack nuance, and, in fact, they both share a fatal flaw. Both models are constructed upon the assumption that the actual *content* of the discourses of both protest and dominance are primary. Therefore, for the models, if the colonizer and the colonized write or speak the same words, they hold the same meaning and ultimately have the same effects. But this conclusion is completely false. Positionality matters. The mouth matters as much as the words. The irony is that both of these models attempt to take power seriously, but fail to recognize that "power" is not some ethereal concept detached from reality—it is always embedded. For instance, as is demonstrated in this book, the marginalized might use the precise words of the "dominant discourse" *as a strategy of resistance* in order to open up a space for novelty beyond the dominant narratives. Both the "limits of dissent" and "pure exterior" models agree that salvation can only come from a site completely outside the structures of oppression; they just disagree over whether that is actually possible. The truth is, however, that the inside/outside binary is deceptively simplistic, and the realities of resistance are infinitely more complex.

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[1] In her text *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood provides an excellent overview of this scholarly conversation on resistance. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1-39.

If a colonial narrative maintains its power through exclusion, it would follow that demands for inclusion (i.e. the performance of some elements of that narrative) by the excluded would radically subvert that narrative. The identity (and power) of the colonial narrative is the act of the exclusion. Critics have feared that these tactics run the risk of the marginalized being completely assimilated and subsumed under the rubric of colonial dominance. What these critics have missed is that the colonizer cannot permit this result because the exclusion is foundational for the colonizer's identity. As such, the colonized invoke carefully selected aspects of the colonial narrative in order to create a tension (that cannot be structurally resolved) within that narrative. Given the colonizer's attachments, the colonial narrative is challenged even while the identities and differences of the marginalized are not lost.[1]

I also see this book as furthering conversations within the growing subfield of "conversion studies." A genealogy of the concept of conversion demonstrates that this concept and Christianity are closely linked. The notion of conversion as an adult ritual among Buddhist American converts is only one such example of Christian echoes in the modern use of the concept. This book contributes to the overall portrait of how "conversion" has both changed and remained the same in different modern religious contexts. Scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds have analyzed "conversion" as a social rite that designates in-group/out-group dynamics, a marker of selection in a modern spiritual marketplace, and as a radical internal psychological transformation (a la the Pauline narrative that proved so influential in Christian theology).[1] While I believe this book adds to all approaches, in particular, I hope to demonstrate how the last view too commonly obscures the political dimensions of conversion.

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[1] For these reflections, I am obviously indebted to Homi Bhabha's concept of "hybridity." Bhabha, 121-31.

Beginning with William James, there is a rich literature on the psychology of conversion.[2] There is also an emerging literature on the ritual of conversion. While these discussions are important, this book examines "conversion" as a discursive formation—a network of dominant cultural representations, understandings and practices that are bound together under the signifier "conversion" in our modern global context. From this view, the language of conversion purports to designate a radical shift in the convert's inner and outer lives, a process of transformation that

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[1] By primarily interpreting conversion as an explicitly political gesture, I position myself against the dominant strands of interpretation in the field that primarily read conversion through psychological and/or economics-based lenses. For examples of this, consider: Henri Paul Pierre Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[2] James' discussion of conversion in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (first published in 1902) testifies to the lengthy history of the dominant representational association of conversion with adolescence and the process of becoming an adult. The linked notion can be traced further back to the Protestant Reformation and debates over infant baptism. In his own discussion of the topic, James writes, "…[I]f you should expose to a converting influence a subject… there would be a sudden conversion…what is attained is often an altogether new level of spiritual vitality… in which impossible things have become possible, and new energies and endurances are shown. The personality is changed, the man *is* born anew." Italics his. At another point in the text, he puts it baldly, "Conversion is in its essence a normal adolescent phenomenon, incidental to the passage from the child's small universe to the wider intellectual and spiritual life of maturity."

There are many power-laden, ageist, and unsubstantiated assumptions throughout his discussion of conversion. Why does James assume that children are somehow more intellectually trapped in their contexts than "mature" individuals? Why cannot children have complex religious ideas and worldviews? What about those that do not go through this rite-of-passage and continue to follow their religious heritages—can they ever grow up or be religious? What evidence does James have that proves that conversion is an essential part of "religion," and shares a common structure (based on the process of aging) across cultures? How exactly does one measure energy or vitality? However, critiques of the lack of empiricism in James' discussion of conversion miss the point. For James, conversion is not about real measurable phenomena, nor is it even about children or adolescents. After all, why would young individuals need to be made young again? In this context, conversion is about adults becoming ritually, rhetorically, and representationally young again, and through this process, maintaining their social hold on power, while real children are dismissed as "small" and religiously unimportant. This process of conversion provides converts with the social "vitality" and power of being representationally young without converts having to weather the very common cultural marginalization that comes with being truly young. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 199, 241.

fundamentally alters the very fabric of the convert's perspective, practices and sense of belonging. Conversion marks a social positioning within culture. I argue, however, that this discursive performance in fact obscures the continuities pre- and post-conversion. While many Buddhist American converts have seen their conversion as a break with corrupt facets of Western culture, they have also failed to realize how their participation in the discourse of conversion has reinscribed many of the most troubling dimensions of that culture. Simplistic binaries like choice/constraint, maturity/immaturity, and West/East are all reaffirmed in this process. Further, by identifying as converts, these Americans place themselves at the center of a new history for Buddhism. Through the lens of discourse analysis, I argue that "conversion" is never just about the individual in the context of modern American Buddhism. Shallow interpretations of Paul's Road to Damascus "moment" have led to a dominant modern mythos that conversion can somehow allow us to escape, transcend or remove ourselves from worldly politics. On the contrary, while I do not strive to completely undercut the value or authenticity of all (or even any) conversion narratives, in this book, I hope to demonstrate that the discourse of conversion cannot ever be separated from politics.[1]

Finally, this book is designed to further academic reflection about the intersection of religion and ageism. Very little has been written on this topic, and nearly all of that concerns religion and ageism against the elderly. Religion and ageism against the young is effectively a non-existent topic in the academy, and in order to rectify this serious issue, I hope this book sparks future scholarship and conversation on the topic.

I plan to tread carefully in this book of linking the ageism against second-generation Buddhist Americans with the wider structures of Orientalism; by no means do I mean to equate the marginalization of second-generation Buddhist Americans with infantilized Asian Buddhists. The fact that they are both oppressed by the same hegemonic system does enable us (as scholars) to uncover shared (and different) features of that oppressive system by studying the two groups. However, this must not lead us to the conclusion that their situations are somehow the same. That said, scholars of religion in the United States have rarely drawn upon the insights of postcolonial scholarship, probably because the latter field is stigmatized as being purely about colonized geographical areas.[1] Truthfully, however, the effects of colonialism, while always contextual, have been fully global. By placing the two fields of Buddhism in the United States and postcolonialism in dialogue, not only do new possibilities emerge, but I also hope to challenge the ghettoization of postcolonial analysis. A postcolonial lens has as much to teach scholars about the United States' own "backyard" as it does about any other location.

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[1] I would add that all conversion narratives cannot be treated equally, since some marginalized groups invoke the discourse of "conversion" against imperial and colonial orders. Finally, I cannot emphasize enough that the scholarly question of "authenticity" of conversion is misleading at best, and incredibly harmful at worst. The concept of "authenticity" commonly rests upon the notion that some conversions are completely separate from political realities and all other conversions, since they are connected to political concerns, are essentially inauthentic. Since I reject the foundational assumption that the discourse of conversion can ever be separate from politics, I obviously also reject the distinction between authentic and inauthentic conversions. This does not mean, however, that I believe that everyone is completely predetermined by their contexts, or that "true" conversions (as in "a change of mind" and/or a shift—even a radical one— in religio-political positioning) are not possible. Such a question, however, is outside the scope of this particular book.

A Question of Method

Many years ago, in an undergraduate history course on women and Christian history, the professor pulled me aside after class. She told me that while my papers showed some potential, my style of argumentation was too strident and polemical for traditional academic writing. She asked me what I hoped to do when I graduated; when I told her that I was considering graduate school, she seemed worried. “In history?” she asked. “No,” I responded, “in religious studies.” She breathed a sigh of relief, “Oh, good, theology will be a good fit for you.”

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[1] We must recognize, however, that embedded in this absence is the erroneous assumption that the United States is not itself a colonized geographical area.

For a variety of reasons, this conversation continues to resonate with me years later. The conflation of theology and religious studies is suggestive of what many outsiders think of the two fields. For many, the two fields together have become the fun house mirrored reflection of the rest of academia—similar enough to pass, but different enough to reinforce by contrast the dominant norms of the entirety of academia. Academia should be objective, disinterested, and apolitical. Theology and religious studies—supposedly outlets for subjective, prescriptive, and overtly political scholarship with an agenda—are the exception that proves the rule. If an argument is identified as essentially theological in nature, the ordinary scholar can dismiss such an argument as academically specious. In truth, like in the case of any power-tinted reflection, the representations of theology and religious studies reveal more about the political desires of the rest of academia than anything about the actual reality of either of the former fields.

Deconstructing these representational boundaries blurs the lines between fields with productive results. This book is not predominantly an exercise in theology. I write as a religious historian of the United States. I examine past narratives pertaining to the modern complicated representational cultural nexus termed "religion" in order to make conclusions about the role religion has played and might continue to play within American histories. This work is predominantly an exercise in history. And yet, following in the footsteps of several postmodern historiographers, rather than strive to minimize the political implications of my critical history, I attempt to be as honest and open about them as possible.[1] Every history is political; critical history simply refuses to leave that fact aside.

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[1] Hayden White's 1973 magnum opus *Metahistory* is the banner work for this postmodern turn in historiography. While popular in certain sectors of history, he also is highly controversial in the field and is often represented as the boogeyman that threatens objective standards in history. As an example of this presentation of White and postmodern historiography, consider *Telling the Truth about History* by Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob. As a recent example of White's continuing influence and recent developments in postmodern historiography, consider *Philosophy of History after Hayden White* edited by Robert Doran. Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994); Robert Doran, ed., *Philosophy of History after Hayden White* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

I was initially attracted to religious studies not as a pass to write whatever I desired without any filters, but rather because of the inertial tendency within the field to trend toward interdisciplinarity. Unlike many other fields, religious studies has no dominant methodology or even, as Tomoko Masuzawa and other critics have shown, any obviously given topic of analysis.[1] These facts can be paralyzing, but they also reveal great potential. Within the complicated history of the field, scholars have deployed a wide variety of tools to illuminate and shape a wide variety of cultural phenomena. Only by looking at previously considered topics through many new lenses—like in a kaleidoscope—can the scholar see hidden dimensions previously concealed by an overreliance on one lens or one perspective. Through a new set of eyes, that which was made invisible becomes visible once again.

Within this interdisciplinary space, this book is the product of two general modes of analysis: literary analysis and genealogy. Throughout this work, I consider many different sources from a time period ranging from the 1950s to contemporary times—including Hollywood films, spiritual autobiographies, personal essays, and literary fiction. These narratives serve as case studies for my reconstruction of the complicated historical relationship between Buddhist American converts and their children. All of these narratives—fiction and nonfiction—are carefully constructed to present a particular conception of social worlds and the norms that bind them together. I purposely select a wide range of narratives—from films with supposedly broad appeal to essays tailored for very narrow and specific audiences—to show the significant power and cascading influence of the cultural structures analyzed in this book. For example, common tropes that surround popular representations of the monk-convert relationship can be identified in narrative genres ranging from blockbuster films to parenting manuals. The scope of this book must necessarily be wide because the cultural effects of the structures that privilege Buddhist American converts are not confined to any single sector.

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[1] Masuzawa, 1-20.

Through synchronic literary analysis of these narratives and their contexts, I recreate detailed snapshot pictures of many moments in this history. What are the dominant norms and values in these narratives? What language is used? What is assumed or left unsaid? How are scenes and settings constructed? Who is made more visible and powerful by these stories? Who can only be found in the background?

Through thematic and normative comparison of these many portraits frozen in different times and contexts, I reconstruct a diachronic overview of the continuities, changes, and trajectories of the cultural structures that have made Buddhist American converts more visible at the expense of other groups including second-generation Buddhist Americans. Since I focus on representations of the seemingly dynamic processes of aging in this book, individual portraits will not suffice. By juxtaposing the many photographs created by my analysis, a generational history—a moving picture—is rebuilt piece by piece.

As a part of this book, genealogy as a method both reveals the full features of the dominant monk-convert lineage and counters the erasure of family lineages that stand apart from the former lineage. Of course, the colonial monk-convert lineage has no essential structure; a genealogy of the lineage reveals that different historical agents have reconstructed and reformulated the lineage to serve their contemporary needs within their contexts. Recently, critics have argued that postcolonial scholars too commonly essentialize the West in their efforts to deconstruct it.[1] The British Empire was not the same as the French

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[1] The cultural historian Edward Berenson aptly articulates this viewpoint. Edward Berenson, "Making a Colonial Culture? Empire and the French Public, 1880-1940," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 22, no. 2 (2004): 127-49.

Empire; nor, for that matter, was the British Empire circa 1750 the same as the British Empire circa 1900. There is no single model for a colonial empire.

Even within a given period and context, however, these critics point out that the persuasive and coercive influence of a colonial empire is never uniform. Some imperial citizens might only reluctantly embrace their empire's colonial designs, or in other cases, might openly reject or subvert those designs. Even the most fervent supporters of their empire rarely hold precisely the same concepts or ends. For one, the empire might symbolize the rise of secularism triumphant; for another, the same empire might represent the vanguard of a Christianization of the world. The suggested lesson: two colonial bureaucrats might share the same forms, the same stamps, even the same office, and yet they will never share the same exact mind.

Obviously, I am sympathetic to this critique up to a point, as I believe that my own work in this book exemplifies that particular groups *inside* the bounds of the metropole can become threats to the colonial system that they are within. While they might be citizens of the empire, they are still threats because they are different in crucial ways. Since second-generation Buddhist Americans never convert to Buddhism, they must be rendered invisible in order to preserve a dominant imperial structure built upon the power of the concept of conversion. While we should not let this truth level our analysis of privilege or difference, I agree that we cannot rely on simplistic models of empire or the colonial order that pretend that something like national boundaries (alone) enable us as scholars to separate the world into a static binary of colonizer against colonized, or a neat and logical network of colonial representations against strategic resistance.[1]

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[1] At this point, it is also important to add a disclaimer for this book: while I rely heavily on postcolonial methodologies throughout the work, I am well aware that second-generation Buddhist Americans are not an archetypal example of a structurally marginalized group. Because of their nationality (and often their race), second-generation Buddhist Americans not only have benefited significantly from colonial structures, but they also possess a great deal more agency and options to respond to those structures than colonized groups around the world. Because of their privilege, they have power and their voices can often be heard. And yet, as religious individuals—as Buddhists—they are silenced and invisible. As I will argue below, in at least three ways—their age, religious identity, and generational status—they are marginalized by a colonial society that finds them inconvenient. Depending on one's primary lens of examination, second-generation Buddhist Americans fall somewhere in the middle of the hierarchies established by colonialism—both privileged and marginalized for different reasons. I note at several points in this book, however, that their marginalized status in these regards does not guarantee that they have been or will be allies for those who have suffered even more within the structures of colonialism. Unfortunately, a society can be blind to those who are blind to others.

However, the limitation to this critique can be found within its ground for authority. These critics argue that postcolonial scholars have not been sufficiently sensitive to the reality of lived history. Ironically, it is the critics that fail to be sensitive to one of the most fundamental aspects of the lived histories of different marginalized populations—power dynamics. In a situation of power inequality, all of the groups and concepts involved might be incredibly complex, but ultimately, this fact does not change the reality of domination. Indeed, an overemphasis on the variegated facets of the situation might actually serve to obscure the differences in power. No doubt there are contradictions at the heart of any colonial order or logic—marginalized groups are often most intimately aware of this fact. Likewise, however, marginalized groups are also generally quite aware of the lived reality of their oppression—even if they give no "exterior" signs to the scholar to indicate such. They can also commonly name the parties and concepts they believe to be most responsible for that oppression. If the scholar should be sensitive to lived history, then she cannot ignore the voices of the underside of that history.

One can accept the truth that every context is rich with infinite realities, perspectives and representations without relinquishing the notion that some hold more relative power than others. To provide a rather mundane example on the individual level, I am both an avid science fiction fan and a Buddhist. This does not mean that both identity markers hold equal weight for me. For a number of reasons, my Buddhism is closer to my heart, i.e. holds more power over my identity. And yet, this also does not mean that my science fiction fandom is completely reducible to my Buddhist identity. One can accept the importance of complexity and differentiation, even while recognizing the obvious truth that particular structures and groups possess a disproportionate amount of societal and cultural power. Marginalized groups know that they do not live within a vacuum; they must struggle within and against a much more limited set of the most dominant structures that oppress them. By reading against the grain within a particular period and context, the scholar can (to a limited degree), unveil what marginalized groups are often already aware of: what cultural structures possess the most gravitational force over the lives caught in their pull?

I am influenced by the French social theorist Michel Foucault for my genealogical method. Foucault argues that dominant cultural structures maintain their power by erasing their histories and presenting as timeless, necessary, and ahistorical.[1] He suggests that while the methods of history have the potential to expose these erasures, most histories reinforce the dominant cultural power of those structures by representing those structures as universal and across history. Critical history—or genealogy—is the task of demonstrating how particular cultural structures are contingent and bound to specific histories of power.

While my own intellectual genealogy can be traced through Foucault, this book is more dependent on the methodological insights of postcolonialism than any other approach. Like many postcolonial scholars, I find Foucault's method a useful tool of historical critique, but I acknowledge that by itself, it does not suffice to interpret history through the eyes of the marginalized. Foucault confined his analysis to European history, and was theoretically committed to the idea that alternate substantive narratives could never be heard because of the dominance of cultural structures. Resistance, for Foucault, amounted to unrestricted desire and freedom; as I argue in later chapters, these concepts are not without their own problematic history closely linked to power, control, and domination.[1]

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[1] For example, consider: Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 139-64.

Following the insights of postcolonialism, any successful critical history must begin with a methodological commitment to privilege previously marginalized voices. Critique of dominant structures—while essential to this book in opening up new spaces for others to be heard—is not sufficient alone. Postcolonialism begins with the notion that the economic, cultural, and religious structures of colonial domination have privileged the experiences and lives of some over others. Even after the so-called colonial era ended in the middle of the twentieth century, these sharp power differentials continued in new forms ranging from predatory global lending practices to the appropriation and commodification of colonized peoples' cultural narratives, practices, and material life.

A postcolonial methodology rejects the idea that all parties are equally bound to the hegemonic structures of colonialism in the same ways.[2] It also rejects previously essentialized and bounded definitions of religion, culture, and tradition that were instrumental in the practices of colonial domination.[3]

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[1] Edward Said was one of the first to make this critique, although many have raised this point. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 41.

[2] As one example, see Bhabha, 121-31.

[3] Masuzawa, 1-20.

For instance, the meaning of religion cannot be exhausted by texts, beliefs, or psychological states. In the place of these notions, postcolonialism suggests that marginalized voices are not forever silent; in fact, the problem is not that colonized groups are not speaking—it is that only the closest ears hear them. With the right commitments and relationships, scholars can amplify these voices. In order to accomplish this goal, scholars must both read against the grain in dominant histories to discern other voices and consider previously ignored narratives by marginalized groups. To further develop my earlier example, they must push beyond limited definitions of religion that confine "religion" to particular spheres, and instead consider the role religion plays in everyday life, in practices as ordinary as cooking, bathing, and play.[1] In this book, I engage both tasks by critically examining narratives by or for Buddhist American converts with a lens sensitive to power dynamics, and considering narratives by second-generation Buddhist Americans in a new light given those power dynamics.

Given my postcolonial commitments, my topic of focus might at first appear odd. After all, second-generation Buddhist Americans are highly privileged because of their nationality, and given that many of them—although not all—are white, many are doubly privileged because of their race. Second-generation Buddhist Americans are hardly the model for absolute subaltern status. And yet, colonial structures of representation do render them invisible. Further, in at least three interlinking ways, second-generation Buddhist Americans are significantly marginalized. First, as a cradle religious minority, this group must regularly wrestle with subtle and overt forms of religious oppression and the wider structures of Christian privilege in the United States that constantly belittle second-generation Buddhist Americans as "not true Americans." Second, they must struggle against the cultural and generational structures that privilege Buddhist American converts' experience as the only authentic form of American Buddhism. Second-generation Buddhist Americans are told to ignore their own conceptions of their religious identities—they cannot be Buddhist, because Buddhism is defined as something else entirely. In other words, combining these two notions, second-generation Buddhist Americans are oppressed for being a religious identity that they are also forcibly not allowed to be.

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[1] For this notion, I am in debt to the social theorist Michel de Certeau. Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1-4.

Finally, second-generation Buddhist Americans are marginalized for their age in a society that—

both legally and culturally—does not even recognize ageism against the young as a possibility. I define structural ageism as a cultural nexus of norms and values that justify sharp power differentials and discrimination based on *any* age through a variety of tactics including the limitation of possibilities, the perpetuation of stereotypes, coerced dependencies, micro-aggressions, and the invocation of authority and threat of violence. Hegemonic American society is thoroughly grounded on unjustified and unquestioned structural assumptions based on age often subtly coded in other language—from hiring decisions based on "experience" to patronizing reductions of teenagers to biology and "hormones," and from common wisdom about younger generations as lazy, amoral, and immature to the normative pressure for youth to participate in educational systems that perpetuate relationships of extreme economic dependency. The academy is sadly not free from structural ageism; some religious studies scholars have only recently begun to consider the religious experiences of children and youth, because previously these experiences were not considered worthwhile enough to examine. Adult religion has been the assumed norm—a norm inseparable from the wider fabric of societal ageism.

The common argument that some difference in power between parent and child is necessary for the purposes of protection and education is often deployed to support the wider structures of ageism against the young. In a variation on hazing practices, adults often also argue that ageism is part of the cycle of maturation—one day, children will grow up and learn the value of adult authority and the moralistic power of educating the young. However, neither absolute power differentials based on age without any mutuality nor any of the marginalizing tactics related to ageism follow from a limited acceptance of the necessity of power differentials between parents and children. With the power of rhetoric, valid arguments are never necessary.

Beginning at the end of the twentieth century, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Don S. Browning, Marcia J. Bunge, and other scholars have combined the insights of the newly emergent field of childhood studies with religious studies in an exciting interdisciplinary conversation that has challenged many of the biases in the latter field for adults.[1] Miller-

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[1] As some important examples of this development, consider: Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Don S. Browning and Marcia J. Bunge, eds., *Children and Childhood in World Religions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009); Don S. Browning and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, eds., *Children and Childhood in American Religions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009); Don S. Browning, M. Christian Green, and John Witte, Jr., eds., *Sex, Marriage, and Family in World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Christian Smith and Melinda

McLemore has particularly challenged dominant modern religious conceptions of childhood that represent children as powerless, innocent, gullible, and in need of active moral discipline as culturally contingent.[1] Furthermore, Miller-McLemore argues these popular representations assume children are simply objects to be shaped and reshaped according to adult values and desires. In the wake of these critiques, scholars like Susan Ridgely Bales began to consider religion in the United States from children's eyes—privileging their experiences in order to reconsider the nature of religion from alternative perspectives. In her 2005 text *When I Was a Child*, Bales

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Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Susan Ridgely Bales, *When I Was a Child* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Carol E. Lytch, *Choosing Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

[1] Miller-McLemore has also helpfully pointed out that one of the reasons problematic representations of children persist in modern American society is because of dominant gendered conceptions of family life. Men as patriarchs benefit from many modern family structures because they are represented as the lords of the household above all others—women and children included. And yet, Miller-McLemore notes that many women—and several feminists—have been complicit in the representational marginalization of children precisely because they fear standing up with and for children will only further sexist stereotypes of the familial association of women first with children. The complexity of this situation should be recognized, while the general silence on this topic by both men and women must end. Miller-McLemore, 1-24, 115-20.

examines children's perspectives of first communion and their interpretations of the event and the practices surrounding it.[1] As an important marker of an epistemic shift, up until that point, no scholar had primarily focused on asking children about their experiences with first communion; the dominant assumption in the field has been that even explicit scholarly consideration of children's religion need only ask adult authority figures about the topic.

However, the bulk of the interdisciplinary field of religion and childhood studies has focused on Christianity and childhood, and several scholars in the field wrongly universalize many assumptions, critiques, and concepts that apply only to Christian history and childhood. In the context of the United States, scholars have failed to recognize the ways Christian hegemony has marginalized other religious practitioners—including children. To her credit, writing as a Christian practical theologian, Miller-McLemore overtly limits the scope of her arguments about childhood to modern Christian contexts in the United States and recognizes the degree to which her Christian background shapes her perspective.[2] Other scholars on the topic, like the sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, have normalized

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[1] Bales, 1-17.

[2] Miller-McLemore, xx-xvi.

American religion as Christian religion, and either assimilated non-Christian religious perspectives into a Christian framework, or otherized them as a threat to the (Christian) value of religion.[1] For example, strangely, Smith and Denton dismissively describes several non-Christian teens within the pejorative group "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism," despite the Christian history and connotations of the phrase.[2]

For the most part, scholars of religion and childhood studies have failed to consider intersectionality issues in relationship to childhood, and have also generally failed to break out of the theoretical and practical confines of Christian hegemony in the United States in order to study non-Christian religions in their own terms. Some intentionally multi-religious edited works like *Children and Childhood in American Religions* and its companion volume *Children and Childhood in World Religions* have attempted to break this mold, but Buddhist studies scholars in particular lag behind.[3] As of 2018, only one book on Buddhism and childhood has been published (*Little Buddhas* in 2013), and this book covers the entirety of Buddhist history and childhood.[1] In Chapter 2, I argue that there are unique factors in the history of scholarship on Buddhism in the United States that has seemingly diminished the importance of writing about Buddhist children in the context of the United States in particular. There can be no doubt, however, that the intersectionality of ageism and religious marginaliz-ation has contributed to this overall reality.

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[1] Smith and Denton, 3-8.

[2] Smith and Denton, 118-71.

[3] Browning and Bunge, 1-2; Browning and Miller-McLemore, 1-2.

Like religious studies scholars, most postcolonial critics have only briefly considered the importance of ageism to colonial relationships of domination and exploitation, but given the prevalence of the infantilization of colonized groups, more scholarly reflection on this concept is critically important. Ageism and racism are intimately related. The experiences of colonized Asian Buddhists and second-generation Buddhist Americans expose the structures of ageism for what they are—groundless myths designed to support the privileges of the already powerful. Through these lenses, even the release valve—the supposed universal process of aging and maturation as a justification for "temporary" power differences—is shown to be an illusion. Through infantilizing representations, Asian Buddhists are never allowed to age. Unless second-generation Buddhist Americans disown their religious identities and conform to the narratives and practices of conversion, they are also never allowed to age. The rhetoric and structures of ageism are designed to keep both groups in perpetual relationships of domination.

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[1] Vanessa R. Sasson, *Little Buddhas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-14.

Due to their represented age and religious identities, second-generation Buddhist Americans might not be marginalized for every aspect of their identities, but they are caught in a liminal place of privilege and oppression that indicates the value of further study. In particular, since some of the primary modes of marginalization of second-generation Buddhist Americans are the muffling of their voices and concealment of their existence, the methods of postcolonialism, supplemented with a lens aware of the specific structures of ageism, are particularly useful in revealing their marginalized status without minimizing their privilege. These strategic tools are useful for examining the complicated realities of power dynamics and are effective in uncovering the previously hidden narratives of second-generation Buddhist Americans.

An important facet of postcolonial methodology is the concept that a scholar's identity and context always shapes the scholar's work.[1] While modernist historians have aspired to remove themselves from their scholarship in order to achieve a standard of objectivity, postcolonial, postmodern, and feminist critics have argued that this goal is impossible. Further, many white male American and European scholars have invoked this goal in order to erase any trace of influence from their social position on their work. Further blurring the lines between theology and history, these scholars also engage in ideological projects—projects misleadingly concealed as objective facts of the surrounding world. One position becomes the universal position. Even more troublingly, since particular cultural assumptions are universalized as objective, minority scholars are forced to either conform to these assumptions or be dismissed as biased. Truthfully, however, everyone necessarily writes from within their home.

I am a 32-year-old white second-generation Buddhist American. I was raised by Buddhist convert parents, and since my mother died when I was young, my father's Buddhist identity was the most important influence on my own religious identity. In order to avoid indoctrinating me in any religious identity, my father tried not to raise me Buddhist. He would often tell me as a child that I should choose my religious identity as an adult. And yet, my father told me Buddhist narratives and mantras, I learned how to meditate, and I internalized many of my father's Buddhist values. While choice is one factor in identity construction, it is not the only factor, or even the primary factor. In my case, the regular and close proximity of my father influenced my religious identity regardless of his intent. Every home is a bounded space. Relationships shape identities, and not all relationships are chosen. Despite my father's objections, he raised me Buddhist.

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[1] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3-23.

Demographically, I am an unusual Buddhist American, but not because I am a second-generation Buddhist American. As I have already argued, second-generation Buddhist Americans likely make up a statistically significant portion of American Buddhists. I am unusual because I am a white Buddhist who grew up in Idaho within a lower-middle-class family. As several studies have shown, most white Buddhists in the United States are localized in large cities and are upper-middle-class. My marginalized experience as a lower-middle-class religious minority has helped me become aware of my privilege as a white American male and recognize the wider intersectionality of oppression that is a grounding assumption for this particular book. Growing up in Idaho, I only met a few other second-generation Buddhist Americans, which led me as a child to accept and internalize the problematic idea that I was a religious anomaly. As I previously mentioned, I only learned later that I was not alone.

Given my postcolonial methodological commitments, I do not believe that my social position and experience influence my scholarship on Buddhism in the United States to a higher degree than other scholars' social positions and experiences influence their scholarship on the topic. Whether one is a cradle Buddhist or a convert Buddhist, or even an outsider, one's perspective is always shaped by one's history. Every field of sight has blind spots. The field of Buddhism in the United States in general has been blind to the full lives of second-generation Buddhist Americans in part because dominant cultural structures conceal them from any scholarly view from above.

Responding to this problem, my experience enables me to begin with the reality of second-generation Buddhist Americans as a starting point for new reflection. However, in addition to aiding me in seeing "new" subjects for consideration, there can be no question that my social location also limits my perspective. In this book, I do not pretend to present a complete portrait of Buddhism in the United States. While I constantly strive for empathy throughout, I also do not pretend to present a complete portrait of

Buddhist American converts. I do not even claim to speak for all second-generation Buddhist Americans—in some ways, I recognize that the greatest risk in this book is that my experience will dominate the stories of other second-generation Buddhist Americans. As such, in Chapter 5, in my analysis of religious experiences closest to my own, I include a more in-depth reflection on my experience as a second-generation Buddhist American alongside others in order to present my narrative as just one among many.

My hope is that I stay empirically close enough to the stories of other second-generation Buddhist Americans that my own individual theoretical instincts are naturally deconstructed whenever they range too far from the collective experiences of second-generation Buddhist Americans as a whole. By providing my story, the reader can judge whether I have radically distorted the experiences of other Buddhists for my own purposes. Likewise, despite my claims to write as a critical religious historian, I will leave the reader to evaluate whether, ultimately, my former instructor was correct all along. Is this an exercise in Buddhist theology? Or is the line between theology and history muddier than previously thought? If what I have said is true, every history of Buddhism in the United States cannot be separated from the social positions, foundational assumptions, or the ideological goals of the authors. These histories all reshape the topic they claim to study. Every history is written toward particular ends. Pushing beyond the individual features of this book, we might consider: to what extent is every history of Buddhism in the United States also an exercise in Buddhist theology?

A Question of Structure

In Chapter 2, I provide a historiographical overview of scholarship on Buddhism in the United States, concluding that while scholars have attempted to overcome early biases for Buddhist converts (racialized as white), many of the underlying structures that led to this imbalance in the first place largely remain in place. Scholarship that first emerged in the 1990s on a debated divide between Asian-American Buddhists and white Buddhist American converts has obscured the troubling origins of rhetoric about "Two Buddhisms" in the United States. The scholar-practitioner Alan Watts first wrote about two different forms of Buddhism in the United States in the 1950s—a conservative tradition-following strand and an innovative tradition-breaking strand—but Watts' typology described two groups of white Buddhist American converts.[1] Watts assumed that whiteness and American identity were completely synonymous, and so he did not feel it necessary to describe the lives of Buddhists in the United States beyond different types of white converts.

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[1] Alan Watts, "Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen," *Chicago Review* 12, no. 2 (1958): 3-11.

Decades later, largely responding to the pressures of multicultural norms and former scholarly tendencies to focus strictly on white Buddhists, scholars appropriated Watts' two Buddhisms typology and its associated rhetoric, but racialized the categories in a new way, linking Asian-American Buddhists with the tradition-following group and associating white Buddhist American converts with the innovative tradition-breaking group.[1] While many scholars redefined the typology with the explicit intent of making Asian-American Buddhist lives more visible to academic eyes, they failed to consider how the repetition of a scholarly model historically defined by whiteness and the politics of Orientalism actually has made Asian-American Buddhists and others further invisible beneath reified stereotypes. Under the newly redefined model, Asian-American Buddhists are represented as being bound to tradition, while white Buddhist American converts are represented as heroes that are free to be innovative and redefine Buddhism for the needs of the West. The limited amount of scholarship on second-generation Buddhist Americans is a byproduct of this entrenched, concealed, and racialized binary since second-generation Buddhist Americans do not fit easily on either side of the typology. Only by deconstructing scholarly links between race and tradition, critiquing the problematic juxtaposition of tradition and innovation, and challenging implicit scholarly valorization of free religious creativity can the field move forward in considering the full breadth and depth of Buddhism in the United States and the diversity of voices that make it up.

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[1] As two examples, see Charles S. Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," *Buddhists Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (1993): 187-206 and Paul David Numrich, "Two Buddhisms Further Considered," *Contemporary Buddhism* 4, no. 1 (2003): 55-78.

In Chapter 3, I provide a generational history of Buddhist American converts and an outline of the structure of the monk-convert lineage as the dominant representational model of the transformation of Buddhism in its "passage" from East to West. Adding to the work of Jane Iwamura, Joseph Cheah and others on this topic, I argue that the racism of the structure is completely inseparable from ageist representations that undergird the authority of the lineage model as well.[1] "Conversion," in this case, describes a process that is ideally done by a (young) adult, in order to signify (and strengthen) the power, freedom and creativity of these agents as they transform Buddhism for the West. Conversion is a ritual that establishes the authority of particular individuals within this power dynamic. Less about internal cognitive transformation, conversion is understood as a rite of passage (a “coming of age,” from the converts’ perspectives, for both themselves and the Buddhism they practice) that must be undergone in order to legitimize and distinguish the converts as the true standard bearers of Buddhism in the West. Under this model, not only can a child not convert (and thus not be “Buddhist”), but so long as an individual (even as an adult) does not “convert” to Buddhism, she is not a real American Buddhist—even if she was raised in a Buddhist family.

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[1] Iwamura; Cheah.

In this light, the metaphors that dominate popular and scholarly understandings of Buddhism in the United States are more insidious than they initially appear. American Buddhism is commonly said to be “in development,” “in process,” “in flux,” “in the making,” and “unresolved.”[1] According to this logic, only the future will tell what the essence of Buddhism in the United States is and will be. While these metaphors appear to be liberating and anti-essentialist, an examination of their role in American

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[1] For one example, consider Richard Hughes Seager, “American Buddhism in the Making,” in *Westward Dharma*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 106-19.

Buddhist discourse shows that de-naturalization can be subtly just as oppressive and essentialist in some contexts as naturalization. While obviously to some degree true (as is true of any human social structure), an over-emphasis on the fluidity and mutability of Buddhism in the United States favors those that represent themselves at the forefront of the future and transformation of Buddhism (converts) over against those cradle Buddhists that, by definition, have always been American Buddhists since their very beginning. No doubt the future of Buddhism in the United States is uncertain; this does not mean that past and present narratives do not matter or have had no influence in shaping American Buddhism today. American Buddhism is still "in the making," and yet American Buddhism has also *been made.*

In order to provide a detailed historical portrait, I limit my analysis of Buddhist American converts and trends in the re-formation of the monk-convert lineage to two (admittedly still broad) periods: the Beat and countercultural generations (1950s-1970s) and the subsequent period as their children grew up (1980s-current). As others have done, the genealogy of the monk-convert lineage can be traced to much earlier periods in the histories of Western empires. For my purposes, I start with the Beats because it allows me to demonstrate the most relevant features of the lineage to the lives of second-generation Buddhist Americans today. I also begin with the Beats because it is during this period that the monk-convert lineage became tied to novel representations of age and religion. While the broader connections between Orientalism and ageism were not new, the Beats were the first to crystalize the notion that the ideal Western Buddhist should be a mature young adult (juxtaposed against the elderly monk or text, on one hand, and the infantile Asian Buddhist masses on the other). By the 1960s, this ageist concept was taken for granted among Buddhist American converts.

In order to expand on my claim that the most recent reformulations of the monk-convert lineage are constructed upon assumptions about adulthood, conversion and agency, I analyze a variety of sources as revealing troubling assumptions about age and religion. I begin with Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums* as pivotal and authoritative books in the unofficial Buddhist American "canon."[1] By linking the Bildungsroman genre with a "Buddhist" ethos, these novels have been incredibly popular for Buddhist American converts. They have been so popular precisely because the narratives reflect the power of the dominant Orientalist structures they assume. In these texts, the characters' "conversion" is closely linked to unrestricted freedom, a continual renewal of youth, and revolt against an older dominant generation.[1]

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[1] Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Viking Press, 1957); Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (New York: Viking Press, 1958).

As these converts began having children, this logic of conversion would lead to the marginalization of the religious experiences of those children. As the ageist dimensions of the monk-convert lineage became increasingly complex over time, by the time most of the converts began having children, the storytellers had to address (however indirectly) the reality that even their children did not fit the dominant Western Buddhist mold. These new narratives had to explain how the sheer existence of these children does not challenge the power of the monk-convert lineage. While the most common tactic to this end is to render these children invisible, when these children are represented, they are generally just presented as tools for the converts' process of enlightenment. The converts remain the only subject of the narrative.

For this later stage, I argue that most of the basic features of the monk-convert structure remain intact, even while the focus of the narratives shift in order to address new threats from within the household. In order to support this argument, I consider the emerging literature of Buddhist American parenting manuals and demonstrate that these texts are blind to the religious lives of children as they strictly assume the values and goals of the convert parents.

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[1] Of course, I use the term "conversion" broadly here, since many of characters avoid the term because they do not want to be bound to an institution—they want to maintain the illusion that they are completely free. However, the point still holds and, in fact, is only stronger because of their discomfort with the term.

While my analysis of Buddhist parenting manuals first establishes the shifts and continuities in the monk-convert paradigm during this latter period, a broader examination of these dynamics in popular culture helps to demonstrate the power this cultural structure has over the American mythos. To this end, I conclude this chapter by deconstructing the social, cultural, and religious dimensions of Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha*.[1] While this film does include American children, a close analysis of the plot illustrates that the narrative is actually about the conversion experience of the father and has little to do with the child (even though he is a reincarnation of a Tibetan Buddhist monk) beyond his utility as a plot device for the father's conversion. Through this process, the audience is meant to identify with the father as he becomes young and free again as a

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[1] *Little Buddha*, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci (Recorded Picture Company, 1993), DVD (Miramax Films, 2011).

Buddhist while the child fades into the background.

Chapters 4 and 5 contain the bulk of my constructive research on resistance and second-generation Buddhist Americans' lives. In Chapter 4, I analyze two spiritual autobiographies by second-generation Buddhist Americans in order to discover common themes despite obvious differences between the two authors and books. I begin with Ivan Richmond's portrait of his life growing up in an intentional Buddhist community in a rural area in *Silence and Noise*.[1] Richmond's sharp criticisms of his parents' generation and convert Buddhism alongside his affirmation of his own religious perspective provide an excellent entry point into positively presenting an alternative identity. Initially, Richmond's overt critique contrasts with the approach of the second author I consider. At first glance, while Noah Levine (famous for *Dharma Punx*) might be a second-generation Buddhist American, he presents himself under the guise of a convert and generally praises his father's religion.[2] A close reading of *Dharma Punx* and his other books reveals that Levine's rhetorical self-presentation as a convert, by subtly affirming Levine's relationship with his father, actually has the same result as Richmond's literary acts of resistance—a critique of the hegemony of the monk-convert paradigm in order to make the religious lives of second-generation Buddhist Americans more visible. Through an analysis of a variety of theorists on strategies of political resistance by marginalized groups within the so-called "personal" domain, I argue that both Levine and Richmond share the common tactic of creatively and subversively remaking the values, narratives, traditions and tropes of their oppressors ("the master's tools") into the tools of empowerment and liberation. In one move, they reshape their prison into a different building—a new house with old wood.

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[1] Ivan Richmond, *Silence and Noise: Growing Up Zen in America* (New York: Atria Books, 2003).

[2] Since writing this book, Levine was accused of sexual assault and misconduct. I briefly reflect on these allegations in the context of this book in a footnote in Chapter 4. Noah Levine, *Dharma Punx* (New York: HarperOne, 2003).

I argue that these narratives show the ways second-generation Buddhist Americans navigate the political-religious structures that marginalize their Buddhist identity that they experience within and through their families. Many of their tactics share the strategy of invoking their parents' authority in order to subvert it and open up a space for their own creative Buddhist narratives. Since the monk-convert lineage functions by marginalizing alternate chains of authority of the passage of Buddhism, by claiming that their parents (and not monks or conversion) are the source of their Buddhism, second-generation

Buddhist Americans subtly but effectively subvert the sole authority of their parents' conversion of Buddhism simply by invoking it.

Much has been made of the distinction between Buddhist sympathizers and "actual" Buddhist converts, and many of the scholarly typologies (including some of the earliest) presuppose that the differences between these two groups are the essential foundation for understanding the transformation of Buddhism in the United States.[1] Orthopraxy ("lax" Buddhists vs. "serious" Buddhists) is the primary guideline for this differentiation. Certainly, most Buddhist sympathizers cannot trace a personal lineage back to any monk figure. And yet, a close examination of the lives of Buddhist sympathizers reveals that they conform to the monk-convert lineage model as well; texts take the place of the physical monk. Buddhist sympathizers find the authority for their practice by consuming "Buddhist" books; they construct lineages in the comfort and safety of their own bedroom. Since the monk-convert model is ultimately a fantasy of control and power, texts are the ideal "Oriental monk" because texts cannot (as easily) speak back. As such, Buddhist sympathizers and "actual" Buddhist converts have more in common than either party might claim or wish.

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[1] As I argue in Chapter 2, Watts first explicitly articulated this scholarly typological distinction, and two decades later, Prebish solidified this notion in the scholarly mind. Watts; Charles S. Prebish, *American Buddhism* (North Scituate, MA: Duxbury Press, 1979), 51.

In Chapter 5, I test this thesis, and expand the scope of my work, by considering the children of Buddhist sympathizers (a group I playfully name "Nightlight Buddhists" after Tweed's own phrase for their parents).[1] While there are probably only 1-2 million Buddhist converts in the United States, Wuthnow and Cadge have estimated that there are likely 25-30 million Buddhist sympathizers.[2] The question is: do Nightlight Buddhists also invoke the authority of their parents in order to challenge their parents' monk-convert lineage? In order to answer this question, I will examine several narratives by Nightlight Buddhists: my own story and two essays in Sumi Loundon's edited volumes *Blue Jean Buddha* and *The Buddha's Apprentices*.[3] I argue that these Nightlight Buddhists are also bound by the limits established by their parents' Buddhist practice. They also identify those parents as the source of their meaningful exposure to Buddhism as a way to challenge those limits. While texts and monks are the ground for authority for Buddhist American convert parents as a whole, their children narrate a different lineage. By acknowledging their parents as the origin of their Buddhism, these children uncover a way of creating their own Buddhist space—their own Buddhist voice.

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[1] Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?" 17-33.

[2] Robert Wuthnow and Wendy Cadge, "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 3 (September 2004): 363-80.

[3] Sumi Loundon, ed., *Blue Jean Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001); Sumi Loundon, ed., *The Buddha's Apprentices* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006).

In my conclusion, I explore the (practical and theoretical) contributions of this book in more depth. I conclude with an articulation of the most paradoxical dimensions of this work. If what I have said is persuasive, "conversion" ends up actually reaffirming and reinscribing the status quo, while the invocation of an inheritance is the site of novelty. Tradition is the site of the new. Only by keeping "close" to their parents do second-generation Buddhist Americans create a different path, an alternate lineage. The parents—not the children—are revealed to be the fetters in the end. What we discover, however, is that not all chains imply an inescapable prison.

WHEN TWO MEANS ONE

RETRACING SCHOLARLY TRADITIONS ON BUDDHISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Explaining an Absence

In her influential 2007 survey essay "Buddhism and Children in North America," Rita M. Gross cites two academic secondary sources total in her overview of the topic.[1] Her article is one of many essays on children and different world religions in the United States contained within the definitive volume *Children and Childhood in American Religions*.[2] In comparison, on average the authors of the articles on the other religious traditions in the volume cite fourteen distinct scholarly sources in each of their texts. No other essay cites less than five scholarly sources.

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[1] It is also important to note that neither of the sources is explicitly about Buddhism and children in North America. She also cites nine non-academic sources, half of which are contained in the same volume, *Dharma Family Treasures*. Rita M. Gross, "Buddhism and Children in North America," in *Children and Childhood in American Religions*, ed. Don S. Browning and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 179; Sandy Eastoak, ed., *Dharma Family Treasures* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1994).

[2] Don S. Browning and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, ed., *Children and Childhood in American Religions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

In a vacuum, this contrast might just be anecdotal evidence that proves nothing. Placed in the broader context of the academic study of Buddhism in the United States, however, the lack of scholarly source citation in the article is suggestive of a troubling phenomenon within the field. The fact that Gross does not cite many academic articles in her essay is not a byproduct of personal negligence. Instead, Gross does not cite many academic articles in her essay because there are very few on the topic. Most surveys of Buddhism in the United States barely consider children and youth (if at all).[1] At the time Gross wrote her essay, very few articles (and no monographs) existed on the topic. Over a decade later, with a few important exceptions, the state of the field has not changed.

As Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Don S. Browning argue, the formal study of religion and childhood is only a couple of decades old, so the scholarly examination of childhood and every religious tradition is underdeveloped.[1] However, in comparison to the scholarly consideration of childhood and other religious traditions in the United States, the examination of childhood and Buddhism in the United States is particularly minimal. Despite an increasingly growing literature on childhood and religion, Buddhism continues to be a gap in the field. The seemingly special case of Buddhism has not followed the wider trends in the academic study of childhood and religion. With little signs of this reality changing, one should begin to suspect that structural assumptions embedded within the field of Buddhism in the United States has prevented major shifts in the approach to this topic. In the scholarly consideration of children, Buddhism is not like other religions. The question is: why?

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[1] Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 3rd. ed. (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1992); Charles S. Prebish, *Luminous Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

In order to answer this question, we must consider the history of scholarship on Buddhism in the United States so that we can uncover previously hidden assumptions that have been foundational for the field. While most scholars identify the publication of several survey texts in the 1970s as the origin of the field, they argue that the debate over the explicitly race-based two Buddhisms typology beginning in the early 1990s has been its defining moment.[1] The explicitly race-based two Buddhisms hypothesis claims that while Buddhists in the United States can be separated and analyzed in many different ways, the essential difference that defines Buddhist history in the United States is based on race. Proponents of this typology argue that there are really two distinct kinds of Buddhism in the United States: Buddhism practiced by "ethnic Asians" and Buddhism practiced by "non-Asian converts" (often, though not always, assumed to be white).[2] According to this perspective, these two communities have remained mostly separate from each other throughout their histories and represent two distinct trajectories.[3]

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[1] Don S. Browning and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, introduction to *Children and Childhood in American Religions*, ed. Don S. Browning and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 7-11.

In this chapter, I am less interested in considering whether this race-based two Buddhisms typology accurately describes the reality of Buddhism in the United States or not, as I am interested in analyzing the defining cultural role the debate over this typology has played within the scholarly community and the dominant assumptions about the nature of Buddhism in the United States that debate reveals. Truly, the debate for and against the typology is such a well-worn topic that it is not worth rehearsing here in length without a critical lens.[1] In fact, the debate over this typology has been represented so much as the defining moment (negative and positive) in the field, it has masked the longer, and more complicated history of troubling assumptions about Buddhism in the United States of which this particular typology is only a part. In fact, the history of the typology itself predates the 1990s by several decades and can be traced back at least to Alan Watts in the 1950s.

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[1] For example, consider Wakoh Shannon Hickey, "Two Buddhisms, Three Buddhisms, and Racism," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 11 (2010): 1-25.

[2] It is important to note that Paul David Numrich (and many other proponents of the typology) often problematically refer to Asian-American and Asian immigrant Buddhists as "ethnic," while referring to white Buddhists without any use of the term "ethnic." This practice makes whiteness the unnamed cultural norm, and ethnicity an otherizing term. Paul David Numrich, "Two Buddhisms Further Considered," *Contemporary Buddhism* 4, no. 1 (2003): 55-78.

[3] Charles S. Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsid-ered," *Buddhists Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (1993): 187-206.

A consideration of this broader history reveals that while the particular features and even the racialization of the two Buddhisms typology have shifted significantly over the past several decades, the grounding dominant assumptions about the nature of Buddhism in the United States have remained largely intact over the course of this period. The problems in the field of Buddhism in the United States run deeper than the recent expressions of the overtly race-based two Buddhisms typology. As one example, there can be no doubt that a typology that assumes that there are only two primary groups of Buddhists in the United States (Asian-American and non-Asian converts) makes all Buddhists that do not fall into these two categories completely invisible.[1] Since non-Asian children of converts do not fit into either category, the typology wrongfully assumes that they cannot exist in any meaningful sense. However, this problem of representation of second-generation Buddhist Americans cannot be confined to just this typology; even critics of the typology have failed to consider the experiences of second-generation Buddhist Americans.[2] While the typology does presuppose problematic assumptions about Buddhism in the United States, these racist and ageist assumptions are older and more entrenched than the typology itself, and so critiquing the typology alone does nothing to challenge the overall dominance of those assumptions. A critical examination of the two Buddhisms typology can reveal these assumptions, but any scholar interested in overcoming them must dig deeper and consider a lengthier history.

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[1] In her article "Two Buddhisms, Three Buddhisms, and Racism," Wakoh Shannon Hickey provides a good summary of this debate. Hickey, 1-25.

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[1] Race-based two Buddhisms typologies fail to consider groups that seemingly fall between the boundaries between the two Buddhisms (like Asian-American converts or second-generation white Buddhists), and also groups that fall outside the two categories all together, such as Latino and African-American Buddhists. As bell hooks and Jan Willis have separately argued, the white privilege behind these typologies has made these latter groups completely invisible, despite the fact that they are an important (and growing) part of American Buddhism. bell hooks, "Waking Up to Racism," *Tricycle* 4, no. 1 (1994): 42-45; Jan Willis, "Yes, We're Buddhists Too!" *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 32 (2012): 39-43.

[2] For example, consider Hickey, 1-25.

I argue that the dominant history of scholarship on Buddhism in the United States since at least the 1950s has presupposed a binary logic even while concealing it. On one hand, this binary demonizes tradition as intellectually stifling and racially and culturally other; on the other hand, it valorizes freedom and novelty of white converts as the essential nature and destiny of American Buddhism. This binary places the responsibility and power to radically "modernize" and reinvent Buddhism for American contexts solely in the hands of white American converts. In the act of rewriting history, it also erases the relationships of dependency these converts have had with Asian-American Buddhists and their communities in the construction of their religious identities. Converts seemingly remake themselves as individual products of their own making. In this case, two Buddhisms is really just about one Buddhism—the religion of converts. Far from just being complicit in this project, many scholars have played an active role in shaping this narrative by perpetuating the binary. Retracing the genealogy of this binary allows us to better understand the complicated and interconnected history of all Buddhist groups in the United States. If the majority of scholarship has rewritten converts as the heroes of American Buddhism, the full roots of this history must be identified and removed before alternate lineages in the history of Buddhism in the United States will become visible to the scholarly eye.

Hidden Traditions

Alan Watts as the Father of the Two Buddhisms Typology

While Emma Layman's 1976 survey text *Buddhism in America* is typically understood as the founding text for the scholarly study of Buddhism in the United States, many of the concepts and themes that continue to dominate the field can be traced to even earlier sources.[1] Narrow definitions of Buddhism, American history, and scholarship have concealed the full age of the scholarly study of Buddhism in the United States. This scholarly lineage did not emerge out of nothing in the 1970s.

As one important knot in this longer history, in 1958, Alan Watts published "Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen," an essay on the topic of the rapidly increasing numbers of converts to Zen in the 1950s.[1] In this article, Watts creates a threefold typology of American Zen; the three forms of Zen in the United States are radical charisma-driven "Beat" Zen, traditionalist "Square" Zen, and "true" Zen.[2] On one hand, Watts argues that Beat Zen (represented by celebrities like Jack Kerouac) is creative and spontaneous, but ultimately has no grounding or roots.[3] This group is constantly at risk of dying out because it is too individualistic and allergic to Buddhist traditions. On the other hand, Watts suggests that Square Zen is more connected to the traditions and lineages of authentic Eastern Zen, but is also too focused on the "authority" and "hierarchy" of "established tradition in Japan."[4] Since Square Zen is concerned with the justification of "spiritual experiences" through tradition, it is unable to create anything "genuine and unique."[5] Watts suggests that true Zen walks the middle path between these two "extremes" in the search for enlightenment through individual experience.[6]

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[1] Emma Layman, *Buddhism in America* (Chicago: Nelson Hall Publishers, 1976).

While nominally a threefold typology of Zen,

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[1] Alan Watts, "Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen," *Chicago Review* 12, no. 2 (1958): 3-11.

[2] Watts, 3.

[3] Watts, 7-8.

[4] Watts, 8-9.

[5] Watts, 9.

[6] Watts, 9.

Watts' conception of Zen in the United States can be mapped on a single linear scale between two points. One edge of the scale is charismatic and creative Beat Zen. The other edge of the scale is traditional and hierarchical Square Zen. The point in between these limit points is true Zen. For the most part, Watts does not describe the defining features of true Zen in his essay. He does not need to; true Zen is the byproduct of the binary of Beat-Square Zen. True Zen entails the strengths of each side without the exaggerations. The Beat-Square Zen binary simultaneously defines the normative ideals of American Zen—creative and innovative, yet connected to the authority of the East—and the dangers of what American Zen can become—stale and lifeless, or completely separated from the authority of the East. Both extreme paths cannot be *sustainably* creative because one is trapped in traditions and the other has no truly new traditions to pass on. More aptly, Watts concludes that the two extremes actually share the same problem because both Beat and Square Zen practitioners—in their careless and uneducated rejection of the "Christian" culture of the "West"—are also bound to traditions—the traditions of the West.[1] They are ultimately so reactive to their cultural situation that they cannot be real agents in the history of Zen. According to Watts, the ideal Zen practitioner is completely free and unbound; he shapes history, but he is not shaped by it.[1]

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[1] Watts, 10.

Obviously, Watts' essay has significant limits to understanding the actual lived reality of Buddhism in the United States in the 1950s, as Watts confines his analysis explicitly to Zen, and more troublingly, implicitly to white converts. However, in his typology, Watts names normative ideals that would eventually become grounding assumptions for much of the scholarly study on Buddhism in the United States.

From Watts to Layman and beyond, scholars have focused their efforts on developing accurate typological models of Buddhism in the United States.[2] Twofold, threefold, and fourfold typologies of Buddhism in the United States abound and divide Buddhists by race, practice, tradition, organizational structure, belief, and religious origin. This mode of understanding Buddhism in the United States has become so dominant that Charles Prebish—one of the founding scholars of the field—recently suggested that old typological models can only be replaced by new ones.[3] The strange implication of this suggestion is that it is impossible to think about Buddhism in the United States outside typologies.

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[1] Watts, 10-11.

[2] Hickey, 1-25.

[3] Charles Prebish, Sarah Haynes, Justin Whitaker, and Danny Fisher, "Two Buddhisms Today," interview by Ted

The origin of scholarly typologies on Buddhism in the United States is typically traced back to Layman and Prebish. While Layman developed her threefold typology first ("evangelical," "church," and "meditational"), Prebish's twofold typology has been more influential largely because of controversies surrounding it that rippled through the field beginning in the early 1990s.[1] In his 1979 text *American Buddhism*, in order to address the question of who counts as Buddhist, Prebish argues that there are two dominant forms of Buddhism in the United States:

> One form of Buddhism places primary emphasis on sound, basic doctrines, shared by all Buddhists, and on solid religious practice (which may reflect sectarian doctrinal peculiarities). These groups are slow to develop, conservative in nature, and remarkably *stable* in growth, activity, and teaching. The other line of development includes groups that seem to emerge shortly after radical social movements (such as the Beat Generation or the Drug Culture). They tend to garner the "fallout" of social upheaval. Stressing less

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Meissner, *Secular Buddhist Association*, podcast audio, September 22, 2012, http://secularbuddhism.org/2012 /09/22/episode-135-charles-prebish-sarah-haynes-justin-whitaker-danny-fisher-two-buddhisms-today.

[1] Layman, 251-63.

> the basic doctrine and painstaking practice, they usually base their attraction on the promise of something new, frequently centered on the personal charisma of a flamboyant leader. In other words, they replace the old social order, now in decay or disfavor, with a new one, replete with the same sort of trappings but transmuted into what is thought to be a more profoundly "relevant" religious foundation. By nature flashy, opaquely exotic, and "hip," these movements gain much attention in the press but are inherently unstable…. They are regarded as clearly undesirable…. We must, then, learn to discriminate between the various forms and their validity.[1]

For Prebish, there are two kinds of Buddhism in the United States: a traditionalist and "stable" form of Buddhism and a radical, unstable charisma-driven form of Buddhism that openly seeks to break with the Buddhist traditions of the past.[2]

Structural, conceptual, and rhetorical parallels testify Prebish's (unacknowledged) dependence on Watts in the construction of his twofold typology.[3]

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[1] Charles S. Prebish, *American Buddhism* (North Scituate, MA: Duxbury Press, 1979), 51.

[2] Prebish, *American Buddhism*, 51.

[3] It is important to note that Thomas A. Tweed's later influential distinction between self-identifying Buddhists and "Buddhist sympathizers" also echoes in some ways Watts' earlier typological distinction between tradition-following and tradition-

Prebish widens the scope of the typology from Zen to Buddhism in general, but the characteristics of the binary remain intact. Much of the language is identical. Both typologies identify two groups based on their apparent relationships with tradition and innovation. While purportedly an objective historian, Prebish even repeats Watts' normative evaluation of the two groups, and like Watts, reserves his harshest words for the tradition-breaking "Beat" form of Buddhism. Since Prebish suggests at other points in the text that Buddhism must adapt to survive in the new cultural climate of the United States, beneath his more reserved evaluation of the tradition-following form of Buddhism is a troubling assumption that it is ultimately not progressive enough to become true American Buddhism.[1] With this stark interpretation, the reader is left to speculate about the ideal future of Buddhism in the United States. Given Prebish's critiques, this much is clear: the ideal form of Buddhism is both stable and innovative—connected

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breaking Buddhisms. Unfortunately, much of the academic field of Buddhism in the United States is dependent on this Wattsian heritage, and this is precisely why it has proven so difficult to reflect on Buddhism in the United States outside this dominant frame of mind. I discuss Tweed's notion of "Buddhist sympathizers" in more depth in Chapter 5. Thomas A. Tweed, "Who Is a Buddhist? Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures," in *Westward Dharma*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 17-33.

[1] Prebish, *American Buddhism*, 44-50, 192-93.

to the authority of Buddhist traditions without being bound by them.

It is important to note that Prebish does not mention ethnicity or race in this discussion at all. Like in Watts' article, the evidence suggests that Prebish intended for this typology to apply solely to white Buddhist American converts.[1] In the text, Prebish does not mention race or ethnicity because he functions within a framework that assumes whiteness as a normative synonym for "American" identity. His discussion of the typology falls within a larger section on the discussion of trends in countercultural convert Buddhism in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, given his dependence on Watts' language and conceptual framework—a framework designed to describe white convert Zen—with little modification of that framework, it is fair to assume that at the time, Prebish intended for his typology to describe two kinds of predominantly white convert Buddhisms. Much like Prebish's tendency to use the term "ethnic" to refer solely to non-white identities, Prebish likely uses universal language about two "American" Buddhisms in this section because he assumes only white converts define American normative identity.[1] Race need not be mentioned when talking about white Americans. Two "American" Buddhisms means two white convert American Buddhisms.

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[1] Since Prebish does not mention race or ethnicity in this section, ultimately, it is unclear whether Prebish originally intended his two Buddhisms model to refer to two predominately white groups (akin to the Beats and Squares), as I suggest here, or if he originally meant for the model to refer to one predominately white group and one predominately Asian-American group but did not mention race or ethnicity for some unknown reason. I believe the textual and contextual clues suggest the former, but I am open to the possibility of the latter. However, it is important to note that even if the latter were true, my overall argument remains intact as the timeline I outline here is merely pushed to an earlier point. In such a case, later forms of the two Buddhisms typology are still problematically dependent upon a Wattsian model that was originally constructed to describe white Buddhists alone; the transformation simply occurred in 1979 rather than in the early 1990s.

Many Asian-American scholars and practitioners, as well as their allies, have criticized this conflation of American Buddhism with white convert Buddhism since the 1950s.[2] Despite these protests, for the next several decades, this assumption continued to frame the dominant popular and scholarly understandings of Buddhism in the United States. However, by the 1990s, this structural assumption about race and Buddhism in the United States had begun to fray at the edges from the many waves of critiques.

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[1] Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," 187-89.

[2] Michael K. Masatsugu, "Beyond this World of Transiency and Impermanence," *Pacific Historical Review* 77, no. 3 (2008): 423-51.

Reinventing Traditions

Racialization and the Two Buddhisms Typology

In her 1991 *Tricycle* article "Many is More," Helen Tworkov infamously claims that only white convert Americans (and not Asian-American or Asian immigrants) had contributed to the development of American Buddhism.

> The spokespeople for Buddhism in America have been, almost exclusively, educated members of the white middle class. Meanwhile, even with varying statistics, Asian-American Buddhists number at least one million, but so far they have not figured prominently in the development of something called American Buddhism.[1]

Tworkov articulates a disturbing mindset among many white convert Buddhists that can be traced back to Watts and earlier—white converts alone are at the center of the history of Buddhism in the United States. At the time, the response to Tworkov's article was tremendous, as scholars and practitioners critiqued the racism of this view. Ryo Imamura, a third-generation Japanese American Buddhist priest, wrote a letter in 1992 in response to the article that was never published in *Tricycle*.[2]

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[1] Helen Tworkov, "Many Is More," *Tricycle* 1, no. 2 (1991): 4.

[2] Prebish, "*Two Buddhisms Reconsidered*," 190-91.

Among many other things, Imamura objects to Tworkov's assumption that only white converts could be true American Buddhists. American does not mean white. He also points out that not only had Tworkov ignored the long history of Buddhist Japanese-Americans and immigrants, but had also effectively erased the ways these groups had shaped, assisted, and influenced the cultivation of Buddhism among white converts in the United States.[1] Tworkov's logic, according to Imamura, presupposes that something only effectively becomes "American" when whites practice it.[2] All others are removed from history—or from the eyes of white privilege, all others have no history.

Many have interpreted the response to Tworkov's article as an important turning point in the history of scholarship on Buddhism in the United States as more scholars became aware of the importance of race in this history. Indeed, a new wave of scholarship on Asian-American and Asian immigrant Buddhisms emerged over the next decade.[3] More scholars also began to explicitly discuss race as a topic pertaining to Buddhism in the United States.

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[1] Prebish, "*Two Buddhisms Reconsidered,*" 190-91.

[2] Prebish, "*Two Buddhisms Reconsidered,*" 190-91.

[3] *Revealing the Sacred in Asian and Pacific America,* edited by Jane Iwamura and Paul Spickard, is an excellent example of this shift in the field. At the time of its publication, it also helped to correct a general absence of the consideration of religion in the field of Asian-American studies. Jane Naomi Iwamura and Paul

One of the important developments during this period was the construction of a seemingly novel typology based on race. Old models of Buddhism in the United States that only discussed and differentiated between white Buddhist American converts would no longer suffice. For this new viewpoint, most white Buddhist American converts have more in common with each other than with Asian-American Buddhists. A new twofold typology was born that differentiated between white Buddhist American converts and Asian-American Buddhists.

The exact history of this race-based twofold typology is murky and there is a significant amount of scholarly confusion over the history of the idea. Several scholars credit Prebish as the creator of the typology.[1] Others argue Prebish did not originate the typology.[2] Prebish himself has vacillated over his ownership of the idea.[3] In some places, Prebish has argued that he articulated an early form of an overtly

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Spickard, eds., *Revealing the Sacred in Asian and Pacific America* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[1] Jan Nattier, "Who Is a Buddhist?" in *The Faces of Buddhism*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 183-95.

[2] Hickey, 6-8.

[3] Prebish, *Luminous Passage*, 57-63.

race-based twofold typology in his 1979 text.[1] At other points, Prebish has argued that the typology has several problems and the journalist Rick Fields—not Prebish—was ultimately responsible for creating it.[2]

A close reading of Prebish's accounts of the race-based two Buddhisms typology in chronological order helps to paint a clearer picture of the history of this idea. As I previously indicated, while Prebish presents a twofold typology of Buddhism in the United States in his 1979 book *American Buddhism*, this typology does not mention race at all, and is conceptually dependent upon Watts' earlier typology of American Zen. Like Watts' typology, Prebish's typology in *American Buddhism* is best understood as describing and differentiating the religious lives of Buddhist American converts (assumed to be mostly white). Asian-American Buddhists are not part of either side of the twofold typology. The typology presupposes a wider racist structural logic that codes American to mean white, and as such, predetermines that the experiences of people of color are pushed to the near-invisible margins of American history. In terms of race, Prebish's earliest typology describes one Buddhism—white convert Buddhism.

By the end of the second millennium, the context had shifted significantly. The politics of multiculturalism had reshaped significant sectors of the scholarly realm. Growing numbers of Asian-American scholars, religious leaders and their allies challenged racist one-sided histories and presented new histories and conceptions of Buddhism in the United States from marginalized eyes.[1] As I will argue in later chapters, younger generations of Buddhists began to challenge the entrenched authority of aging baby-boomer converts. These critiques from multiple directions reverberated throughout the closely linked popular and scholarly spheres; Prebish and many other scholars from the first wave of scholarship on Buddhism in the United States were also white converts or had significant ties to white convert communities.[2] They had written from that perspective, and the dominance of that perspective began to crack. In response to new challenges, old traditional scholarly narratives had to be revised.

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[1] Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," 187-88.

[2] Prebish, *Luminous Passage*, 57-63.

In 1993, Prebish published his article "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered" and described an explicitly race-based twofold typology of Buddhism in the United States for the first time in print.[3] Prebish credits a phone conversation with Fields in 1992 about race and Buddhism as the spark for resurrecting the two Buddhisms typology.[1] At the time of the conversation, Fields had published a popular history of Buddhism in the United States titled *How the Swans Came to the Lake* that went through three editions (1981, 1986, 1992).[2] With a few exceptions, Fields' history focuses primarily on converts in the United States—particularly toward the end of the text as Fields discusses the history of Buddhism in the United States from the 1950s to his own contemporary time.[3] Comparing the multiple editions of the text reveals that Fields altered the text to address this issue, as the later editions had additional sections on Asian-American and Asian immigrant Buddhist experiences (albeit leaving the overall problematic structure intact). Race was a topic on Fields' mind.

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[1] As one important but brief example of this shift in perspective, consider: Victor Sogen Hori, "Sweet-and-Sour Buddhism," *Tricycle* 4, no. 1 (1994): 48-52.

[2] Prebish, *Luminous Passage*, 173-202.

[3] Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," 187-89.

According to Prebish, in the phone conversation, and in light of the controversy surrounding Tworkov's article, Fields suggested that Prebish's twofold typology from *American Buddhism* accurately described a split between white Buddhist American converts and "ethnic Asian-American" Buddhists.[4] Prebish agreed and decided to write "Two

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[1] Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," 189.

[2] Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, xiii-xvii.

[3] Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 195-380.

[4] Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," 187-89.

Buddhisms Reconsidered." The article begins with the following words:

> It has been nearly fifteen years since my book *American Buddhism* was published. By design it represented an initial effort to assess and understand Buddhism's progress in acculturating to an American environment. I concluded the first portion of the volume with a summary section called 'A Tradition of Misunderstanding: Two Buddhisms in America'. In my use of the term 'Two Buddhisms', I was not trying to imply that there were only two kinds of Buddhism in America, however conceived, but rather that there had been **two completely distinct lines of development** in American Buddhism. The first form of Buddhism, I argued, represented the Buddhism practised by essentially Asian American communities. Collectively, they emphasized basic Buddhist doctrines and practices (many of which reflected sectarian peculiarities), were markedly conservative and presented a primarily stable climate for their members. The second line of development included those groups that emerged shortly after the social and religious revolution of the 1960s. At the time, I described these latter groups as 'flashy, opaquely exotic, and "hip"'. In many cases, they depended on the personal charisma of a flamboyant Asian Buddhist master for their impetus, often eschewing basic Buddhist doctrine and solid Buddhist

> practice in favour of something more uproarious. Invariably, it was these latter groups that caught the public eye, often arousing serious suspicion about the nature of the obviously progressing Buddhist movement in America.[1]

In this passage, Prebish accurately summarizes his early discussion of two Buddhisms often down to the exact word with one important exception—an explicitly racialized dichotomy has been imposed on the typology. While the typology formerly described two groups of white Buddhist converts—tradition-following and tradition-breaking converts—in his 1993 essay, Prebish repeats the binary between tradition and innovation but racializes it in a new way. Under this newly redefined typology, Asian-American Buddhists are tradition-following and resistant to change; white converts are not bound to tradition and pursue innovation.

In "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," Prebish implies that he has not redefined his typology under new racialized terms; he weaves overtly racial terms into the fabric of the other characteristics of each side of the twofold typology so that it appears as though they had always been there. Prebish redefines the typology for a new situation and new demands, but erases this process of redefinition in order to rewrite the history of scholarship.

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[1] Emphasis his. Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," 187-88.

While it might appear as though Prebish reserves his harshest words for the newly defined category of white Buddhist American converts, his criticism is less important than the effects of his transposition of categories. Converts might invite "suspicion" and be easily duped by "charisma," but because they are willing to break and redefine Buddhist traditions, they are also at the forefront of the "progressing Buddhist movement in America."[1] Recall that Watts was also critical of the charismatic Beats—his criticism of extremes supported his normative ideal of true Zen. Likewise, by suggesting that converts are prone to rash extremes and Asian-American Buddhists are too limited by their traditions, Prebish concludes his article by hoping that the two Buddhisms will "coalesce" and become a singular ecumenical Buddhism.[2] They must leave behind old conflicts and traditions; they must adapt. They must change and innovate. They must become one "American Buddhism."[3]

The irony in this statement is palpable, as all of the two Buddhisms typologies—regardless of their content—have been more about the idealization of one form of Buddhism over every other all along. The common thread through all of these typologies is that American Buddhism should find a way to invoke the authority of the traditions of the East while not being bound to them; American Buddhism should be linked to the Orientalized spiritual power of Asia but ultimately also be free to do with that power what it wishes.[1] For this perspective, American Buddhists must overcome their racial divide and become one group. And yet, the whitewashing of race, universalization of categories under an implied whiteness, and erasure of differences caused the problems in the original typologies in the first place.[2]

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[1] Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," 187-88.

[2] Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," 206.

[3] Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," 206.

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[1] Note that Prebish also rewrites the "flamboyant" leaders of the Buddhist American convert groups as "Asian" in his 1993 text, tapping explicitly into the power of the Orientalist monk-convert paradigm that I will examine in more depth in Chapter 3. Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," 187.

[2] One of the added problems in the new two Buddhisms typology is that Prebish and other proponents of the typology also make false comparisons between Asian-American Buddhists and white converts, effectively leveling the differences in power between the two groups. For instance, Prebish suggests that Asian-American Buddhists' critiques of white converts as "intellectually arrogant" are just as misguided as claims by white converts that Asian-American Buddhists are "fundamentalist" and "dogmatic." Both positions, Prebish claims, embody "racism." Such an argument is a gross misreading of history and the sharp power differences between the two groups; while Asian-American Buddhists might hold prejudices against white convert Buddhists, it is not possible for them to be racist against them, because racism is a structural phenomenon predicated on power differences. Even on the rhetorical level, calling someone

The supposed solution is simply a repetition of the original problem.

Over the next fifteen years, the explicitly race-based two Buddhisms typology met more and more criticism. Kenneth K. Tanaka argues that the typology erases connections between the two communities and the dependent relationships converts have with Asian-American Buddhist communities.[1] Tanaka also notes that the model erases all of the differences among Asian-American Buddhists; Chinese-American and Japanese-American Buddhist families that have been here over a century are placed in the same group as Asian-American Buddhists who immigrated to the United States more recently.[2] Wakoh Shannon Hickey argues that the typology is built upon white privilege and favors the experiences of white converts over all others.[3] She also echoes Imamura's point that the typology normalizes whiteness and represents Asian-American Buddhists

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"arrogant" (a term that might be accurate for white Buddhist American converts that have seized more cultural power than they deserve) is hardly equal to branding someone a "fundamentalist." Prebish is unfortunately not alone among scholars in the field in making such judgmental false comparisons. Prebish, "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," 189.

[1] Kenneth K. Tanaka, "Epilogue," in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 287-89.

[2] Tanaka, 287-89.

[3] Hickey, 9-11.

as "ethnic" others.[1]

In 1994, Japanese-Canadian scholar Victor Hori responded to Tworkov's article, the new two Buddhisms typology, and the wider debates about race in his essay "Sweet and Sour Buddhism."[2] Utilizing data from responses to a Buddhist retreat by white and Asian-American participants, in this article, Hori argues that while race is a critically important category in the history of Buddhism in the United States, the two Buddhisms typology misrepresents both groups.[3] Hori notes that while Asian-American Buddhists often identify their practices and worldviews within a wider context of social relationships and communities, white convert practitioners articulate a very individualistic (even ego-centric) mindset—their practices are about them alone, their liberation, their cultivation of proper selfhood, their enlightenment and awareness.[4] White convert practitioners downplay the importance of social relationships and community for their practice.[5] These practitioners present themselves as self-sufficient islands. Hori argues that this self-representation is an illusion—and a troubling one at that with disturbing power implications—and scholars have taken white converts too often at their word as they have fashioned themselves Robinson Crusoes.[1]

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[1] Hickey, 9-11.
[2] Hori, 48-52.
[3] Hori, 50, 52.
[4] Hori, 48.
[5] Hori, 48.

In other words, Hori suggests that while there might be some value in the (new) two Buddhisms typology because it recognizes the importance of race, the common characteristics that typology uses to describe the two groups are not only stereotypical, but also completely inaccurate. Placed within the wider history of the typology, however, this fact is not surprising, because the original categorization within the typology was not intended to describe Asian-American Buddhists at all. As such, not only is it a top-down model with little sensitivity to the everyday religious lives of Asian-American Buddhists, but it redefines the scholarly representations of Asian-American Buddhists to conform to a new model that will reaffirm the power and privilege of white Buddhist American converts. After all, given its history, the only group that the two Buddhisms typology was originally designed to describe was white Buddhist American converts, and this "description" itself was a normative idealization of what these converts desired to be. All other Buddhists do not fit in this model, and the wooden imposition of novel racialized categories onto an old typology does nothing to solve that problem.

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[1] Hori, 48-52.

As the new typology became more and more controversial, Prebish distanced himself more and more from it. In his 1999 monograph *Luminous Passage*, Prebish admits that he had "redefined" the tradition-following group to be "Asian-American communities."[1] On a 2012 podcast for the website Secular Buddhist Association, while he continued to defend the usefulness of the typology, he also disowned it completely and suggested that he was not responsible for creating it in the first place.[2] Prebish's shifting position and ambivalence toward the theory has created a significant amount of confusion among the field as to Prebish's position on the typology. Reading backwards, many scholars continue to read Prebish's explicitly race-based categorization into his earlier discussions of two Buddhisms. However, the core of the typology remains a binary between tradition and innovation that was originally racialized in an entirely different fashion.

My point in reviewing this scholarly history is not to suggest that Prebish or other proponents of the revised two Buddhisms typology are racist or personally prejudiced against Asian-American

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[1] Prebish, *Luminous Passage*, 58.

[2] Charles Prebish et al, "Two Buddhisms Today."

Buddhists. Prebish, Fields, and other proponents of the typology have all actively tried to combat racism in Buddhist communities within the United States.[1] For example, Paul David Numrich (one of the most passionate remaining proponents of an overtly race-based two Buddhisms typology) argues that if scholars scrap race-based two Buddhisms typologies all together, then they will fail to realize the importance of race in shaping the lived religious lives of both the privileged and the marginalized.[2] In other words, Numrich argues that the typology has value because it takes race and power differences seriously. His method and assumptions are problematic, but my point is not to question his motives. In fact, if this was a case of personal prejudice, it would be far less troubling. The problematic assumptions at the foundation of much of scholarship on Buddhism in the United States are not individual—they are structural. Writing from their positionality (as they must), these scholars unknowingly repeat a racist structure designed to favor white convert Buddhists over all others regardless of their anti-racist intent. This problem of representation is broader than any one scholar or typology. Challenging one scholar or even critiquing one typology will not suffice to deconstruct these grounding racist assumptions. The notions themselves must be exposed in entirety and critiqued wholesale.

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[1] Prebish, *Luminous Passage*, 57, 62-63; Rick Fields, "Divided Dharma," in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 196-206.

[2] Numrich, 65-66.

In his recent revision of the two Buddhisms typology, Numrich argues that "ethnic-Asian" Buddhism can be essentially understood as a continuous tradition-following movement, while "white convert" Buddhism can be essentially understood as a movement in flux, breaking (or at least radically adapting) traditions of the past in order to recreate a Buddhism appropriate for their (essentialized) cultural milieu.[1] To the extent that "ethnic-Asian" Buddhism has changed and continues to change, this process can be primarily (or perhaps even solely) explained as a singular mode of Americanization—an understanding that not only denies the agency of these individuals and groups, but also fails to recognize that the process or ideal of "Americanization" has never been monolithic at any point.[2]

In addition to simplistic models of "Americanization," an examination of the scholarly genealogy of the two Buddhisms typology has revealed one further grounding assumption for much of the field—the binary between tradition and innovation. If one examines recent scholarly typologies in vogue today that are presented as less racist alternatives to the explicitly race-based two Buddhisms typology (“modern” vs. “traditionalist,” “established” vs. “emergent,”) one uncovers a common theme—scholars have separated Buddhism into two groups depending on how they relate to “past” tradition and “future” possibilities.[1] In this way, typologies designed to critique the explicitly race-based two Buddhisms typology actually presuppose the core problem in the latter typology they are supposed to supplant.

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[1] Numrich, 65-69.

[2] Numrich, 56-57, 65-69.

The racialized “tradition-following/tradition-breaking” binary minimizes the diversity of both sides of the typology. Effectively, this is true of any typology that purports to be not only analytically useful in ascertaining hidden (to the scholar) facets of Buddhism in the United States, but also in the most important ways, descriptively true of the full breadth of Buddhism in the United States. One of the mistakes of many scholars involved in these debates over typologies is that they fail to take Max Weber’s famous discussions of typologies to heart: typologies will always conceal as much as they reveal, and should never be understood as revealing the complete truth about phenomena.[1] In fact, to the extent that typologies further bury important dimensions of a topic of study beyond easy access, they fail. Of course, race and ethnicity are critical factors in the lived realities of Buddhism in the United States (for all groups, although in obviously different ways). Scholarly rhetoric that constructs two groups based on their represented relationship to tradition is also an important factor that shapes these realities. Given the reality of colonialism, on both global and local scales, the categories of race and tradition have long been entangled, even far prior to Watts' 1958 essay. However, by failing to trace the full dimensions of the rhetoric and representations surrounding these terms, two Buddhisms typologies only tangle the knots even further. As such, they fail to recognize how representations of race, religion and tradition have become so complicatedly interrelated. Since scholars helped create this troubling reality, we have a responsibility to help untangle these knots, or perhaps more realistically, at least trace the paths of each strand, in order to loosen them a small amount.

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[1] Hickey, 16; Martin Baumann, “Protective Amulets and Awareness Techniques, or How to Make Sense of Buddhism in the West,” in *Westward Dharma*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 51-65.

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[1] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 32-45.

Rhetoric about converts′ self-sufficiency (obscuring important connections and dependencies on other groups) is only one side of a coin. In a way, Watts was right when he articulated that the Western convert mindset fluctuated between the two poles of affirming tradition and breaking tradition. As scholars and converts alike emphasize the novelty and inventiveness of converts′ practice, converts are presented as the vanguard of the present and future of the development of American Buddhism. And yet, in order to gain their authenticity, converts also draw upon Orientalist representations of the East in order to strengthen their authority, tying themselves to a seemingly "mystic past," "ancient Asian monks," and the context and time-defying wisdom of the "historical Buddha."

As I will discuss in more depth in Chapter 3, both Jane Iwamura and Joseph Cheah have uncovered this other feature of the Western representation of Buddhism.[1] Through an analysis of a variety of popular media, Iwamura argues that Americans (and other colonialists) have been part of constructing a monk-convert paradigm in which the Western convert imbues representations of the Eastern ancient sage or wise monk with power and authority, only so that they can tie their lineages to those representational figures in order to reinforce their own power.[1] Within this narrative, according to Iwamura, white converts place themselves at the center of the history of the invention of modern Buddhism, as they become the heroes in the adaptation and reconstruction of the wisdom of the ancient East to a modern American reality.[2] All other subjects (Asian Buddhists, non-white converts, white "cradle" Buddhists) are invisible in this narrative. Cheah highlights this dimension by showing how white converts have not only adapted Buddhism to their cultural situations (as has been done before by different peoples throughout the history of Buddhism), but have invoked and used race as a way of privileging their adaptations over all other contemporaneous and past forms of Buddhism.[3]

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[1] Joseph Cheah, *Race and Religion in American Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

In a way, one might understand this dynamic as a dialectic, as white converts invoke this rhetoric to draw upon the authority of an invented past, only to erase the meaning of all past tradition in the name of the invention of a new kind of Buddhism. The irony is that while (at first glance) it appears to be dialectical, it is not. Despite the rhetoric to the contrary, this process does not lead to the invention of anything new. The deployment of the tradition/innovation binary by scholars and converts only reinforces the status quo in which white converts are placed at the center of the history of modern American Buddhism—all other groups' claims are delegitimized. While converts do invoke a kind of Buddhist "tradition" in this process, they do so only to rhetorically move beyond it in the affirmation of their own individualism. Simultaneously, they can reject other forms of Buddhism as helplessly bound to tradition.

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[1] Iwamura, 20.

[2] Iwamura, 20.

[3] Cheah, 3-35.

One of the weaknesses of most typologies is that while they can give us glimpses or snapshots of dynamics between and within Buddhist groups in the United States, they rarely examine historical changes within and outside these groups. Further, at least in the case of white convert Buddhists, they often simply assume the rhetoric of these groups reflects the reality of lived experience. A close examination of those experiences, however, reveals that such a statement could not be further from the truth. The rhetoric among white convert Buddhists is completely individualistic—of this there can be no doubt. As I have discussed above, this rhetoric is connected to power-laden strategies designed to reinforce converts' privileged status within wider hegemonic colonial structures. However, if scholars wish to challenge this problematic dominance, they must interrogate the gap between the rhetoric and the reality, just as postcolonial scholars have exposed the fact that while the “West” purports to be self-sufficient, it is actually dependent on a wider network of global exploitation.[1] Humans are social animals (as Aristotle once said), and it would be an astounding mystery if white converts had somehow found a successful trick (beyond the rhetorical level) in breaking from that reality.

The explicitly race-based two Buddhisms typology has mostly been supplanted by a new twofold typology that differentiates between modernist Buddhisms and traditionalist Buddhisms. Martin Baumann and David McMahan have both articulated this position as an attempt to recognize that many Asian and Asian-American Buddhists have been radical modernists.[2] In other words, the modernist/traditionalist divide does not neatly map onto any racialized dichotomy. Baumann and McMahan argue separately that the primary driving force in reshaping Buddhism over the past century (in the United States and elsewhere) is modernization and traditionalist responses to it. Baumann’s model relies on a problematic linear model of history, in which traditionalists (still mostly ethnic-Asian communities) live or at least attempt to live somewhere in the "past," while modernists (still mostly white converts) move through the present toward the future by radically adapting (even breaking from) traditions in order to rationalize and modernize them.[1] McMahan has a more nuanced account of this model by recognizing that there are multiple modernities and therefore multiple Buddhist modernities.[2] While there is some truth to these analyses on the rhetorical level, a close examination of the lived experiences of so-called traditionalists and modernists reveals that both groups are hardly essentialized or firmly-bounded groups. In fact, traditionalists adapt and change in the present and toward the future, just as modernists evoke and draw upon the authority of the past through their own selective lineages. Furthermore, both scholars fail to recognize the troubling scholarly history on representations of modernity, tradition, and innovation and their links to racist colonial politics. The clear ideological and normative connections between these scholars' models and Prebish's original twofold typology should make us pause; only a few pages before Prebish outlines his typology in *American Buddhism*, he contrasts Asian reluctance to modernize Buddhism with white American attempts "for the first time [to] creatively deal… with… the modern world."[1] It remains unclear whether discussions of modernization, tradition-bound communities, and innovative individuals can be separated from a history of normative judgments, idealizations, and connotations.

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[1] Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 1-11.

[2] Baumann, 51-65; David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1-21.

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[1] Baumann, 54-59.

[2] McMahan, 16-21.

One of the keys to overcoming these typologies and the problematic binaries they presuppose is found within the pages of one of the staunchest proponents of the two Buddhisms typology—Rick Fields. Fields argues that the history of Buddhism in the United States (and the wider history of Buddhism) is a complex network of lineages, and the scholar's responsibility is to retrace every nuance of these lineages.[2] Relying too literally on this view would run the risk of monasticizing lay traditions, as lineage-histories have typically focused on monastics. And yet, symbolically, the concept has much to teach us about the historical nuance, dependencies, inventiveness and power dynamics of Buddhism in the United States. In a way, some scholars have done this already for some time, beginning, for instance, with Tetsuden Kashima's unfortunately neglected sociological history of the Buddhist Churches of America titled *Buddhism in America* and published in 1977.[1] Kashima's account expertly discusses the interwoven, but often still partially distinct, lines of authority that connect to the history of the BCA. He does this through an overview of developments inside the tradition as the BCA maintained—both rhetorically and existentially—continuity with cultural and religious traditions from the past while reinventing others.[2] He also does this by recognizing the important ways the BCA has shaped and influenced Buddhist groups outside the

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[1] Prebish, *American Buddhism*, 44-47.

[2] Of course, it is important to emphasize that scholars and practitioners have already told versions of "lineage" histories of Buddhism for millennia. As McRae and others have shown, these lineages are often as "invented" as they are reflective of historical reality, and we should not be surprised to see this trend continue (perhaps even strengthen) within Buddhism in the United States. Much of what Western converts have invented as their lineage-connections to Buddhism are a reinvention of Buddhism through representations of texts (and mystic monks, as outlined above). As such, a full historical analysis of Buddhism in the United States would have to examine both the rhetorical lineages created and reconstructed by particular groups, as well as the lineages the

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former invented lineages are designed to cover over. For example, white converts have obscured their important social connections to the BCA and other predominately Asian-American groups by invoking invented lineages of texts. Both histories are important to uncover precisely because they are related. Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, xiii; John R. McRae, *Seeing Through Zen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1-21.

[1] Tetsuden Kashima, *Buddhism in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977).

[2] Kashima, xi-xiii.

BCA, pointing to the BCA's support of a variety of white convert groups throughout the history of Buddhism in the United States.[1] This is a helpful point, not only because it shows the wide and important effects of Japanese-American and Japanese immigrant Buddhists on the broader history of Buddhism in the United States, but also because it further contextualizes the religious experience of white converts, and demonstrates that the rhetoric of self-sufficient white converts is false.

One could further develop these insights by narrating (and thus contextualizing) a variety of lineages of authority for white converts, showing interconnections with other groups and individuals, as well as uncovering lineages that lead outside white convert Buddhism. For example, supported by many scholars, white converts generally present themselves as the end of Buddhist history and the sole agents of modernized Buddhism. They not only have concealed their ties to past traditions, but have also obscured the reality that history continues after them. New groups—like second-generation Buddhist Americans—have connected their lineage-authority to white converts.

White converts have generally presented themselves as individual practitioners able to keep their practices and Buddhism from families and friends; in other words, these converts purport to have the power to fully privatize their Buddhist lives to the point that it has no impact on anyone but the practicing convert individuals. Scholars have generally taken these converts on this point at their word. For instance, Richard Hughes Seager claims that he sees no evidence of a second generation of white Buddhists; he supports the notion by claiming that Buddhist convert parents are uncomfortable raising their children Buddhist.[1] This reinforces the illusion that children are simply blank slates or sponges that absorb only what adults consciously give them. By examining the stories of second-generation Buddhist Americans in Sumi Loundon's two edited volumes, however, we discover that children with Buddhist parents have a great deal more agency and perception than they have been given credit for having, and whatever their parents' intentions, these children can be properly described as having important connections (i.e. lineage ties) to Buddhism through their parents.

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[1] Kashima, 212-20.

Scholars must return to primary sources alone (like those contained in Loundon's volumes) in the quest to uncover the experiences of second-generation Buddhist Americans because scholarly bias for

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[1] Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 2nd ed., 273.

Buddhist American converts has made the experiences of their children largely invisible. Second-generation Buddhist Americans do not fit into any of the scholarly typologies of Buddhism in the United States, and since nearly all of these typologies presuppose a binary between innovation and tradition that favors white American converts, most scholars have been structurally blind even to the existence of second-generation Buddhist Americans. This has led to a general absence of scholarship on these Buddhists; beyond Gross' article, there are only three other articles that focus at least in part on this group, and two are contained in the same volume.[1] Like in Gross's article, all three articles focus on the parents' perspectives in childrearing and fail to consider the children's perspectives on their own religious identities. Even the scholarly articles explicitly on second-generation Buddhist Americans assume that Buddhist American converts are the sole agents within the history of Buddhism in the United

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[1] Karen Derris, "Picturing Buddhism: Nurturing Buddhist Worldviews through Children's Books," in *Little Buddhas*, ed. Vanessa R. Sasson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 206-26; Kristin Scheible, "'Give Me My Inheritance': Western Buddhists Raising Buddhist Children," in *Little Buddhas*, ed. Vanessa R. Sasson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 428-52; Charles S. Prebish, "Family Life and Spiritual Kinship in American Buddhist Communities," in *American Buddhism as a Way of Life*, ed. Gary Storhoff and John Whalen-Bridge (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010), 151-66.

States. The children are just objects.

And yet, for the most part, despite their problems, these articles are still the exception in the field. For the most part, scholars continue to fail to discuss second-generation Buddhist Americans at all. As a justification for his lack of consideration of this group as a separate category, Numrich takes Seager's logic and pushes it to the extreme by claiming that the children of white Buddhist converts can be grouped together with their parents under the "white convert" category, because the children ultimately must choose as adults to retain or reject their Buddhist heritage.[1] Numrich writes:

> The conscious choice of identity transformation is fundamental to the conversion phenomenon…. Non-Asian Buddhist converts in Western societies adopt a religious worldview different from that of their ethnic heritage and the mainstream culture in which they were raised. An argument can be made that the term 'convert' still applies to the children of the original cohort since this new generation must at some point consciously choose to perpetuate their parents' rejection of their former religious views.[2]

Numrich fails to realize that this argument would effectively make all Buddhists (regardless of background) converts. He also fails to recognize that by making this claim, he effectively accepts the problematic notion constructed by white converts (and wider colonialist forces and structures beyond them) that modern religion is primarily about adult choice—in other words, the idea that only adults choose to take on religion, possess it, and reshape it for the present and future. Numrich assumes that children have no agency and that being raised in a Buddhist household effectively has no impact on their lives.[1] In other words, whites are Christian by heritage, Asians are Buddhist. As such, Asian-American and Asian immigrant Buddhists are bound to the Buddhist traditions of their past, while white convert Buddhists are the only ones who can break from tradition—both their Christian heritage and old Buddhist traditions that supposedly do not apply to new American contexts.[2]

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[1] Numrich, 63.

[2] Numrich, 63.

Within this history of scholarship, the question still hangs in the air: where are all the second-generation Buddhist Americans, and why have scholars failed to discuss them? Numrich's arguments are useful for answering this question because they make explicit the scholarly assumptions about Buddhism in the United States that have rendered so many Buddhists invisible. Second-generation Buddhist Americans are caught in a double-bind. To the extent that they are reflections of their parents, they are not innovative enough to warrant separate study by scholars. To the extent that they are different from their parents, they are separated from the hegemonic authority of their parents and lose their status as Buddhist because of these differences, and therefore do not warrant separate study by scholars. Furthermore, these children fall on both extremes of the binary that has grounded so much scholarship on Buddhism in the United States—they are simultaneously understood to be bound to traditions that they have no ability or freedom to reshape, and yet, are also understood to be radically separate from the authoritative lineages that link back to the East. As children, they are thought to have no ability to freely remake Buddhism their own. Even as they grow older and become adults, unless they pretend to convert and follow in the modeled modernizing path of their parents, they are still not understood to be Buddhist—they remain bound to the traditions of childhood.

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[1] In order to avoid the universalization of conversion, Numrich argues that Asian-American Buddhists who "convert" to Buddhism are actually "re-converting" because that is their ethnic and racial heritage. In other words, Asian-Americans are bound to cultural traditions regardless of their choices; only white converts have the ability to break from their cultural traditions. Numrich, 63.

[2] Numrich, 63.

In reality, however, as I argue in Chapters 4 and 5, second-generation Buddhist Americans repurpose their parents' religious traditions to many novel ends as both children and adults. They succeed where there parents failed, learning how to make tradition the site of true innovation. By linking their authority with Buddhist American converts, many scholars have been bound to binary-driven traditions that prevent them from seeing these new religious lives, as well as the religious lives of many others. No matter how many times these scholars recode those traditions for new contexts, the stale logic at the foundation of the field remains the same. Through this lens, they will never see the full depth and breadth of Buddhism in the United States.

The Death of American Buddhism?

The scholarly symphony on Buddhist American converts concludes on one shared note. Since the majority of Buddhist American converts trace their roots to the countercultural period beginning in the 1960s, nearly half a century has passed since the emergence of this new strand in Buddhist history. While many of these converts were young at the times of their conversions, with the advent of a new millennium, they are now middle-aged or older. As the first waves of Buddhist American converts have aged, many scholars have come to worry that one of the primary subjects of their surveys will become nothing but a dead end.

This thought is particularly troubling for those scholars that have placed Buddhist American converts as one of the primary groups of actors in the history of Buddhism in the United States. Seager worries about the "graying" of Buddhism.[1] Numrich fears the loss of a potential legacy as the baby-boomers "fade away."[2] Prebish echoes Robert Thurman's uneasiness about the possibility that Buddhism might "disappear" in the United States in the future.[3] Jan Nattier summarizes this collective feeling best:

> If today's American Buddhists are to avoid the fate of their predecessors of a century ago, they must… move beyond the concept of Buddhism as a matter of individual "religious preference" grounding it instead in the everyday practice of families and larger social networks.[4]

If Buddhist American converts do not change, their religion will die with them.

At first glance, the scholarly anxiety over this possibility might appear strange. After all, as every historian knows, the seemingly neat fabric of history conceals all the lost strands and lineages beneath it. Death is not unusual; death is the norm. The question then becomes: why do the aging lives of Buddhist American converts merit special concern from scholars?

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[1] Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 2nd ed., 274.

[2] Numrich, 63.

[3] Prebish, 262.

[4] Jan Nattier, "Buddhism Comes to Main Street," *Wilson Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1997): 80.

This scholarly anxiety can be explained by appealing to the historiography of scholarship on the topic. As we have seen, since the 1950s, many scholars have placed Buddhist American converts at the center of the development of Buddhism in the United States. Even many scholars that have attempted to provide further nuance and recognize the importance of Asian-American and Asian immigrant Buddhists have largely perpetuated the idea that Buddhist American converts are crucial to the continuing history of Buddhism in the United States. The idea that Buddhist American converts are the primary or sole makers of Buddhist history in the United States—made explicit by Tworkov—has proven difficult to exorcise from the field. As one traces the lineage of this idea back through the history of scholarship back to Watts, the reason for this difficulty becomes obvious. This idea is so entrenched in the field it is commonly simply assumed without any argument. Buddhist American converts are presented as the sole agents linked to the authority of past traditions without being bound to them; they are free to create, shape and remake Buddhism in the modern age. No explanation is necessary for why Buddhist American converts are thought to be heroes in the history of Buddhism in the

United States. This is just the dominant and foundational tradition of the field—the assumed idea that makes other scholarly thought and exploration possible.

These scholars have created their own problem; by making Buddhist American converts heroes in the history of Buddhism, the thought of their impending demise becomes tragic. They must not die because the history of Buddhism in the United States will die with them. And yet, this repeated assumption fails to recognize that there are many different hands shaping the future of American Buddhism. Asian-American, African-American, Native American, Latino American, and immigrant Buddhists have all played and will continue to play important roles in the history of Buddhism in the United States in many different ways. Likewise, Nattier is wrong to assume that converts have not passed on their religion to their children through family relationships. Converts do not have the ability to insulate their religious identities from their children. As such, these children also have been and will continue to be an important part of the history of Buddhism in the United States.

However, there will never be a single essentialized American Buddhism or one culminating lineage of Buddhism in the United States. The common demands for delay in making any final conclusions about the nature of American Buddhism often have unreasonable demands for the definition of the term that will never be met, whether in over one century, or two millennia. Prebish is not alone in yearning for a unified Buddhism in the United States. Seager, for instance, also aspires for a "genuinely indigenous" and ecumenical form of Buddhism that has not been reached, in which scholars can reflect on dimensions that all Buddhists share.[1] The scholarly hope for a singular idealized modern and innovative Buddhism in the United States is at least as old as Watts' original 1958 article.[2] But truthfully, this (very Christian) ecumenical ideal is illusory, and will only cover over the important value of differences. As such, perhaps if we are to uncover the future of "modern" American Buddhisms, we should look to the traditions that they both conceal and evoke, such that we realize that while no one is firmly bound to their past, neither can they ever be free from it. In fact, as this historiography of scholarship on the topic has begun to suggest, and the next chapter will confirm, the illusory and isolated freedom of white converts covers over the fact that they, in reality, are the most intransigent. True novelty will have to be discovered elsewhere.

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[1] Richard Hughes Seager, "American Buddhism in the Making," in *Westward Dharma*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 118.

[2] As Judith Snodgrass has shown in her examination of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, the modern colonial ecumenical idealization of a unified Buddhism even predates Watts. Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1-15.

THE MOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

CONVERTING AMERICAN BUDDHISM AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE MONK-CONVERT PARADIGM

"To the children and the innocent,
it's all the same."[1]
"Isn't it true that you start your life a sweet child
believing in everything under you father's roof?"[2]
"To learn is to change."[3]
"Yeah man, you know to me a mountain is a
Buddha."[4]

Everything Returns

Siddhartha and the Family

The 1922 late German Romantic novel *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse begins with a conflict between father and son.[1] Siddhartha's father (a Brahmin) wants his son to follow in his footsteps and become a Brahmin. Dissatisfied, Siddhartha wants to leave his family behind and become a forest ascetic in search of enlightenment. After lengthy argument, Siddhartha's father reluctantly allows his son to leave. The father only makes one request: whether his son discovers enlightenment or failure, Siddhartha must eventually return to his father so that the two may be reunited once again. Siddhartha agrees, leaves home—his journey begins.

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[1] Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 186.

[2] Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Viking, 2007), 106.

[3] *Little Buddha*, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci (Recorded Picture Company, 1993), DVD (Miramax Films, 2011), 68:20. (I include timestamps in my film citations to aid the reader in locating quotes.)

[4] Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 50.

Many pages later, after some time as an ascetic, and then a wealthy merchant in a sexual and erotic relationship with a courtesan named Kamala, Siddhartha chooses an old ferryman named Vasudeva as his teacher. Through his relationship with Vasudeva and interaction with the river and surrounding environment, Siddhartha learns many paradoxical concepts. Intentional effort cannot change the world. Let everything be, and we change the world by changing ourselves. Like the river, nothing ever remains the same. And yet, everything returns to where it came from.

In the middle of this learning process, on a trip to meet another ascetic, Kamala crosses paths with

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[1] Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999).

Siddhartha once again. At this point, Siddhartha learns that he has a son with Kamala. After this discovery, Kamala, dying from a snake bite, asks Siddhartha to raise their son. Siddhartha agrees, and while he mourns Kamala's death, Siddhartha is overjoyed to discover he has a son. However, it does not take long for overt generational conflict to emerge once again, this time between Siddhartha and his son. The son, seemingly dissatisfied with his father's philosophy and way of life, leaves to return to the city. Siddhartha follows him and discovers that his son seems to be happy. While Siddhartha is sad, he believes his young son will be fine autonomously and better off on his own. Hearkening back to his conflicts with his own father, Siddhartha comes to believe that his son must be given freedom so that he will arrive at his own decisions and beliefs. After his own journey, Siddhartha believes his son will come to freely choose the path of enlightenment as well. From his perspective, enlightenment cannot be given—that would be inauthentic. True enlightenment can only emerge from a place of absolute freedom.

Underneath this notion is the assumption that traditions—passed from generation to generation—are insidious traps that can only serve as barriers to enlightenment. Only beliefs, practices, and narratives freely chosen by the individual can have any value. For those that ascribe to this viewpoint like the character Siddhartha, this is a fundamentally liberating concept. Unchosen beliefs, practices, and narratives are necessarily either vestigial at best, or oppressive at worst. Tradition is the antithesis of choice, and choice is the foundation of value. From this viewpoint, if only every individual would reject their traditions and embrace the full power of freedom, then we would live in a more enlightened world.

There is a terrible irony and a profound erasure at the core of this notion. According to this view, all traditions are inherently corrupt except for particular traditions with particular histories that are rewritten as timeless and the ground of all value. This narrative proclaims that freedom is inescapable; you must choose freedom! Further irony is present in the fact that this specific construction and valuation of absolute freedom is also a given tradition with its own lineage. The history of this concept extends beyond Hesse's novel. I will examine below several critical moments in the history of this concept within the broader history of the reception and representation of Buddhism in the West.

Before I get there, however, further examination of the narratives in *Siddhartha* reveals a further complexity within this valuation of freedom. The notion of absolute freedom is passed from generation to generation as a tradition, but not from parent to child. Siddhartha does not learn the truths of enlightenment from his father, but rather from his teacher Vasudeva. Likewise, Siddhartha assumes that his son will not learn about enlightenment from him, but will also learn from a teacher. This lineage displaces the importance of the family for another lineage—the student and the teacher, or put another way, the convert and the monk.

Hermann Hesse wrote *Siddhartha* in a historical and situational context far different from the American contexts considered in this book. No doubt there is much continuity between these contexts, beginning with Hesse's sympathies for German Romanticism that would later have a significant amount of influence on 1950s-1970s Buddhist American convert culture.[1] However, here I am less interested in the cultural role Hesse's novel played originally in Germany in the 1920s so much as its reemergence and significant popularity in the United States beginning in the 1950s. First published in English in the United States in 1951, the book was a banner novel with the Beats in the 1950s, became ubiquitous in the 1960s counterculture, and had an even broader effect on popular conceptions of Buddhism with the release of the film *Siddhartha*

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[1] David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 117-147.

(based on the novel) by Conrad Rooks in 1972.[1] The novel experienced a renaissance.

While popular representations of Buddhism in the United States were not static between the 1950s and the 1970s, there is no question that the novel played a critical role in the history of Buddhism in the United States during this overall period. Jack Kerouac once described the book as an earlier model for the rucksack revolution. The film would seemingly vanish from popular consumption during the 1980s, but it was popular and well-reviewed during the early 1970s.

The continuities between the film and the novel reveal a significant amount concerning what resonated about the narrative for many American audiences in the middle of the 20th century. Generational conflict is highlighted even further as one of the dominant threads of the narrative. Just before he leaves, Siddhartha's father tells Siddhartha that "everything returns."[2] Throughout the film, in his journey of self-discovery, Siddhartha echoes this line again and again in a variety of situations. Siddhartha wants to find his own path to enlightenment and initially believes his father's statement is contrary to his freedom. Only after his own son leaves does

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[1] *Siddhartha*, directed by Conrad Rooks (Columbia Pictures, 1972), DVD (Milestone Film and Video, 2011).

[2] *Siddhartha*, 8:40.

Siddhartha repeat the line as though he finally understands it. His son must also learn to choose his own path.

Allowing some themes from the novel to fade into the background, Rooks emphasized other themes in the narrative more intensely to reflect the values of a new cultural context, in addition to freedom being presented as an absolute value. Within the narrative, the home and family life is a dangerous threat and impediment to the possibility of enlightenment. Enculturated to feel responsible to and for his family, Siddhartha must discover a method to free himself from that responsibility without destroying his heroic status for the audience. In the case of his father, Siddhartha effectively coerces his father into blessing his desire to leave by displacing the responsibility onto his father—Siddhartha is not a failure if he leaves his family, but rather, Siddhartha's father is a failure if he forces his son to stay against his will.

In the case of his son, the story constructs an elaborate fantasy in order to erase Siddhartha's responsibility to his son—even after he promises Kamala to care for him. While Siddhartha wants to continue to practice his way of life as though his son had not arrived, he is bound by the norms of his society (as well as the norms of the American viewing audiences) to not abandon his son. Siddhartha is seemingly trapped by his contradictory desires and responsibilities. The film creates the perfect solution to this conundrum—Siddhartha's preadolescent son leaves of his own free will. This event allows Siddhartha to remain a hero and mourn the loss of his son, while also maintaining his own freedom and independence. In fact, this construction extends the authority of that freedom and independence since it is not just written on the character of Siddhartha, but his son as well. Siddhartha's son had to leave freely in order to begin his own journey and reach enlightenment. There was no other choice. Everyone must seek freedom. This norm is not only universalized, but idealized and celebrated. Siddhartha could never leave his son and remain a hero, but if his son chose to leave, Siddhartha would be suddenly released from his societal responsibilities and the prison of family. He would be free.

This emphasis on freedom, while originally present in the novel, becomes even more overt and dominant in the film. Less discussed are the consequences of this reification of freedom and the erasure of Siddhartha's privilege that originally made his own choices possible in the first place within the narrative. Siddhartha was born into an obviously wealthy and politically powerful family within the novel and the film. Even within the logic of the tale, Siddhartha's son will be forced to 'find his own journey' from a very different context—homeless, poor, and socially and politically invisible as a young child. In reality, there can be no question that the abandoned son's journey will be much different from the father's own path.

Of course, the film's logic does not prioritize probability and reality so much as the construction of a resolution—no matter how illusory—to the conflict between family responsibility and individual freedom. The focus of the audience remains on Siddhartha, who is the hero of the story. To the extent that other characters are useful to this hero's journey, they may remain in the foreground, but the moment they begin to sabotage Siddhartha's freedom, they must be made invisible. *Siddhartha* is not just the tale of an individual; it is the tale of *the* individual. In the story, many characters do not qualify to be true individuals—from children to women. They are not able to be free (either yet or ever). The individual must be free to pursue his own life unrestricted. He must live a life of free adventure on a journey of self-development. He must be free to practice his religious life without any burdens or conflicts. He must be free to solely tell his own story. He must be his own author—his own master. While the narrative of *Siddhartha* nominally rejects the dominance of the ego and selfishness, echoing popular conceptions of Buddhism, *Siddhartha* is a profoundly selfish tale. The free individual is the ultimate ego. He is not just the total author of himself, but necessarily in order to achieve this end, he seizes the power to be the author of everyone—including his own family. And so, as a tale of the individual, *Siddhartha* is also a tale of authority. Paradoxically, this idealization of absolute freedom is revealed to be fundamentally about power and dominance.

The story of the story of *Siddhartha* in the United States serves as only one parable of this history of power and representation. It allows us to paint the broader themes of the political structures that shape and are shaped by Buddhist American converts, but a more careful and in-depth history will reveal the nuances and features of these structures. Of particular importance for this project is the consideration of the social and political construction of the notion of individuality. What values and norms are linked to modern American constructions of individuality? Who is the ideal individual? How is this individual ideally formed? How should knowledge pass from generation to generation of individuals? As a consequence of these positions, are there groups of people that are stripped of their identities because they do not fit this normative definition of individuality?

In order to address these questions, we must return to the notion in *Siddhartha* that the individual is always in process and development. The individual is always in the making. To put it in more colloquial and appropriate terms, the true individual is always on a journey (of self-construction). This process of learning and knowledge-construction takes place explicitly outside the realm of the family. Instead, the dominant mode through which the individual becomes an individual is in relationship with a teacher. Individual formation as the further entrenchment of power is a constant process of conversion toward an older mentor figure. All other Buddhist relationships beyond the monk-convert lineage must become invisible in order for the paradigm to function. While examining the narratives of *Siddhartha* allows us to outline the basic features of this relational structure, a detour is necessary in order to fully uncover the inner mechanisms of this structure of individualism. As we engage in this process of theorization, we might begin to see some children within the gears.

The Monk-Convert Paradigm

In 2011, Jane Iwamura published her critically important text entitled *Virtual Orientalism*.[1] Iwamura's book was the first monograph-length intersectional analysis of Asian religions and American popular culture. On one hand, due in large part to Marxist influence in some sectors, much of Asian-American studies had not considered the full breadth and complexity of religion in the process of deconstructing the representational relationship between race and American popular culture. On the other, while religious studies scholars have increasingly considered popular culture as a topic of analysis over the past few decades, their analyses have largely been confined to the relationship between dominant forms of Christianity and American popular culture, reflecting a wider and long-entrenched hegemonic bias. By reflecting upon Asian religions and American popular culture, *Virtual Orientalism* was groundbreaking in that it challenged both of these disciplinary assumptions and opened up a space for novel scholarly examination of a previously little discussed topic.

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[1] Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

While Iwamura considers myriad topics in her text, her central argument throughout the text pertains to the dominant trope of the monk-convert relationship found throughout American popular culture.[1] Ranging from an examination of the press' representation of D.T. Suzuki throughout his career to a critical analysis of the TV show *Kung Fu*, Iwamura traces the genealogy of the monk-convert relationship in American popular culture from its distinct emergence at the beginning of the 20th century through shifting dimensions within the concept up through today. Her analysis focuses on the period between the 1950s and 1970s as a particularly fertile moment in the development of the concept. Iwamura argues that the dominant use of specific representations of monk-convert relationships in popular culture is inseparably linked to wider Orientalist politics and the maintenance of Western authority. Iwamura describes the structure of this popular trope in the following way:

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[1] In his insightful book *Race and Religion in American Buddhism*, Joseph Cheah also examines the modern dominance of the monk-convert relationship through a postcolonial lens and comes to similar conclusions as Iwamura. I focus on Iwamura's work rather than Cheah's because of the difference in their source material—while Iwamura focuses on popular culture, Cheah casts a broader net and examines the dominance of the relationship in

> A lone monk figure—often with no visible family or community—takes under his

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everything from American literature to the field of Buddhist Studies. Given that the majority of my analysis in this chapter also focuses on popular culture as a case study for wider political forces, there is a more natural symmetry in my book with Iwamura's analysis. The bottom line, however, is that for the purposes of this book, Iwamura and Cheah largely agree on the overall structure and political consequences of the monk-convert paradigm. The effects of this representational racist structure are global, the influence wide, the harm immeasurable. While some become the heroes of modern Buddhism, others become the villains, and most just vanish beneath history. There are many ways to deconstruct this structure, but the shared need remains the same. Joseph Cheah, *Race and Religion in American Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

> wing a fatherless, often parentless, child (usually a boy). This child embodies a tension—although he signifies a dominant culture in racial terms, he has an ambivalent relationship with that culture. This allows him to make a break with the Western tradition that is radical enough to allow him to embrace his marginalized self. The Oriental Monk figure discerns this yearning for difference, develops it, and nurtures it.[1]

While easily dismissed as a non-significant (or even seemingly beneficial) stereotype, Iwamura argues that the popular representations of the Oriental Monk are designed to reshape the East to reflect Western desires while reaffirming the power of particular parties within the West. The monk-convert paradigm is the affirmation of one idealized lineage of Eastern spirituality over all others.

While the genealogy of the monk-convert relationship in American popular culture is complex and takes several twists and turns, Iwamura argues that a general structure of the many presentations of this relationship can be identified between the 1950s and the 1970s. After the end of World War II and the emergence of the Cold War, a new generation of Americans sought to reconstruct their culture and traditions in the name of a new geopolitics.

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[1] Iwamura, 20.

Disgruntled with the nihilistic "capitalist greed, brute force, totalitarian rule, and spiritless technology" and Christian empire that they felt increasingly defined the essence of the West, these Americans looked outside and toward the East for salvation from the corruption of the West.[1] Tapping into a long history of Orientalist binary-driven representations of the East as the opposite of the West, these cultural rebels embraced an artificial "East" that symbolized organicity, spontaneity, peace, freedom, and a bottomless depth of spiritual-meaning as an antidote to the impending spiritual death of the West. This was the beginning of a new internecine conflict within the West as a struggle between generations—between parents and children. Rejecting the Christian faith of their parents, a new generation of Buddhist converts tried to construct a religious alternative of their own making. In truth, since the children invoked dominant—albeit reshaped—Orientalist representations as the core of their portrait of new salvation, neither the parents nor the children moved far from the walls of their old homes.

As I have already indicated, however, this new generation of Americans did adapt and change old concepts and narratives for new uses. Expanding on Iwamura's analysis, I argue that this new generation sought a primary narrative that would uphold the collection of norms they valued and place the new generation at the center of this potential new history in the West. In order to challenge the authority of their parents' generation, they needed stories to justify their gathering power. No longer defined by the violence and corruption of an old decaying West, they needed to be free to define themselves. To be the authors of their own lives. To be the new protagonists. They needed a new canon.

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[1] Iwamura, 20.

It is easy to tell new stories; it is less easy to tell new stories that only accomplish specifically what you desire. It was not enough to be protagonists of a new American story—this story had to be imbued with the power that only comes from absolute moral authority. Given the spiritual salvation they sought, the protagonists of these new stories had to be heroes. They had to stand for all their salvific values—absolutely free, peaceful, spontaneous, and selfless heroes. Without affirming these values, the heroes of the new narratives would be anything but—they would be one more group of villains in the history of a morally bankrupt West. Selflessness was particularly critical to the moral authority of these new narratives as it grounded the critique of the older Western hegemony as narcissistic and nihilistic. Cultural critics from Jack Kerouac to Alan Watts argued the West had become corrupt because of a calcified notion of selfish individual identity separated from any real sense of compassion or social engagement. A reconstructed Buddhist doctrine of no-self was presented as an antidote to this selfish nihilism. Moral meaning could only be found again in the spiritual loss of selfhood, or as Watts put it, to stop aspiring to be the "master" of the world.[1]

This double demand was nearly impossible to satisfy: how can one be one's own master but also fight all masters? How can one be an author by fighting all authority? How can one affirm the value of the absolute freedom of the unrestricted self but ultimately also reject all selfhood? In a true double-bind, the only solutions accept the contradiction outright.

Within this additional context, Iwamura's analysis provides the groundwork for deducing how a new generation solved this dilemma. Specifically, they reshaped and placed increasing importance on an Orientalist structure that could succeed in subtly presenting this new generation as selfless protagonists that—at face value—are not even the source of new spiritual salvation. Instead, by taking on the role of converts, this new generation could conceal their authority under the guise of simply being mediators.

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[1] Alan Watts, "Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen," *Chicago Review* 12, no. 2 (1958): 5.

These converts are given the values and stories that will save the West by Asian sages, masters, and wise men—by, in short, "Oriental Monks."

The monks are not actually the sole ground of spiritual authority; the power of the narrative structure emerges because of the *relationship* between the monk and convert figures. Iwamura writes: "As a result of this relationship, a transmission takes place: Oriental wisdom and spiritual insight is passed from the Oriental Monk figure to the West through the *bridge figure* of the child."[1] Alone, neither figure can bring about the transfer of spiritual meaning from East to West. However, this relationship is not symmetrical. Iwamura's description of the popular representation of the Oriental Monk is apt. The monk is represented as ancient and sterile, bound to a culture otherwise destined for death. In this way, as a pupil, the (usually white) convert is represented as not just salvation for the West, but the East as well. The monk can only live on through the youthful convert. In these stories, the monk characters are typically static and the only "change" they commonly undergo is death.

While the convert needs the monk, at the level of representation, the convert is the only real agent in the story. Putting aside the admittedly important question of the agency of popular monk figures in reality (like D.T. Suzuki), at least at the level of dominant representation, only the converts symbolize life itself—free, organic, able to pursue real, meaningful change. While necessary to the functionality of the narrative, the monk is not so much an agent in the story as he is one more resource to be mined. While at the level of rhetoric, spiritual authority is passed from the hands of the monk to the hands of the convert, in reality, as a matter of Orientalist representation, the convert imbues the monk with authority, only to take it back in a sleight-of-hand. This dynamic is represented in Figure 3.1. There can only be one hero in this cyclical tale.

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[1] Italics hers. Iwamura, 20.

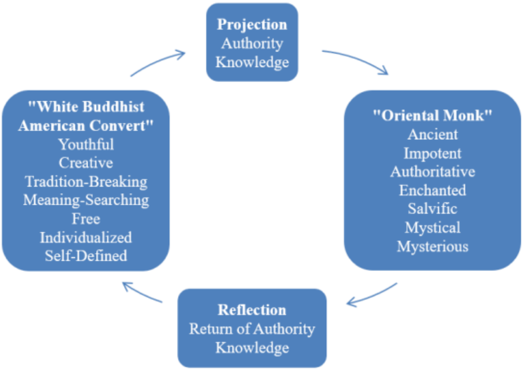
Projection
Authority
Knowledge
"Oriental Monk"
Ancient
Impotent
Authoritative
Enchanted
Salvific
Mystical
Mysterious
Reflection
Return of Authority
Knowledge
"White Buddhist American Convert"
Youthful
Creative
Tradition-Breaking
Meaning-Searching
Free
Individualized
Self-Defined

Figure 3.1. The Monk-Convert Paradigm: The Cycle of Making a Hero

Ultimately, however, there can be no question that this narrative technique is successful in sidestepping the double-bind of simultaneously critiquing and affirming Western selfhood. In these stories, the convert is always quite heroic. From *Kung Fu* to *Karate Kid*, after learning new values from his mentor, the youthful convert nearly always valiantly holds to those values in the face of an otherwise nihilistic world. The power of conversion, however, is that it is ever ongoing. The youthful convert—even after the death of the monk—must always strive to learn anew. Ironically, they would lose their authority if they lost their student or convert status. Instead, by always remaining a student in relationship, in "…[t]he battle between youth and adults," the convert appears selfless and can representationally serve as both "the figure with which the audience most identifies" and the "entry point into the Monk's mystical realm."[1] In the process of bringing Buddhism to the West, these converts must re-present Buddhism anew again and again in order to provide the illusion of constant movement. The illusion of a constantly revivified organicity. The illusion of eternal youth.

As I already noted in Chapter 1, the intersectionality of age and religion is a significantly underdeveloped topic within the field of religious studies. Despite this general absence, Iwamura does note at several different points the importance of representations of age within the broader dynamic of the monk-convert paradigm. Iwamura considers the importance of age-related discourses in at least two ways:

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[1] Iwamura, 93.

1) The represented age difference between the monk and convert. The old age of the monk allows the monk to symbolize the depth and authority of an alternative spiritual tradition in contradistinction to a young nihilistic West. Simultaneously, the old age of the monk prevents him from being a real threat to the Western converts' authority, creativity, and freedom and, in fact, demands the young converts' intervention to prevent the loss of spiritual meaning with the impending death of the monk. The youth of the convert symbolizes a new, open, and creative future.
2) The represented age difference between the old and new American generations. Representations of age difference function as a proxy for "the battle between youth and adults… [and] their divergent views on cultural authority" as a new generation seeks to seize the power of cultural dominance from an older generation.[1] Many of the ambivalences in values within

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[1] Iwamura, 93.

> the monk-convert narratives Iwamura considers emerge because of the conflicting authority between competing generations. The story of the monk-convert paradigm from the 1950s-1970s is at least in part a tale of competing generational cultural hegemonies.

In both of these ways, age as a matter of representation is inherently a political concept inseparable from wider issues of power and authority. For older audiences, representations of elderly monks were presented as threatening, and youthful Buddhist converts signified amoral rebellion, arrogance, and insubordinate rejection. For younger audiences, elderly monks were the site of alternative values, and youth signified the possibility to make something new with those values in the face of a corrupt and aging West.

As the notion of shifting generational hegemonies itself suggests, age is not only inherently a political concept, but is also a uniquely slippery concept to get a stable handle on. While critical race theorists have demonstrated the permeable and near-liquid "boundaries" of race even at the height of the "science of race," at the rhetorical level, racial discourses in modern colonial history have often (although not always) functioned by diminishing that permeability and presenting race as a completely stable construct. Age, on the other hand, even on the rhetorical level, usually has some permeability built within the concept. Age and ageism often support extreme power differentials, but somewhat uniquely, these power differentials are justified by appealing to the process of maturation. Supposedly, no one remains a (powerless) child forever. Presupposed in the concept of age is the notion that eventually everyone will get to take the reins. Since everyone can become an adult, the purported universality of the monk-convert paradigm functions through the illusion that eventually everyone has the ability to become a convert.

There is much that could be criticized in this troubling but all too common presupposition. First, the notion presumes a singular and universal process of aging that does not bear out in reality, wrongly dismissing the importance of cultural perceptions of age, and discarding more nuanced biological notions of aging. Second, the assumption that children are not agents prevents us from seeing their everyday moments of creativity and self-empowerment. Third, in this view, children are represented as simple objects with only the *potential* value of subjecthood. Fourth, the justification for the power differential (lack of adequate agency and subjecthood) is inseparable from colonialist, racist, and sexist discourses that have justified similar power differentials on similar grounds. The links between these discourses and ageism is troubling enough; if representations of people of color and women as perpetual children have justified extreme hierarchies of power, the entire structure of oppression needs to be dismantled in order to deconstruct colonialism, racism, and sexism as a whole. Not everyone is allowed to become a convert.

Recognizing the intersection of these layers of oppression reveals a few more issues. While the outer mechanisms of the monk-convert paradigm might move because of generational conflict within the West, the continuities in values and Orientalist representations between the two competing generations in the 1950s-1970s reveal not only that the children borrowed more from their parents than they might have wished, but also that the "salvation" of the monk-convert paradigm is ultimately grounded upon a colonialist and racist framework. In this way, American revolt through the discourse of youth during this period did not guarantee opposition to Western colonialism, and in fact, in many ways, helped to reinforce it.

Perhaps most troublingly, what this intersectionality shows us is that what we take most for granted about age is ultimately false. For a variety of reasons, not everyone "gets" older. On one hand, many subaltern groups are perpetually represented as children in order to maintain the dominance of the colonizer. On the other hand, Western Buddhist converts can maintain their cultural power through ever renewed self-presentations of themselves as being in young adulthood, no matter how old they actually are in reality. Young adulthood serves as the perfect liminal place between the powerlessness of childhood and the assumed impending death and powerlessness of the elderly. Conversion and mature youthfulness become intrinsically linked. Through the process of becoming young again and again, the convert continually remains as the new face of Buddhism in the West. The real Buddhist children and youth remain hidden by this structure. Where are they?

Pushing the tools of analysis provided by Iwamura beyond the originally examined context allows us to consider new questions like this one. The bulk of Iwamura's text is effectively a freeze-frame analysis of the monk-convert paradigm within a specific period in American cultural history. This is not so much a limit to her examination as it is a strength. It allows her to carefully and accurately reconstruct the inner mechanisms of the paradigm during this period. However, as age becomes the primary focus of our analysis of the monk-convert paradigm, in addition to looking closely at representations of age in a variety of narratives, we must also extend the analysis to a wider time period in order to discover how a generation of converts changes their discourse as they age. Certainly, during the 1950s-1970s, when this generation of converts was young we would expect the focus of their rhetoric of youth to be directed against their older parents. As the first generation of converts ages, however, and begins to have children of their own, one would expect the dynamic to shift. How can one continue to present oneself as the site of youthful rebellion and spiritual meaning, not only as one ages, but also as one has—actually young—children of one's own?

A wide perspective on the history of this generation allows us to recognize both tidal shifts and continuities in their discourse. In particular, I argue that while the content of the stories told by this generation does shift in some important ways—coming to include new genres like parenting manuals—the overall structure of the discourse and the role the converts play in it has mostly remained the same over a period of half a century. In fact, even as they grow older, these convert parents still represent themselves as the youthful protagonists and heroes of Buddhism. While their children are discomforting anomalies that confront this narrative, the convert parents utilize their power and familial-cultural authority to ultimately render their children invisible so they cannot challenge the authority of the monk-convert paradigm. While the reality of these converts having families has necessitated new narrative forms—like parenting manuals and children's movies on Buddhism—a close analysis of these forms reveals that even in these new forms supposedly for or about children, the true protagonists of Buddhism startlingly remain the convert parents and their journey for eternal youth. Before deconstructing these more recent forms of the convert narrative, however, it is helpful to return to the semi-origins of this quest in the 1950s so that we can use it as a point of comparison to later discourse on age and youth at the end of the twentieth century.

Kerouac and the Spiritualized Idealization of Youth

Born in 1922 to Catholic French-Canadian parents, Jean-Louis Lebris de Kérouac (later: Jack Kerouac) would later become one of the most controversial American authors of the twentieth century. He has been both revered as one of the primary progenitors of the Beat movement and dismissed as one of the least critically important parts of that movement. He has been both affirmed as a central figure in a renaissance in American literature in the middle of the twentieth century and criticized as pretentious, derivative, and uninspired. He has been described as a saint for the later hippie movement and its greatest reactionary detractor. He has been understood as one of the greatest Catholic American authors and as a Christian heretic. He has also been understood as one the most important Buddhist American authors and as someone who only had a shallow understanding of Buddhism.[1] Needless to say, the historiography of thought on Kerouac is a fascinating, if ultimately underdeveloped topic.[2] Kerouac—like many cultural icons because of their power—is many things to many people.

Despite this proliferation of material on Kerouac, particularly in the past two decades as literary interest in Kerouac has burgeoned, while some scholarly ink has been spilled on representations of age and religion in Kerouac individually, no one has thought to connect these seemingly disparate topics. On one hand, literary critics with Marxist historiographical sympathies have interpreted Kerouac's idealization of youth as part of a wider trend in secular youth generational revolt that first emerged in the 1950s.[3] This uprising of youth revolt is understood as having little to do with religion; Kerouac's apparent interest in religious topics is dismissed as shallow and empty. On the other hand, post-secular literary critics interested in rediscovering religion in American life have argued that the creative reconstruction of Catholic and Buddhist themes and concepts was part of Kerouac's attempt to find existential and spiritual meaning in an increasingly nihilistic world.[1]

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[1] Alan Watts famously once claimed that Kerouac "has Zen flesh, but no Zen bones." Robert Anton Wilson, "An Impolite Interview with Alan Watts," *The Realist* 14 (1959-1960): 1-11.

[2] John Lardas provides a very helpful and brief historiographical overview of scholarship on Keroauc, the Beats, and religion in his book *The Bop Apocalypse*. John Lardas, *The Bop Apocalypse* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 6-24.

[3] This interpretation of Kerouac began during Kerouac's own lifetime, and was even popular with some other Buddhist Beat figures (like Alan Watts) who wished to deemphasize

These two scholarly groups have resisted combining the topics of analysis because of prior assumptions. Because of strictly negative views of religion in political life, the Marxist group of interpreters has typically dismissed the importance of religion in Kerouac as shallow and inconsequential to his overall political agenda. Likewise, post-secular literary critics, in their emphasis on the importance of religion in Kerouac, have done so with an essentialized and narrow definition of religion that insulates it from wider networks of political meaning in context. Discourse on religion should always be

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Kerouac's connection to Buddhism. Consider the following early example of this interpretation of Kerouac and other Buddhist Beat figures: Michael Rumaker, "Allen Ginsberg's 'Howl,' in *On the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg*, ed. Lewis Hyde (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), 36-40.

[1] As one example of this interpretation, consider: Richard Sorrell, "The Catholicism of Jack Kerouac," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 11, no. 2 (1982): 189-200.

taken seriously. And yet, religion is never just about religion.

Since nearly all of Kerouac's works are semi-autobiographical, his mode of writing serves as the perfect vehicle for the process of modern identity reconstruction. Inspired by reality and the structural norms that form him and the possibilities in front of him, Kerouac had the ability to reshape those norms to the desires and demands of a new generation. As an author, he aspired to model the absolute affirmation of freedom and spontaneity that permeates all of his novels. No matter how bound he was to his context, he strove to freely rewrite reality, to give it new authority. As will gradually become clear below, the tragic irony at the heart of his work is that this aspiration itself made up the chains that kept him linked to an aging normative past he so desperately wanted to escape. His desire to freely rewrite himself and his generation no matter who or what was being written over is the quintessential American colonial value—a norm that would shape the very fabric of Buddhist American convert identity.

I have already outlined above the basic aspects of the structure of the monk-convert paradigm from the period of the 1950s-1970s. However, a short analysis of Kerouac's corpus (focused particularly on *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*) helps to further highlight the importance of age within this politicoreligious framework. By linking the idealization of youth to Buddhist convert identity, Kerouac unites the cultural power of both concepts into a singular nexus of power that he can deploy against the cultural hegemony of his parents' generation.

The basic aspects of the constructed connection between the idealization of youth and spirituality appear early in Kerouac's body of work. This link can be seen in its initial stages in Kerouac's most famous work *On the Road* (written between 1947-1951; published in 1957).[1] In this semi-autobiographical novel, Sal Paradise (Kerouac) becomes infatuated with a young con man named Dean Moriarty (Neal Cassady). Sal becomes interested in Dean because of his rebellious and spontaneous nature and youthful spirit. Sal follows Dean in several trips across the United States. Initially, Sal comes to believe that Dean is the definition of what a new generation coming into adulthood at the time should aspire to. He does what he wants in any given moment, supposedly not being bound to any laws or social norms. He is young and free.

While Buddhism and other "Eastern" traditions are only peripherally referenced a few times in the text, the basic skeleton of the system of values that would later become associated with Buddhist

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[1] Kerouac, *On the Road*.

American converts is already present in this early text. Sal becomes enchanted with Dean because he sees Dean as the paradigmatic example of new youth. Sal takes Dean as his mentor so he too can learn how to be young. To be old is to be part of a broken, corrupt and inflexible system bound to their parents' aging values. Novelty is needed, and novelty comes with youth.

Even though Buddhism is only passingly referenced in the novel, this idealization of youth is closely linked to the politics of Orientalism. As the book progresses, the characters become increasingly aware that the process of aging seems inevitable. At a few points in the novel, Dean and Sal argue fervently over which one of them is older at heart.[1] Aging is a threat as dangerous as death—it is death. As they journey across the United States, they search for the magical answer that will keep them young forever. Revealing the old colonial ties between racism and ageism, Sal hints at an answer at two different times in the text. First, in Denver, as Sal walks through a black neighborhood, he wishes he could leave his "white ambitions" behind.[2] He feels old and with too many responsibilities; he desires to "exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America" and the "…[l]ittle children…[that] sat like sages in ancient rocking chairs."[1] While Sal claims to be an ally to these communities over against the racism of his parents' generation, he is completely blind to his own racism through the exotification of others. Instead, it is this spiritualized exotification and infantilization of African Americans as racialized others that enables him to construct a representational fiction that provides him hope. Whereas the old age of his parents is negative since they are close to home, Sal can represent African Americans as foreign others who are simultaneously ancient (and therefore magical and wise) and young (the site of salvation) at the same time. Later, as Sal and Dean travel through Mexico, Sal likewise represents the indigenous peoples they meet as simultaneously "primitive" and "childlike."[2] As Edward Said famously suggested, the representations of Orientalism always say more about the political desires of the colonizer than anything about the colonized; Sal had been looking for his fountain of youth and he found it.[3] After everything, it was in the "New World" all along. The colonizers simply had to build it first.

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[1] For example, see Kerouac, *On the Road*, 213.
[2] Kerouac, *On the Road*, 180.

As Sal's journey of self-discovery continues, he learns the power of several other ideas as well that would become important parts of the Buddhist American convert frame of meaning. The idealization of youth is closely connected to organicity, spontaneity, and change. Sal raises change to the level of the sublime when he thinks, "We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, *move*."[1] To be stationary and static is to be lifeless and dead. This value is ultimate. Change is sacred. The world must change, the older adults must lose their cultural and political power, and youth must become the new leaders.

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[1] Kerouac, *On the Road*, 180.

[2] Kerouac, *On the Road*, 280, 301.

[3] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 4-9.

In this new age, this utopia of the young, the political structure of the world will be supported by another supreme value—freedom. The ideal world is one where no one is bound to anyone or anything—a land without norms beyond the norm to be free. Dean tells Sal: "You spend a whole life of non-interference with the wishes of others, including politicians and the rich, and nobody bothers you and you cut along and make it your own way."[2] Sal approves of this sentiment and summarizes it as the "Tao" way.[3] To be young is to be free, not bound to governments, social norms, or family responsibilities.

Of course, this is an ideal, and there is a great deal of ambivalence in Kerouac's books, including *On the Road*, concerning trying to escape social norms and the pressure to have a family. Dean continually vacillates between a desire for a family and feeling trapped by his responsibilities. Dean proposes to a few women, and has several children, but despite internal and external pressure, never stays with his families. He must be free. But competing with this norm is an equally strong norm in American life—the closely knit nuclear family that emerged as an entrenched cultural ideal during this period. While Sal does not have any children (that he is aware of anyway), he also vacillates between being jealous of and repulsed by Dean's many families.[1] Mirroring a common theme across many of Kerouac's protagonists, Sal is also anxious and uncomfortable around children. The competing norms surrounding the idealization of free youth on one hand, and family life on the other, reveal a great deal of friction at the heart of a new generation's life. Sal partly idealizes cross-country treks because he is restless. Told by his parents' generation that home is the ground of value, when he realizes that he'll "never be" home, he makes homelessness itself the new value.[1]

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[1] Kerouac, *On the Road*, 134.

[2] Kerouac, *On the Road*, 251.

[3] Kerouac, *On the Road*, 251.

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[1] Kerouac, on the other hand, did have one child in his lifetime with his second wife Joan Haverty: a daughter named Jan. Joan became pregnant in 1951, while Kerouac was still working on a full draft of *On the Road*. Kerouac refused to recognize Jan as his child for several years until a blood test proved his paternity. Continuing the long string of abandoned children in this history, Kerouac disowned his daughter and she only met him twice.

But while this reversal is somewhat successful, the success is only partial, and anxiety and ambivalence over family life permeates Kerouac's texts. Given that Kerouac's writing period was in the early stages of the new wave of Buddhist American convert identity formation, and the majority of converts would both become adults and convert after the 1950s, this fear of families and children remained largely abstract and unrealized. Only later in the 1980s-1990s when many of these converts began having children of their own did this fear become something more than anxiety over unrealized possibilities. At that point, the return and realization of this anxiety would demand new action in order to maintain the hegemonic frameworks that form converts' identities.

As one progresses further chronologically into Kerouac's corpus, the overall structure of the spiritualized idealization of youth in the books becomes more overt and complex. For example, in his semi-autobiographical novel *The Dharma Bums* (1958), the protagonist Ray (Kerouac) also learns from a mentor character, but this time, the mentor is not a con man, but rather, the well-read Buddhist convert and naturalist Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder).[1] Over the course of the book, while traveling around the country, Ray learns about Buddhism, nature, and enlightenment from Japhy.

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[1] Kerouac, *On the Road*, 255.

Early in the text, in one of the most famous stories within *The Dharma Bums*, Japhy, Ray, and another older friend set out to climb Matterhorn Peak in California. Japhy convinces Ray that the trek will change his life because he will only be able to encounter enlightenment away from the city and among the purity of nature: only among the "inconceivable prehistoric mountains" will he find true awakening.[2] Japhy is a naturalist and Romantic and believes salvation can be found away from the complications of wealth and urban humanity among the ancient wisdom of the natural world. When Japhy finds out that Ray has never really left urban environments except to travel between them, Japhy decides Ray must set a new destination. Ray will be transformed on a mountain top. The organic—movement, change, ever-reborn youth and novelty among a field of antiquity—is salvation.

In the story, readers get their first real glimpse of Kerouac's representation of Japhy as a character. Unlike Dean in *On the Road* who is constantly described as the embodiment of youthful revolt, Japhy—nearly a decade younger than Ray—is regularly described as old, wrinkled, and wise. On the hike up Matterhorn Peak, while Japhy seems to have boundless energy, he is described as an old and mysterious sage bringing along his student Ray on the path to enlightenment. Japhy is like one "of the old Zen Masters of China out in the wilderness."[1] As Kerouac describes Japhy and the surrounding antiquity of the environment, the two blend into one ancient source of wisdom and foreign salvation. For a variety of moments scattered throughout the text, Japhy becomes less of a character, and more of a well of natural spiritual power Ray can draw from.

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[1] Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*.

[2] Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 50.

It does not matter that Japhy is a young white American who grew up on a farm in the Pacific Northwest—he is the monk, the master of the tale. In fact, at later points in the text, Ray describes having visions in which Japhy is an old Asian monk, more "Oriental" than "Orientals."[2] Not only does this display the flexibility within the monk-convert paradigm, but it also reveals the tendency in the paradigm to simplify and eliminate the danger that the others silenced by shrouds of racialized difference will discover how to speak back. To avoid this risk, the power of otherness that the paradigm exploits in the process of Orientalism can more easily be reflected back upon the self-same and white converts. White Americans spiritualized to be Asian are more convenient monks than any real Asian monks.

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[1] Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 56.
[2] Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 155.

In a conversation between Ray and Japhy later in the book, the characters suggest that while the ancient roots of the East might hold the key to salvation, the modern East had potentially lost its way:

> "What are you going to wear in the monastery, anyway?"
>
> "Oh man, the works, old T'ang Dynasty style things long black floppy with huge droopy sleeves and funny pleats, make you feel real Oriental."
>
> "Alvah says that while guys like us are all excited about being real Orientals and wearing robes, actual Orientals over there are reading surrealism and Charles Darwin and mad about Western business suits."
>
> "East'll meet West anyway. Think what a great world revolution will take place when East meets West finally, *and it'll be guys like us that can start the thing*. Think of millions of guys all over the world with rucksacks on their backs tramping around the back country and hitchhiking and bringing the word down to everybody."[1]

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[1] Italics mine. Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 155.

If both the East and West have lost their way, Buddhist American converts will be the heroes that bring salvation of spontaneous freedom back to the world again. For Kerouac, this revolution is not violent, organized, or even overtly political. Activism and institutional politics are both part of the same problem. The true revolution is personal—the true revolution begins within.[1]

In the relationship between the two main characters in the text, since Japhy plays the role of the old monk (albeit with American convert roots), Ray fully embraces the role of the youthful and skeptical convert on the journey toward enlightenment. On the climb up Matterhorn Peak, Ray learns to see the spiritual beauty and power in nature. His mind, however, is not the only thing that is transformed. Complaining of health maladies and aging bones earlier in the text, as Ray leaves the urban environment and enters a vivacious and wild new world in nature, he becomes more energetic, charged, and purposeful. He describes later how his feet pain temporarily left him. He feels young again. Alive again. As he ascends, he discovers that Japhy has shown him true salvation: the mountain of youth.

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[1] Kerouac's rejection of organized political activism in the name of personal spirituality was embodied by many (although not all) Buddhist American converts in later decades. The conflation of political revolutions with personal spirituality had the aftereffect of delegitimizing collective actions by marginalized groups seeking actual political changes in regards to racism, sexism, heteronormativity, militarism, and colonialism during the same era. Steven M. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 95-175.

As if in a parable, as they leave their physically older friend at the base of the mountain, Ray—the convert transformed to be young again—follows his master, Japhy—the ancient monk with mysterious energy—up the last ascent. Ray comes close to the top of the peak, but eventually stops, not out of physical inability, but because of his fear of falling. He has come so high! He is afraid to lose everything—afraid to die. Ray cowers on a ledge. Only the enigmatic Japhy reaches the top. As Japhy descends, however, and returns to proximity with Ray, Ray feels his energy return as he experiences "satori": "you can't fall off a mountain."[1] With this insight, Ray leaps up realizing he cannot lose anything, and charges down the mountain with reckless abandon. Like nature, he is invincible, motion itself, and change will never die. With new insight, he will always be young.

The political and cultural rebellion of Kerouac functions through the spiritualization of an idealized concept of youth. It is not just that the idealization of youth is a convenient concept to compete with the aging cultural hegemony of their parents' generation.

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[1] Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 64.

It is also the presentation of youth as a religious experience that makes possible the seemingly magical notion of continually renewed youth. The rhetorical bonding of youth and religion give the two concepts new power that is more than the sum of the parts. By touching the power of spiritualized nature and monastic figures, converts are continually remade to be young again. As Ray shows, one does not have to reach the top of a mountain to be transformed. The journey up the mountain suffices.

At the very end of the novel, Ray ascends a mountain again, this time alone and as a fire lookout for an entire season. Here, among the "marshmallow roof of clouds," and the "beautiful cerulean pool[s]," Ray no longer needs a teacher.[1] Or, perhaps more properly, by this point Ray realizes that the mountain and his teacher are spiritually the same. After many days of meditative practices and communion with nature, Ray sets off to climb down his temporary but truly felt real home, Desolation Peak. And there he sees a vision of Japhy on the mountain, as part of the mountain.

> And suddenly it seemed I saw that unimaginable little Chinese bum standing there, in the fog, with that expressionless humor on his seemed face. It wasn't the real-life Japhy of rucksacks and Buddhism

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[1] Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 180.

> studies and big mad parties at Corte Madera, it was the realer-than-life Japhy of my dreams, and he stood there saying nothing. "Go away, thieves of the mind!" he cried down the hollows of the unbelievable Cascades. It was Japhy who had advised me to come here and now though he was seven thousand miles away in Japan answering a meditation bell (a little bell he later sent to my mother in the mail, just because she was my mother, a gift to please her) he seemed to be standing on Desolation Peak by the gnarled old rocky trees certifying and justifying all that was here. "Japhy," I said out loud, "I don't know when we'll meet again or what'll happen in the future, but Desolation, Desolation, I owe so much to Desolation, thank you forever for guiding me to the place where I learned all. Now comes the sadness of coming back to cities and I've grown two months older and there's all that humanity of bars and burlesque shows and gritty love, all upsidedown in the void God bless them, but Japhy you and me forever we know, O ever youthful, O ever weeping."[1]

As he descends the spiritual mountain among the clouds, he is temporarily afraid that his age will rapidly catch up with him. But he is comforted. His relationship with Japhy—his master, his Buddha—

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[1] Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 186.

and the monk-convert paradigm will sustain him. He will remain young forever. At the time, it does not matter that his understanding of youth is a spiritualized idealization, or that his representation of the mountain is a romanticized and purified fiction, or even that he knows that the Japhy of his "dreams" is not the "real-life" Japhy, but ultimately is just a fantasy. The power of fantasies—of youth and spirituality here—are bigger than reality. They are the fantasies and gods of his own making, and with power at his fingertips, reality does not seem to matter anymore. And yet, someday, reality catches up with fantasy. Dean's children catch up with Dean, Ray's anxieties over family no longer remain abstract, and Rahula confronts Siddhartha and demands his inheritance. And in these moments, we must wonder: is the mountain of fantasized youth truly insurmountable? Can converts—the real masters of self-control, freedom, and change—adapt when confronted by new youth and the competing social norms of family? What happens when the monk-convert paradigm meets a true child's face?

Shifting Hegemonies, Part 1

Parenting Manuals

In her important 2013 article "'Give Me My Inheritance': Western Buddhists Raising Buddhist Children," Kristen Scheible examines the slowly expanding but still underdeveloped topic of Buddhist family life in the West.[1] Scheible focuses her analysis on the rapidly growing collection of books on parenting for Western Buddhist audiences. This genre first emerged in the middle of the 1990s, as significant amounts of Buddhist converts from the 1950s-1970s began to have children. Books like Sandy Eastoak's 1994 text *Dharma Family Treasures* and Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn's 1997 text *Everyday Blessings* became bestsellers nearly over night as Buddhist American convert demands for resources for parenting were satisfied.[2] By the time Scheible published her article two decades later, dozens of books, articles and blog posts defined a vast genre. Given the popularity of the genre, considering common themes across these books has much to teach us about dominant views of parenting and children among the Buddhist American convert community.

Scheible argues that the defining feature of this genre is an attempt to walk a narrow path between the parents educating their children about Buddhism and avoiding coercively indoctrinating their children.[1] On one hand, given that many of these convert parents intentionally tried to leave behind the religious and cultural traditions of their parents that they felt had been forced upon them as children, now that these converts have children of their own, they are often quite anxious about repeating the past. On the other hand, these parents feel as though they have encountered something of great value that they wish to pass onto their children.

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[1] Kristin Scheible, "'Give Me My Inheritance': Western Buddhists Raising Buddhist Children," in *Little Buddhas*, ed. Vanessa R. Sasson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 428-52.

[2] Sandy Eastoak, ed., *Dharma Family Treasures* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1994); Myla Kabat-Zinn and Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Everyday Blessings* (New York: Hyperion, 1997).

The common solution to this difficult maze presented by the manuals is twofold. First, these parents must stop viewing their children as burdens and barriers to serious practice.[2] Given that most convert parents trace their lineages through the Buddhist monastic traditions even as they strive to adapt monastic practices to a more flexible lay life, children are often seen as impediments to the rigors of this meditative life. To counter this tendency to view children this way, many Buddhist parenting manuals suggest that parents should see their children as opportunities to practice Buddhism. From changing diapers to learning to be patient through tantrums, the stresses of parenting can serve as moments to cultivate enlightenment.[1] From this viewpoint, children can even be understood as teachers and mentors.[2]

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[1] Scheible, 440.

[2] Scheible, 437-38.

Second, in order to avoid coercion and indoctrination, but still encourage active religious education, parents should model the ideals of Buddhism to their children.[3] This allows children, as they age and gradually become young adults with fully realized agency, to knowledgably decide for themselves when they are older what their religious identity should be. In this light, religious education can be seen as preparation for later culminating decisions as adults.

Citing Sharon Suh's excellent work on Korean American religious communities, Scheible argues that her findings cut across American cultures and are not confined to the predominantly white convert community because Suh has found that Korean American Buddhist communities share similar concerns with "parental ambivalence" over passing on their religion because of the valued importance of individual freedom.[4] Scheible concludes that all Buddhists in the United States share a similar dilemma with wanting to inculcate the value of freedom in their children alongside religious education about Buddhism.[1] The implication is that this new wave of Buddhist parenting manuals can reveal shared concerns and interests among all Buddhists in the United States.

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[1] Karen Maezen Miller, *Momma Zen* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2006), 3-8.

[2] Scheible, 434-38.

[3] Scheible, 440-42.

[4] Scheible, 444-45.

Scheible misreads Suh and the evidence, however, in making this assumption. While Suh does argue that Korean American Buddhist parents are ambivalent about passing on their traditions uncritically because of their affirmation of free individuality, Suh suggests this is true because of a complicated nexus of factors that simply have no bearing on white Buddhist convert family life.[2] Among other factors, Korean American Buddhists are pressured to naturalize to the best of their ability to racialized American norms (like absolute freedom and individuality) and struggle to maintain membership levels in the face of pressure from historically entrenched American Christian privilege as well as from Korean American Christian communities and social networks. In many cases, Asian-American Buddhist communities have old and well developed networks of religious education for their children that simply do not exist in Buddhist American convert communities—hence the need for a new genre of books in the first place. Ultimately, of course, we have no idea who reads popular Buddhist parenting manuals like *Everyday Blessings*. It is clear, however, that these books are marketed specifically to American convert audiences.[1] Many outright declare that they are for American convert parents. While it would not be the first time, it would be wrong to assume that a genre mostly written by and for Buddhist American converts has the ability to speak for every Buddhist. This is a case in which the same apparent words and emotions can mean radically different things in different contexts.

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[1] Scheible, 444-45.

[2] Sharon A. Suh, *Being Buddhist in a Christian World* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 3-7.

The genre can teach us about wider social dynamics beyond Buddhist American converts, but only to the extent that the genre serves as a viewpoint on these wider social dynamics from the dominant Buddhist American convert perspective. This position comes with many blind spots. The social critic must read between the lines and against the face value of these texts in order to recognize the power and privilege inherent in the worldview. As one example, this means recognizing the "secular" Buddhist parenting presented by the Kabat-Zinns as part of a lengthy colonial history driven by racist binaries that separated a universal philosophical Buddhist ideal constructed by Western and Asian elites from the supposedly superstitious "cultural baggage" practiced by non-elite Asian Buddhists.[1]

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[1] As one example, consider the vocabulary and rhetoric used in the introduction to the Kabat-Zinns' parenting guide. The reader is instructed to find "inner authority" in the process of "authoring" his or her own life, "create" the world "every day," and take part in the "hero's journey." The Kabat-Zinns also assume at several points throughout the text that reader-parents are still in the early stages of "self-discovery" in a new religious or spiritual tradition. Kabat-Zinn, and Kabat-Zinn, 13-21.

As one examines the parenting manuals closer, the popular concept that ideal Buddhist parenting amounts to threading a needle between indoctrination and no religious education at all is revealed to be an illusion with discomforting political implications. Comparing these books to Kerouac, there can be no doubt that something has changed—these books describe a reality of family life that was always just a terrifying fantasy in Kerouac's works. These books, while read by a similar audience, are written for that audience decades later, and the context has shifted. However, there is much continuity in values between representations of Buddhism in Kerouac and in the manuals. They may have aged and had children, but these Buddhist American converts still yearn for a life of unrestricted and unending youth and freedom.

One common thread in Buddhist parenting manuals is that parenting is principally about the parents' spiritual practice and journey. As we have seen, in order to counter the notion that children are barriers to rigorous practice, the authors claim parents should see their children as objects of practice, or even occasionally teachers. At other points, the authors claim that parents can feel young again by living vicariously through their children.[1] Ultimately, these views exacerbate the problem of making the children invisible as they only become worthwhile because of their instrumental value to the parents. Even if they are seen as teachers, they are assimilated to their parents' frame of meaning and the monk-convert paradigmatic lineage. The children's real Buddhist lineage from parent to child is erased. These children can be understood as zafus or monks, but cannot be seen as children.

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[1] Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn, 22-30; Donald S. Lopez, Jr., introduction to *Curators of the Buddha*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 6-8.

Likewise, by attempting to avoid the risk of indoctrination by "non-coercively" modeling Buddhist life, these manuals fail to recognize that passing on traditions and values to one's children is inevitable (if not predictable) and "indoctrination" serves merely as a normatively judgmental code word for this phenomenon. For this perspective, good values passed onto children are just a matter of life, and bad values passed onto children through the very same processes are negative and amount to indoctrination. Buddhist American convert parents also discipline their children by teaching them to value absolute freedom and internalize culturally contingent assumptions about childhood, adulthood, and religion. These parents reward their children's consent to these values and punish dissent. In a woven web of parental discipline, they strive to reshape their children in their own self-imagined image. These practices are concealed as active parental discipline in part because the parents believe the practices define the normatively correct way to raise children—much like whiteness is often not defined as an ethnicity because it is assumed to be *the* normative ethnicity. Furthermore, these practices and values are not commonly defined as discipline because of a partial contradiction in the logic of the values—how can you indoctrinate your child to value freedom? The parental resolution to this problem is simple—children are not agents with freedom, they are simply objects to be trained for adulthood—but this disciplinary solution only has power when it remains unnamed.

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[1] For example, consider: Miller, 52-58.

No doubt there are relative levels of coercion, and parents should rightly strive to avoid particular forms of coercion, but such a discussion is beside the point. The idea that Buddhist convert parents can be guided by a completely non-coercive parenting style is a politically useful, but ultimately false concept. The parenting manuals themselves make this obvious. By modeling ideal Buddhist life, parents teach their children that freedom and autonomy should be absolute values. They also teach their children that children—because agency emerges in adulthood—have no current value and only have potential value depending on how they exercise their freedom later in life. Some guides recommend understanding children as an appendage or extension of the parent's identity, and other guides recommend the seemingly contradictory notion that parents should model autonomy to children and give them (albeit bounded) freedom, space, and agency so that they can be like little versions of their parents.[1] Despite the apparent contradiction, what all of these guides share in common is the assumption that these children have no separate identities or values from their parents, or the framework of autonomous freedom and the monk-convert paradigm that establishes their religious identities, visibility, and social power. These children can only be visible and valuable to the extent that they conform to their parents' frame of mind. Contrary to the parents' hopes and desires, their practices and beliefs reveal quintessential coercive parenting.

When both these parents and guides regularly ask—as summarized by Scheible—"Is there such a thing as a Buddhist child?" and "Does a Buddhist child need to self-identify as such?" they present very troubling questions as completely innocuous.[1] The questions make a litany of problematic assumptions both about ideal religion and childhood that can only function because they are left unsaid. Why is it assumed that religion is always chosen? Why is it assumed that children cannot make choices? Why is adulthood the norm for religion? This position is so firmly committed to a set of unjustified foundational values it closes off the possibility of recognizing differences and the other. What if a child declared to her parents that she was Buddhist? These parents would need to patronizingly explain away ("she doesn't know better" or "she'll really choose when she's older") rather than truly hear their child's words. They can only see their own reflection in their child. The child—and her religion—remain invisible.

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[1] Miller, 9-12, 116-21; Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn, 49-62.

In some cases, Buddhist parenting manuals do not only render the children invisible, but they also erase Buddhist traditions and narratives that have the potential to be reappropriated by second-generation Buddhist Americans for the purpose of empowerment. In one extreme but particularly revealing case, Charlotte Kasl's popular *If the Buddha Had Kids* asks what Siddhartha would have been like

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[1] Scheible, 445.

if he had been a parent, subtly rewriting the assumed normative narrative of the Buddha with a single conditional conjunction.[1] In the case of reality, Kasl erroneously assumes that Siddhartha did not have any children, so that in the case of imagination, she can conjure parenting norms of her own making without any resistance from Buddhist traditions about Rahula. At first glance, this blatant and ahistorical fictionalization of a solitary Buddha figure with no family connections might appear surprising, and yet, placed within a wider history of child-erasure that can be traced back through Kerouac, there is ultimately nothing shocking about it. With this erasure, Kasl not only articulates the religious ideal of Buddhist American converts, but rewrites reality to reflect that ideal. From this viewpoint, children and families are obstacles to the true religious life because they impede the unrestricted freedom of the enlightened life. That Kasl believes that the problem of children can be overcome is not the point; the point is that children are defined as a problem. Furthermore, parenting manuals like *If the Buddha Had Kids* actually exacerbate the sharp power differential between parents and children by rewriting history and Buddhist traditions. As Rahula vanishes, and Siddhartha becomes the ideal of the free and individualized ascetic, second-generation Buddhist Americans lose potential connections to traditions that might bind them to the wider community. Instead, they are told that they are exceptional—outside the entire history of Buddhism. There is no Buddhist like them. They are alone. Forgotten. They are against the dominant rules and norms of Buddhism, and therefore have no right to representation—no right to be heard.

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[1] Charlotte Kasl, *If the Buddha Had Kids* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

As a credit to her insight, Scheible argues that any portrait of Buddhist family life in the United States among families with convert parents is incomplete without also presenting accounts of family life by the children.[1] Such a call is critically important, and my work in Chapter 4 and 5 is an attempt to lay the initial groundwork for such a project. Without such work, we are only left with the parents' words. While useful, as we have seen, when taken at face value, these accounts amount to a room of mirrors with only one endlessly repeated reflection. If we want a full picture of new developments within Buddhist convert identity in the wake of new family pressures, however, ordinary mirrors alone will not do. We must turn to the fun house mirrors of pop culture to understand the full breadth and cultural power of Buddhist American converts' influence.

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[1] However, in her concluding words, Scheible echoes the all too common problematic assumption in the field of Buddhism in the United States (which I outlined in Chapter 2) that there is simply not enough evidence (i.e. not enough children yet) about second-generation Buddhist Americans to discuss yet. Scholars must continue to wait. She also problematically assumes that Buddhist convert parents are the subject-norm: "But the reflexive piece—reflection not on one's own experience of 'dharmic parenting' but instead on the experience of this generation's 'children of the Buddha'—will have to come later." Scheible, 452.

Shifting Hegemonies, Part 2

Little Buddha

"Each man is the writer of his own script."[1]

Just as the first wave of Buddhist parenting manuals came out in the middle of the 1990s, three major large budget films on Buddhism intended for wide audiences were also released.[2] As we will see, this was not a coincidence—something important had shifted among both Buddhist American converts and the popular representation of Buddhism. The dominant face of American Buddhism—white converts—was aging and becoming increasingly mainstream. As the aging reality became increasingly distant from past frozen idealizations of young adulthood, and more of these converts had children, the old narratives began to crack under the stress of a new situation and new demands.

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[1] Fabien Gerard and T. Jefferson Kline, "The Earth Is My Witness: An Interview with Bernardo Bertolucci on *Little Buddha*," in *Bernardo Bertolucci: Interviews*, ed. Fabien Gerard, T. Jefferson Kline, and Bruce Sklarew (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 215.

[2] Those films are: Bernardo Bertolucci's 1993 film *Little Buddha*, Jean-Jacques Annaud's 1997 film *Seven Years in Tibet*, and Martin Scorsese's 1997 film *Kundun*. *Little Buddha*; *Seven Years in Tibet*, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud (Mandalay Entertainment, 1997), DVD (Sony Pictures, 2004); *Kundun*, directed by Martin Scorsese (Touchstone Pictures, 1997), DVD (Buena Vista, 1998).

A resurgent interest in Tibetan Buddhism during this period provided the necessary support for reshaping the old dominant tropes and narratives that surrounded Buddhist American convert life. Following the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 and growing geopolitical strain between the United States and China, American fascination with Tibet exploded. High profile celebrity conversions—from Richard Gere to Steven Seagal—and a growing Western media interest in the fourteenth Dalai Lama helped to juxtapose the plight of a romanticized and heavily spiritualized Tibet over against a dangerous atheistic and communistic China. As Donald Lopez has noted, the romanticization of Tibet has a long and complicated history in the West, and this history provided the resources for novel obsession with Tibet.[1] A series of binaries have defined Western racialized representations of Tibet since the 19th century, as Western missionaries, authors, and spiritualists have written about an exotic "Shangri-la" simultaneously highly spiritual and superstitious, profound and primitive, peaceful and savage—the place on Earth that needed Western education and salvation the most, and yet, also the place on Earth that contained the secrets to the salvation of the West.

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[1] Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-La* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1-11.

These stereotypes were well-worn by use by the 1990s, but they were extremely useful as tools to critique China. Authors could exploit the denigrating sides of each binary to present Tibet as the helpless victim suffering under the cold and calculating Chinese military, while simultaneously describing all the harm the Chinese were doing as they damaged, destroyed, and terrorized the Tibetan physical and spiritual landscapes. These binaries served as the ideal tools to call for further Western intervention, and it should come as no surprise that much of the popular new material on Tibet called for such intervention, from calls for financial support to further United States government intervention.

One of the themes in this book, however, is that we all lose a great deal of the full geopolitical picture when we only focus on the obviously public political dimensions of specific cultural phenomena. In particular, by passing over the seemingly "private," "personal" or "familial" dimensions of cultural phenomena, we fail to recognize the ways that these latter dimensions are important parts of the full breath of everyday lived political worlds. Likewise, the importance of scholarly analysis of popular culture is also often dismissed by “common-sense” scholars who feel as though only analysis of the obviously brute public political realm is worth the effort. Popular culture and “private” realms are often dismissed as vapid, shallow, and apolitical. As we have seen, however, analysis of both of these realms shows us how dominant groups use these realms as seemingly apolitical spaces to maintain their dominance. Marginalized groups also use these spaces as sites for the mobilization of resistance. Popular culture and the family are both battlegrounds.

Taking this truth to heart allows us to consider again the full geopolitical ramifications of the resurgence of American interest in Tibet in the 1990s. Not only did this interest enable the positioning of American sentiment against China, but it also opened up a space for Buddhist American converts to rearticulate their—very political—personal stories as the dominance of the old tropes waned.

Bernardo Bertolucci’s 1993 film *Little Buddha* was the most important film in the new wave of interest in Tibet during this period. This was not because the film was the most successful of the films on Tibet; it was a total box office failure despite positive to mixed reviews. Of the major films on Tibet during this period, only *Seven Years in Tibet* was financially successful. While box office success does say something about the ability (or lack thereof) for a film to adequately tap into and represent a particular zeitgeist, for my analysis here, the success and reception of the films is less important than the initial impetus to create the films in the first place. There are, of course, important and relevant reasons that need to be analyzed why *Seven Years in Tibet* was successful and *Little Buddha* was not. For instance, only in *Seven Years in Tibet* was the main protagonist both white and played by a well-known white actor (Brad Pitt). Of the two primary leads in *Little Buddha*, one was a recent crossover actor (Chris Isaak) and the other was in brownface (Keanu Reeves). *Kundun* effectively has no white characters at all.

As we have already seen, the cultural dominance of particular narratives is closely tied to the dominant (by race, gender, etc.) audience being able to envision themselves as the hero-protagonist in those stories. While the case of *Little Buddha* is somewhat more complicated in this regard than *Seven Years in Tibet*, this participatory envisioning plays an important part in the narrative of the former film as well.[1]

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[1] While I do not focus on the film here, it is important to note that the main character in *Seven Years in Tibet* struggles with anxiety over being an absent father throughout his journey of self-discovery in Tibet (thus repeating the "ethereal absent child"

I am less interested in the particular popularity of each of these films, however, because I am not so interested in their success in meeting new cultural demands as I am in uncovering the particularities of those cultural demands in the first place.[1] By

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motif often present in Kerouac's works). The film hints at a moment of reconciliation between the father and his son at the end of the movie, but ultimately, much like in *Little Buddha*, the child is barely depicted in the film and functions more as an objectified plot device for the spiritual transformation of the father than as a subject in his own right.

[1] Critics might object that if I am focused on the production-side (rather than reception-side) of the film, it is rather odd to choose a British-French-Italian supported film directed by the Italian Bertolucci for my analysis. While my consideration in this book does focus on Buddhism in the United States, it is important to note that there are important continuities in the dominance of the monk-convert paradigm and marginalization of second-generation Buddhists in both the United States and Europe. More work needs to be done on second-generation Buddhists in Europe to make further comparisons. Further, as my analysis has shown, any reflection on representations of Buddhism worldwide must wrestle with the dominance of American popular culture within those representations given American political and cultural power around the world. The film, however, is more American in design than an initial glance might suggest, as the film history shows. As he was filming, Bertolucci was constantly in negotiations with Miramax over the plot of the film, and ultimately a special cut had to be released of the film solely for American audiences. Bertolucci also tried to tap specifically into the American Buddhist situation throughout the narrative, as most of the film is set in the United States. While there can be no doubt the film is politically global in scope, it is also thoroughly American. As we have seen, the bonding between global and American political dynamics in the popular cultural representations of Buddhism in the United States is an essential

considering the first film in this wave—an arguably rougher, less polished film—we can see better the specifics of how Buddhist American converts were forced to reinvent their politically charged narratives after being confronted by their aging selves in the mirror and their younger children beneath their feet. As an early attempt to resolve these developing problems, *Little Buddha* serves as a helpful test case for examining this shifting reality because of (and not despite) its failures. The creative fumbling for new solutions as well as the critical failures in the narrative demonstrate as much, if not more, about the continuities and changing demands in the representation of Buddhism during this period as later more successful and polished films might.

Little Buddha was both designed and marketed as a family movie that was children-friendly. At the time, Bertolucci said that he wanted to tell an epic about Buddhism that children would enjoy.[1] Many critics panned this decision and argued that the film lacks sophistication and the narrative is inconsistent precisely because it was made for children.[2] Betraying

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part of the mechanisms behind white Buddhist American convert dominance.

[1] Gerard and Kline, 210-12.

[2] For example, consider Roger Ebert's review of *Little Budd-ha*: Roger Ebert, "*Little Buddha*," last modified May 25, 1994, http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/little-buddha-1994.

the Buddhist American convert anxiety over children and families that can be tied back to Kerouac, the sentiment is simple: a film for children was not a film for adults.

The film begins in Bhutan, where the Tibetan Lama Norbu is told that a potential candidate for his reincarnated teacher has been identified in Seattle, Washington. Norbu and several other Tibetans travel to Seattle to meet the boy and discover if he is truly the reincarnated Lama. After meeting the boy (Jesse), Norbu asks his parents (Lisa and Dean) if he can get to know him better and teach him a little about Buddhism. The main plot of the film is interspersed with flashbacks to ancient India, as Jesse learns about Siddhartha (played by Reeves) and his journey toward enlightenment. Eventually, after finding out that there are other child-candidates that might be the reincarnated Lama, Jesse and his father travel to Nepal and Bhutan in order to discover final answers about Jesse's identity. Jesse meets the other children, and after hearing the ending of Siddhartha's story, it is announced that Jesse and the other children are all reincarnated aspects of the Lama together.

Despite problematic dismissals of the film for being a simplistic children's movie, the plot and aesthetics of the film are immensely creative and complex. The film juggles two interwoven plots simultaneously, asking audiences to follow both seemingly separate plots until the film radically breaks the boundaries of realism toward the end by integrating the actual viewing bodies of Jesse and the children into the final flashback scene when Siddhartha reaches enlightenment. The film is also conceptually complex as well, as the characters wrestle with topics from suicide and death to the political morality of cross-cultural encounters.

Given the narrative and philosophical complexity of the film, we are left to speculate what specifically Bertolucci had in mind when he described the film as a children-friendly family film. It is heartening to see that Bertolucci resisted the problematic cultural stereotype that "simple" must be associated with "child." And yet, for Bertolucci, the film was made, at least in part, for children. How was it made for children? Bertolucci has never provided an answer to this question. The most reasonable explanation in this case, however, was that the film—at first glance—centered around children as the primary protagonists in the narrative. Not every film about children is for children. But in this case, given the lack of evidence for any other plausible explanation, it is fair to assume that Bertolucci assumed that white American and European children would identify with Jesse primarily (since he is white) and the other children and their enchantment with the Buddhist story as they watched the film.

Ultimately, however, the problem with this explanation—and the great failure and success of this film—is despite the ways the film was intentionally designed and marketed, *Little Buddha* is not a film for whole families or children. Bertolucci attempted to make a film that appealed to both children and adults, but the structural dominance of converts within representations of Buddhism constricted the narrative and character possibilities to fit converts' political desires alone. A close examination of the film reveals that while the children serve merely as objects and plot devices, Dean (the father)—as the archetypal convert—is not only the focus of the film, but is the only character who displays agency and the ability to change as the film progresses. As the children fade into the background, Dean is revealed to be the hero of the tale.

Dean is intellectual, skeptical, empirical and searching. His home—and the rest of Seattle—is cold and uninviting—missing something. All of the sets feel empty, and the entire environment is shot in blue-hued tones. Dean becomes close with Norbu, and while Jesse is hearing stories about Siddhartha, one gets the sense that Dean is the one who is actually learning about Buddhism through his conversations with Norbu. Norbu plays the role of the Oriental monk well—old and sick, cryptically wise, and ultimately non-threatening—as Dean becomes closer to his teacher. Tellingly, Dean is the only character that is deeply moved when Norbu dies at the end of the movie. The driving mechanism of the film is the monk-convert paradigm, and a comparison of tropes in the film with earlier versions of the structure in the 1950s-1970s reveals a significant amount in common. *Little Buddha* is principally a film about an adult character who undergoes a spiritual journey of self-discovery. It is a film about how the monk-convert relationship enables a convert to become a powerful and morally justified agent in the world—a hero.

As one looks closer, however, one notices that new contexts have forced adjustments in the overall structure of the monk-convert paradigm. Anxiety has become a defining feature of the convert's life. As we have seen, anxiety—over family and competing generational norms—was present in Kerouac and earlier representations of the monk-convert relationship, but by the 1990s, this anxiety had become the dominant theme. Suddenly, the archetypal convert had become anxious about the possibility of threats at every juncture.

Much of *Little Buddha* can be read as a "death of the patriarch" tale—a kind of narrative that became increasingly popular after the 1960s and 1970s feminist and civil rights movements as white males felt their power increasingly threatened. Throughout the film, Dean feels powerless. Early in the film, when the monks visit Jesse, Dean, and Lisa for the first time, the cinematography, music and reactions by the American characters suggest the monks should be interpreted as foreign and dangerous. The suggestion is that even the center of Dean's power—his home—is not safe. Dean initially reacts to the monks (and Lisa's interest in them) with disdain, and he eventually confronts Norbu for "kidnapping" his son.[1] At several points in the film, it is suggested that Dean's company is in financial trouble. He regularly argues with Lisa in early scenes, and Bertolucci's decision to focus on Lisa's pregnancy as surprising information at the end of the film suggests Dean should be read as a sexual failure in the beginning of the film as well. In short, in the beginning, Dean feels emasculated because he falls short of every American masculine norm. Dean cannot provide for his family, and he cannot protect his family. He cannot even control his family. He has lost all of his power. At first, Dean is a failed patriarch.

If *Little Buddha* was just a standard "death of the patriarch" narrative, it would not be particularly suggestive or unique. However, *Little Buddha* is the byproduct of the intersection of the "death of the patriarch" narrative with the popular representations of Buddhism discussed above. Because of the special status youth and age have been given within the history of popular representations of Buddhism in the United States, youth and age as themes take on a special weight within *Little Buddha* as a remaking of the "death of the patriarch" story.

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[1] *Little Buddha*, 46:33.

In the story, Dean is anxious about many things in his felt loss of power, but the driving plot line is that he is anxious about old age and death. Dean confronts his mortality and fragile hold on power when his best friend and business partner commits suicide in the middle of the film. When Dean hears of his friend's death he cries on a bridge in front of the backdrop of an indifferent city. It is only in this moment that Dean expresses strong emotion besides anger in the film. Initially showing great skepticism about Buddhism, it is at this point that Dean takes significant interest in the idea of reincarnation and repeatedly asks Norbu about the concept. The primary conflict in the film is Dean overcoming his skepticism, and embracing his hope and desire that reincarnation is true.

Norbu's death at the end of the film serves as a plot device for Dean's eventual transformation and acceptance of the doctrine of reincarnation. The plot of the film is deceptive because the audience is initially led to believe that the question of Jesse's identification as a Lama is the primary focus of the film. As Jesse and the other children fall further into the background, however, and Dean's process of reflection and self-discovery is revealed to be the locus of narrative development, it is easy to forget that children were in the movie at all. The climax of the film is not when Jesse and the other children are identified as the reincarnated Lama—the film proceeds for another thirty minutes after this scene. The climax and defining moment of the film is a doubling moment; the conflict of the movie begins with Dean's fear of death culminating in the death of his friend, and the conflict of the movie ends with the climax of Dean's acceptance of reincarnation after the death of Norbu.

The irony is palpable in these closing scenes because a doctrine that Dean finds comforting is in actuality the central problem that must be overcome in traditional Buddhism. The possibility that one would be born again and again until the end of time is not salvation in Buddhism; it is the ultimate horror that makes salvation necessary. Dean remains blind to this understanding throughout the entire film, because his understanding of reincarnation is rather different from the traditional Buddhist understanding of the concept. For Dean, reincarnation means that death, aging, and loss are all fundamentally illusions. Dean will never actually age. He will never die. The social structure that supports his power will always remain the same. Dean overcomes his fear of the loss of his patriarchal privilege by accepting the belief that he can never lose his power or his life. He will remain the essence and force of change; in other words, nothing will ever change.

Alongside this redefinition of reincarnation, Dean finds his peace and power once again by fantasizing about being young again. After hitting bottom after his friend's suicide, and after resisting Norbu's many requests to let Jesse travel to Bhutan earlier in the film, Dean has a sudden change of heart and decides that he will go to Bhutan with Norbu and Jesse. Hearkening back to Kerouacian geographical treks, Dean decides he will find himself in a journey around the world. Lisa is shocked and angry with Dean when he tells her his decision. Originally, Lisa had expressed more interest in Norbu, Buddhism, and Jesse's potential identity. She tells Dean she feels blindsided and pushed aside and in some of the most self-aware words in the film, she tells Dean: "you are taking the adventure away from me."[1] After these words, Lisa vanishes for the remaining half of the film until the final scene. But Dean does not just seize the center stage away from Lisa halfway through the film; at first, Norbu requests that Jesse be allowed to travel to Bhutan with no mention of his parents accompanying him. When Dean effectively invites himself on this trip, the subtext is clear. The trip is no longer about Jesse. The trip is about Dean's journey to conversion.

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[1] It is important to note that the overall structure of the monk-convert paradigm is thoroughly gendered and patriarchal, and generally has been throughout its history. For instance, patriarchal and sexist themes pertaining to the domination, control, and objectification of women permeate Kerouac's texts, and many of them continue to echo throughout films from later periods like *Little Buddha*. Furthermore, patriarchal societal norms in the United States have allowed many privileged fathers to pursue the ideal of absolute freedom at the core of the monk-convert paradigm, while mothers who have done so have been disparaged as being irresponsible, immoral, and maternal failures. Many scholars and practitioners perpetuate a binary between a sexist East and a feminist West, and use this false dichotomy to

This journey is a fantasy about jumping back in time and becoming young again. As Dean continues to learn from his teacher Norbu on the trip, Norbu is presented as increasingly ill and old in order to signify by contrast Dean's youth. Recall that Kerouac's idealizations of youth were part of a wider strategy by converts to counter an aging generational hegemony. As a generation of converts aged,

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perpetuate colonial power relationships by suggesting that "Eastern" Buddhism must undergo significant moral and political transformation that only the West can successfully achieve. The inherent patriarchal nature of the monk-convert paradigm, revealed in popular narratives like *The Dharma Bums* and *Little Buddha*, should give these scholars and practitioners pause, however, as neither gender relations among Buddhist American convert communities in reality nor many of the popular representations of Buddhist American convert life match this constructed binary-ideal. The West is not the mystical and pure moral high ground uniquely able to transmogrify Buddhism for a more just, feminist future, and Buddhist American converts are not the heroes they understand themselves to be in this gendered tale. *Little Buddha*, 63:47.

dissonance between the rhetoric and reality often demanded a shift in tactics. The idealization of youth became increasingly spiritualized. Aging Buddhist American converts write about being “young at heart,” and meditation making one “young again.” Echoing Dean’s choice, Buddhist parenting manuals describe living vicariously through one’s children to feel young again. Even the boundaries of youth have shifted as this generation of converts has aged, transforming forty- to sixty-year-olds that were once the aged and entrenched enemy in Kerouac’s time to a period of extended youth. All of these tactics in the spiritualized reshaping of the idealization of youth and organicity appear in the film. Just before Dean decides to convert and believe in reincarnation, Norbu tells him the most pivotal words in his apparent transformation: “Children. We are all children.”[1] There is no need to focus on the real and complex children in the film or the world if the value of an idealized childhood is universalized for the purposes of an entrenched, if aging, hegemony and the maintenance of cultural power.

And yet despite shifting contexts and new emerging threats, *Little Buddha* is nothing more than a fantasized time machine, a nostalgic yearning for a past fading away. This is made obvious by the fact that while generational conflict is present in the film, it is not a conflict between a convert father and his child, but rather, between a disapproving father obsessed with political power and wealth and a rebellious countercultural convert son. As to the former, any potential conflict between Dean and his family is erased as Lisa and Jesse are pushed more and more to the margins of the narrative.

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[1] *Little Buddha*, 101:35.

This means that the primary relational conflict in the film is not in the present day storyline, but rather in the flashback reimagining of Siddhartha's life. In this storyline, Siddhartha is transformed to fit within the common tropes and characteristics of a modern Buddhist American convert. While the story begins with his birth, after a brief scene during Siddhartha's infancy in which an old and cryptic ascetic predicts Siddhartha will be a great spiritual hero, and his craven father insists he will be a powerful king, the plot quickly fast forwards to Siddhartha as a muscular and fit young adult. Rejecting his father's desires for control and material wealth, Siddhartha confronts his father and tells him that his "love has become a prison."[1] Much like in Kerouac, Siddhartha displays anxiety concerning his responsibilities to tradition and family, looking noticeably pained when his father tries to get him to stay by telling him that if he leaves he will have betrayed his newborn son: "you too are a father. You too have a duty."[1] Siddhartha is able to waive this responsibility away, however, because his family, and especially his son, remain completely ethereal throughout the film. His son is never shown. There is no reason to show him given the logic of the narrative. Like in Kerouac, children are not people; representations of family are actively constructed as remaining just possibilities—dangers—and not realities. As such, Siddhartha is able to leave on a journey of self-discovery while remaining a hero who has not broken his responsibilities. His journey toward enlightenment is presented as the most responsible choice because by searching for himself he will help the entire world.

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[1] *Little Buddha*, 48:25.

In both storylines, mimicking earlier values seen in Kerouac, enlightenment and salvation are equated with absolute and unrestricted freedom. When Siddhartha tells his father that he must abandon his son and choose his "journey of awakening" for the sake of saving everyone, he tells him that he is looking for "freedom."[2] Siddhartha balks at the norms and traditions that try to bind him to his family because he should be free to live the life of his choosing regardless of the consequences. In the modern-day storyline, when Dean asks about meditation, he is told that it is like "setting your mind free like a bird."[1] The film is part of a broader trend in the modern reconstruction of Buddhism as concerning the self-aware agent-self.[2] What this film reveals is that in order to succeed, this transformation must be morally coded. The freedom to self-define, change, and develop—to be organic—cannot just be a fact of the world—it must be the very definition of the heroic.

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[1] *Little Buddha*, 50:15.
[2] *Little Buddha*, 56:44.

What *Little Buddha* also reveals, however, is while the success of this absolute value hinges on its rhetorical universalization, in reality, not everyone gets to be a hero—not everyone gets to be free. As Jesse, the other children, Lisa, and even the monk-figure Norbu fade within the picture, only one hero is left. We are not told what happens to Rahula (unnamed in the film) when he is abandoned by his father. The children in the film will not be saved by their fathers' actions. They are buried by them. Their fathers' freedom comes at their expense. As if vampires, the fathers drain their children's screen time, their agency and power, their identities, even their youth. Within the converts' supreme valuation of absolute freedom, children are not a concern because—given dominant modern representations of children—children are not understood to have agency. The only times Dean sees his son, he sees a reflection of himself and his own values; Norbu can only persuade Dean to consider allowing Jesse to travel to Bhutan by telling him that Jesse will have the ability to "decide when he's older" whether he wants to be a monk.[1] Only adults can be true free individuals, only free individuals can be true converts, and only converts can be true Buddhists. Converts are still represented as youthful adults, vivacious, fit, and powerful—in complete control of their destinies. Their children are too young and inconvenient—someday they might be free adults, free to choose Buddhism at that point—as converts—but at the present moment they are nothing but potential. In the present, all that remain at the level of representation of these children are husks; tools and objects to justify the moral transformation of the real protagonists of the film.

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[1] *Little Buddha*, 64:58.

[2] McMahan, 195-99.

In this wider picture, characters like Dean and Siddhartha can insist that they are the heroes that will bring salvation, freedom and ever-lasting life to the world. Given new mounting realities of families and children, they can even nominally make parenting manuals and children-friendly family films. They can even preach values like selflessness that seemingly contradict their own egotistical and narcissistic heroic status.

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[1] *Little Buddha*, 46:07.

The truth is, however, that as much as they might have wished, they never left their old homes. They, like their fathers before them, grasp at their power and hegemony as new situations bring new challengers to their dominance. Even as Siddhartha mocks his father in the film for being obsessed with beauty and youth regimens in his old age, he does not realize that he is ultimately shouting at himself. When the demon Mara, posing as a reflection of Siddhartha, appears at the apex of Siddhartha's enlightenment in the film, a conversation between Mara and Siddhartha occurs:

> Mara—"You who go where no one else will dare, will you be my God?"
> Siddhartha—"Architect, finally I have met you. You will not rebuild your house again."
> Mara—"But I am your house and you live in me."
> Siddhartha—"Oh lord of my own ego, you are pure illusion. You do not exist."[1]

In the film, with Siddhartha's final words, Mara vanishes. But we must wonder: did Mara actually vanish? Could the illusion be that there are two figures in this scene? Could there be no separation between Mara and Siddhartha? The ego, the architect, the god, the demon, the hero are one and the same. There is only one character in this film. The only trick—the only sleight-of-hand in a children's film not really for children—is the hegemonic illusion that Samsara has been overcome. In reality, the ideal convert never left the house.

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[1] *Little Buddha*, 90:56.

Siddhartha's father was ultimately proven right. Siddhartha/Dean is the lord of the house, lord of the world. The father got his king.

On Political Games and Spiritual Prisons

Among other things, the history of Buddhist American converts through popular culture tells a cautionary tale about the structural limits of resistance depending on social position regardless of motive. Many of these converts rejected the cultural and religious hegemony of their parents' generation only to bring new life into the basic structure of that hegemony and the norms that make it up. In all of the narratives above, the converts describe an admittedly compelling peaceful utopia built on the ideals of freedom and equality. This spiritual utopia would be built upon the ashes of their fathers—the aging Western traditions of rule by violence, Christian empire, and selfish market-capitalist values, long ago set aflame, would be long forgotten. The only remainder, the only reminder, of this past left behind would be the statues of the heroes that brought about this utopia—Buddhist American converts, each and every one.

It is at this point that we must realize that the game was rigged from the very beginning, and that this ideal utopia and the corrupt ashes beneath it are one and the same thing. It is not just that Buddhist American converts are hypocritical—that they preach "universal" values like unrestricted freedom but then reserve such freedom only for themselves. Of course, this much is true. But the problem goes much deeper. The issue of adequate representation would be much easier to solve if this tale amounted to a simple case of cheating. Instead, the core problem at the intersection of representation and Buddhism in the United States is structural—the rules of the game tip the scales, and no one has to cheat because the winner is effectively assured victory before the game even begins. If the rules are built on the norms of absolute freedom and individualism, any fairness in the game is an illusion. Those that have already seized freedom as their own will win—guaranteed first among all free individuals.

At this juncture, some might suggest that I have been overly critical in my analysis of Buddhist American converts over this time period. Surely, whatever the results of their actions and words, as far as we can know, the motives of many of these Buddhist converts have been grounded in the desire to combat racism, colonialism, and egoism. Certainly, it is unlikely that any parent—Buddhist American convert or not—would intentionally marginalize their own children. Perhaps I have failed to separate the intention from the effect. Perhaps there is nothing wrong with the motive to affirm absolute freedom as the primary grounding value in principle. Perhaps that utopia just needs a little more effort.

These critics might even raise the most potentially damaging thought of all: what gives me the right to critically deconstruct and evaluate these converts' lives? Somewhere in these pages, some might claim I have lost the necessity of a historian's empathy for his subjects. Even more troublingly, they might say, who am I to tear apart the lives and choices of Buddhist converts as parents? Have I simply shamed individuals engaged in the difficult task of parenting? Given what I have written, how would I have raised children differently if I had been a Buddhist convert?

There are many ways I could respond to these questions. I could point out that the idea that parents (and by proxy the household) are beyond reproach as residents of an apolitical private sphere is actually part of the problematic political history I hope to deconstruct here. I could argue that I never lost my sympathy for my subjects; I deeply appreciate their trials. I empathize with their struggles against a

Christian American hegemony they have tried to leave behind. Unlike many, I recognize and honor their religious identities and do not dismiss them as "fads," "fake," or "shallow." Their religion is often their identity (no matter the form), and that fact should not be trivialized by false distinctions between "real" and "fake" Buddhists. If one takes Kerouac seriously, he was as Buddhist as Alan Watts was. In terms of my empathy for Buddhist converts as parents, I know personally how much they can love their children and be invested in their futures. I do not know what I would have done if I had been in their shoes, sitting at the card table with their hand.

Ultimately, however, this is all beside the point. After all, I am not a Buddhist convert, and I am not writing a Buddhist parenting manual. Admittedly, as I will touch on in the conclusion to this book, I do think that increased scholarly prescriptive reflection on the norms surrounding childhood and parenting is a valuable cause. Scholarship does not live in an ivory tower, and scholars—as people—have a responsibility to deconstruct and reconstruct the norms they played a part in forming for the very practical purpose of parenting. How might we raise our children more ethically? But that project is not this project.

All of this is beside the point because it remains strictly at the level of individual and personal concerns when the entire conclusion of my analysis has been that the problem at the heart of representation in Buddhism in the United States is structural. It is not a matter of whether I have been adequately charitable to my subjects, their motives, or even their parenting choices. Because, ultimately, the central mistake has been to think that this entire discursive dynamic is functionally about choice or freedom at all. To say that the problem is structural—that the game is rigged—is to say that it does not matter what the players do, because the outcome is determined from the very beginning. It is not a matter of how Buddhist American converts could have been more inclusive or made better choices. No matter how much they preached the value of freedom, indeed precisely because they saw no other possibilities but to preach the value of freedom, they too were bound in what they did by their location. The only difference between the converts and everyone else is that the converts were bound to win. The converts are as trapped as anyone else, albeit to a different fate.

The irony of the situation is these converts were not wrong in their original goal: the prisoners of the West are in desperate need of salvation and there are no local tools the prisoners have at hand to bring about freedom. Instead, despite their power and authority, they live in a nightmare. They are endlessly yearning for an outside they cannot reach, preaching values of selflessness and freedom they will always break, striving and failing to escape the values of their parents, and even structurally blind to the one site of novelty they take part in creating—their children. To indulge the dramatic, we might even say this fate would be worse than any hell. Desiring lives of perpetual youth, they will have them. They will live forever, fated for eternal life in a prison of selfhood. This fate is Samsara.

Despite the structural limits of these Buddhist converts, the real question is: is everyone bound to this fate, to this prison? This narrative of Buddhist American converts is a troubling tale: even as they sought to resist the restrictive norms of their parents, they eventually became very much like their parents precisely through the values behind those acts of resistance. Is there a place outside these walls? As I transition from this chapter to the next, from the eyes of Buddhist American converts to the eyes of their children, the most relevant question to this task is the following: could a child born within these walls know how to escape? Are second-generation Buddhist Americans, like their parents and grandparents before them, destined to simply use the norms and traditions of their ancestors to constantly rebuild the prison walls even as they continually erode? Unlike their more privileged warden parents, however, such a fate would mean these children would be fated to continually rebuild their own cell walls as invisible inmates. Is there an alternative? In the right hands, can the game be turned upside down? Can chains become a shovel?

FROM MASTER'S TOOLS TO CHILD'S TOYS

RECOGNITION AND REMAKING THE POLITICAL AS PERSONAL

A Tale of Two Books

In 2003, two pivotal books in the history of Buddhism in the United States were published.[1] At first glance, the two authors—Ivan Richmond and Noah Levine—share a significant amount in common. Both are Generation X. Both are privileged white male Americans. Both grew up in California. Both are second-generation Buddhists. Both are marginalized because of their ages, generational status, and religious identities. Both books penned by their hands are autobiographies and mostly focus on their childhoods. And yet, their stories (and the stories of the stories) could not be more different.

Given the absence of scholarly consideration of second-generation Buddhist Americans, these two books are a critically important resource for understanding the full breadth of Buddhism in the

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[1] Ivan Richmond, *Silence and Noise: Growing Up Zen in America* (New York: Atria Books, 2003); Noah Levine, *Dharma Punx* (New York: HarperOne, 2003).

United States. Comparing the overlap between the narratives would reveal a significant amount about the conditions and dimensions of second-generation Buddhist American lives. By searching for what these two different data points have in common, we might tentatively begin to inductively paint a portrait of the wider context of more lives than just two second-generation Buddhist Americans. However, such a project will have to wait until another time. While my overall goal is to explore the lived religious worlds of second-generation Buddhist Americans, in this case, highlighting the contrasts rather than similarities between the two proves to be much more fruitful toward this end. Sometimes we have to walk backward in order to move forward.

Ivan Richmond was born in 1974 to two Zen parents.[1] Nearly thirty years later, he would publish his memoir *Silence and Noise: Growing Up Zen in America*. When he was born, both of his parents were very active members of the San Francisco Zen Center. His father was one of the priests at the center. When he was three, the whole family moved to a new branch of the Zen Center in a rural area outside of San Francisco called Green Gulch Farm. An intentional Buddhist community, Richmond was immersed in a Buddhist world that was, as he describes it, largely separate from the America "outside."[1] At the age of ten, for some important reasons that are revealed at the end of the text, he and his family left Green Gulch and returned to the San Francisco suburbs.[2] While Buddhism remained an important part of the private family life, the family mostly withdrew from the community of San Francisco Zen Center. The bulk of the text focuses on Richmond's life both at Green Gulch and the first few years after his entry into the "foreign" world of America.[3]

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[1] Richmond, xi.

His memoir reads as a combination of recollected childhood memories from growing up Buddhist alongside political and philosophical conclusions he grounds on those experiences. In the beginning of the book, Richmond forthrightly states that the primary purpose of "writing this book is simply to state 'I am a second-generation American Buddhist, and people like me exist.'"[4] As he explicates what this means, Richmond argues that second-generation Buddhist Americans are caught between two sets of norms: Buddhist and American. Raised with countercultural Buddhist values and traditions, the pressures and realities of wider American values and traditions are inescapable. Unlike their parents who were raised within the American ethos before they rejected aspects of it, however, these children creatively internalize the Buddhist values and traditions of their parents from their very first moments, leading to entirely different perspectives on "America" as other. The friction between the two sets of norms shape the unique identities of second-generation Buddhist Americans.

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[1] Richmond, xiv.
[2] Richmond, 79-88.
[3] Richmond, xv.
[4] Richmond, xiv.

In each chapter of the book, Richmond highlights the contrasts between Buddhist values and American values, from "Nonviolence versus Violence" to "Nonmaterialism versus Materialism."[1] For example, in the latter chapter, Richmond reflects on how the values he learned from his parents about rejecting attachment to material objects (like particular toys), while initially leading to bewilderment in his contact with wider American culture, now grounds his critiques of American identity as bonded with insatiable capitalist consumption.[2] In another chapter on popular culture, by reflecting on being bullied as a child, and affirming the Zen value of just "being" without pretension, Richmond critiques the link between the canon of American popular cultural knowledge and social capital and power.[3]

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[1] Richmond, 36-70.

[2] Richmond, 71-94.

[3] Richmond, 70-94.

It might be tempting to dismiss Richmond's analysis as all too dependent on over-essentialized binaries between "East" and "West." Such a dismissal too easily waves away the value of strategic essentialisms for marginalized groups while also missing the subtlety of Richmond's arguments. A close reading of the text reveals that "America" is not the primary target of Richmond's critiques. Richmond's most devastating assault is not strictly just against the American nation-state, but rather against his parents and the community that raised him as well. This critique rests upon one single apparent paradox. On one hand, Richmond states that he is different from America precisely because of the "Buddhist" values his family and community taught him.[1] On the other hand, Richmond claims that even in the supposedly separate haven of Green Gulch, many of these "Buddhist" values *as lived by his parents and the surrounding community* are fully "American" through and through.[2]

Richmond provides several examples of this near-contradiction. While Richmond's appreciation for his parents and surrounding Buddhist community (grouped together by Richmond as American "Buddhist converts") should not be undersold, he also does not pull his punches—his critiques are sharp, clear and targeted with pinpoint precision.[1]

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[1] Richmond, xv.

[2] Richmond, 79-88.

Richmond argues that he and his parents are from different worlds.[2] He notes that while there are continuities between the religious identities of converts and their children, the parents often fail to account for critical differences in experience. The parents do not recognize the differences in experience and perspective that emerge when one grows up outside American religious and cultural hegemony. The parents' cultural and religious knowledge alone allows them to "pass" and integrate into surrounding American culture much more easily than their children. His parents are from America; Richmond is from Green Gulch. Richmond tells a story about how baffled his parents were when he disliked the film *Michael* because of its assumed Christian worldview.[3] Buddhist American converts are more American than they might wish, while their children are less American than they might be able to even recognize.

Richmond analyzes the minimal childcare among the Green Gulch community and the wider adult community values this fact reveals. Childcare was always an afterthought, and this often meant that childcare simply did not exist. Many of the adults did not believe children should even be part of the Buddhist community ("out of sight, hearing, and mind"), and the mix of apathy and open hostility was clear to the children.[1] When childcare was present, it was strictly on an untrained volunteer basis and typically fell along gendered lines. The convert community often rationalized the lack of childcare as being good for the children since they considered freedom to be the best master and teacher. For Richmond, freedom is no substitute, *nor is it even possible*, without active and present relationships with adults.

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[1] Richmond, 171-86.
[2] Richmond, 172-73.
[3] Richmond, 172-73.

Building on the theme of childcare, Richmond also critiques the complete absence of formal religious education in the Green Gulch community.[2] Carrying their own demons, Richmond notes, Buddhist American converts are so worried about indoctrinating their children in a religious tradition that they attempt to minimize the children's active exposure to Buddhism until they can choose to be Buddhist as adult converts. Until very recently, intentional religious education in Buddhist American convert communities did not really exist. The result of this has not been fewer second-generation Buddhist Americans or even more adult converts. Children learn from parents despite their best efforts, and children will appropriate and internalize narratives, practices, norms, and beliefs from their parents no matter what. According to Richmond, the result of a lack of structured religious education has been more second-generation Buddhist American children who are drastically underequipped to live in a wider Christian society with a full religious toolbox at their disposal.

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[1] Richmond, 111.

[2] Richmond, 106-26.

He also argues that Buddhist American converts fail to recognize the full diversity of forms of Buddhist life.[1] They focus on the importance of doctrines (Four Noble Truths) and practices (meditation) to the diminishment of other forms of religious life embraced by their children (stories, ethics). Combined with the lack of structured religious education, this leads converts to the erroneous conclusion that their children are not Buddhist or even religious as children, effectively making them invisible. These children (even at early ages) are practicing Buddhists; they simply practice Buddhism in ways that subvert essentialized understandings of "religion" that unjustly assume the content of the term a priori.

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[1] It is important to note that Richmond mostly ignores Asian-American and Asian immigrant Buddhist communities in his analysis, repeating his parents' sin. As I will explore in more depth below, second-generation Buddhist Americans' marginalized status (because of their age, generational background, and religious identities) does not guarantee that they are able to recognize other forms of oppression. Richmond's privilege—by nationality, race, and gender—shapes what he can and cannot see. Richmond, 171-80.

As I myself highlighted in Chapter 3, Richmond also notes that many Buddhist converts reject the notion that Buddhism is a religion. Instead, for these individuals, Buddhism is a "spirituality" or "philosophy."[1] Richmond suggests that these converts reject the term "religion" for past associations of the term with Christianity and monotheism.[2] However, most second-generation Buddhist Americans do not share these associations and identify as practicing *religious* Buddhists.[3] Since they do not fit the preferred model, the existence of these religious Buddhist children becomes structurally concealed.

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[1] Richmond, 174-75.

[2] He also subtly echoes my point from Chapter 3 that these converts might reject the term "religion" in order to maintain their own power and self-mastery. Richmond, 174-75.

[3] This particular point highlights the close link between ageism and racism within dominant colonial representations of Buddhism. Nineteenth-century Orientalist scholars and many missionaries argued there were two kinds of Buddhisms: the original noble philosophy taught by the man Siddhartha Gotama, and corrupt superstitious religious derivations of that thought practiced by the "infantile" Asian masses. At best, with a guiding colonial hand, these "children" would grow out of understanding Buddhism as a religion. At worst, such a task was a lost cause, and the colonialists themselves would have to maintain the true thread of Siddhartha's thought. Ageism and racism function together in this rhetoric in the maintenance of colonial hegemony. While much of the logic has shifted in the maintenance of a more modern hegemony, the core of the idea can still be identified in the works

Richmond critiques Buddhist American converts' valorization of particular elements of Buddhist monastic life to the exclusion of the value of Buddhist lay life.[1] Much ink has been spilled on the anxieties of Buddhist American converts' desires to embrace what they see as the core of Buddhist monastic identity (meditation, scholarly study) while maintaining their control and freedom as non-monastic individuals. Nearly everything that has been

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of many "secular" Buddhists today, from Sam Harris to Noah Levine. In Levine's case, we can see that even an active commitment to combating racism and colonialism alongside a history of personal marginalization does not immunize oneself from the possibility of participating in and benefitting from racist, colonialist, or even ageist structures. While Richmond mostly manages to avoid falling into this particular colonialist trap, his tendency to collapse Asian-American Buddhists, Asian immigrant Buddhists, and convert Buddhists into one single hybrid group (and assume that the history of Buddhism in the United States began in the 1960s) reveals a harmful ignorance built upon privilege. Since the maintenance of convert Buddhist hegemony is built on marginalizing the experiences of Asian-American Buddhists, Asian immigrant Buddhists, and second-generation Buddhist Americans all together, there is a natural symmetry for solidarity between these groups in order to combat their collective oppression. Unfortunately, the potential for alliances has remained mostly at the level of theoretical possibility in large part because second-generation Buddhist Americans have failed to identify the full depth of their privilege.

[1] Richmond, xix.

published for Buddhist practitioners is for these kinds of quasi-monastic converts. The meditation retreat becomes symbolic for the wider style of practice of these converts; Buddhism for these converts is highly circumscribed within particular times of day, periods of the month, and forms of religious life. Buddhism for their children is more of a full worldview encompassing narratives, ethics, and "everyday" and seemingly non-religious practices.[1] Most second-generation Buddhist Americans are not masters, teachers, or even monastic-lay hybrids like their parents. Most second-generation Buddhist Americans are simply "rank-and-file" lay Buddhists.[2]

Connected to his critique of their appropriation of monastic Buddhism, Richmond rejects the common assumption among Buddhist American converts that the teacher-convert relationship is essential to Buddhist identity, rendering others that do not fit into that model invisible.[3] He notes that since second-generation Buddhist Americans identify their parents (and not particular masters) as their primary link to Buddhism, they fall outside this dominant model.

Richmond's most devastating critique of the dominance of the teacher-convert relationship within

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[1] Richmond, xix.

[2] Richmond, xix.

[3] Richmond, 71-94.

Buddhism in the United States is his reflection on the corrupt power at the heart of this reified hierarchy. Despite their protests otherwise, Richmond argues that Buddhist American convert communities are fundamentally hierarchical and built upon the exaltation of the power and materialism they claim to reject.[1] Corruption is often treated as an aberration within a few of these communities, but for Richmond the tendency toward corruption is built within the very fabric of the identities of these communities. The affirmation of extreme power differences between the teacher and students invites the abuse of that power. As a child at Green Gulch in the 1980s, Richmond grew up in the middle of the Roshi Richard Baker sex and embezzlement scandal.[2] This scandal eventually caused Richmond and his family to leave the Green Gulch community. While Buddhist American converts might believe they have overcome American desires for wealth and power, the reality testifies to the opposite situation. These converts are quintessentially American. Only a leveling of the differences in power within these communities will enable them to be healthy and safe for the less powerful.

In contrast to these hierarchies built on extreme power differentials, Richmond argues that there are alternative lineages and forms of Buddhist life in the United States, including second-generation Buddhist Americans.[1] Many countercultural Buddhist converts argue that second-generation Buddhist Americans are weak-willed and do not know what they stand for. For these parents, now often living in the comfortable safety of suburbia, these children should follow in their parents′ footsteps more often and rebel more against the "establishment."[2] There is a contradiction at the heart of this expectation—their parents expect second-generation Buddhist Americans to be a second generation of hippies without following the traditions of the past. And yet, many of the traditions of the past for these children are countercultural traditions. Caught in an impossible position, these second-generation Buddhists pursue the only way forward: embracing the countercultural Buddhist traditions of their parents on their own terms. Second-generation Buddhist Americans received their traditions from their parents. Ironically, given the countercultural rejection of tradition in toto, this re-appropriation of the traditions of their parents is the only option for revolt and the ground for a different kind of freedom.

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[1] Richmond, 71-94.

[2] Richmond, 79-94.

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[1] Richmond, 184-85

[2] Richmond, 185.

Richmond reserves his sharpest words for Buddhist American converts' valorization of freedom and their rejection of the value of inherited religion.[1] In their exaltation of a pure concept of freedom, Buddhist American converts assume that ideally religion is always a chosen identity. A core concept of American identity is that chosen identities, whenever possible, are best. Given modern notions of agency, these converts assume that their children cannot practice that ideal until they become adults and then become able to choose one religion over another. Richmond argues that this notion privileges converts' identities over others who find meaning in the idea that they inherited their religious identities. Religion is not always a matter of "choice" and this reality is not always bad.[2] In fact, being a religious "native" often provides an alternately valuable perspective on the intersection of religion, power, and everyday life.[3]

Despite the breadth and edge to these critiques, Richmond's text does not simply amount to extended criticism. Internal to most of his critiques of Buddhist American converts is a deep appreciation for what he has been given. After all, Richmond is quite aware that he would not be Buddhist without his parents and the surrounding community of Green Gulch. Richmond's guiding principle throughout the book is the "middle way": appreciate and critique simultaneously.[1]

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[1] Richmond, 171-75.

[2] Richmond takes pride in his declaration that his religious identity is not first and foremost a "chosen" religious identity, but rather, is fundamentally "inherited." Richmond, 171-75.

[3] Richmond, 184-86.

The power of Richmond's story emerges when it becomes clear that for all his appreciation, Richmond and others like him are Buddhist *despite* his community's best efforts, not because of them. The Green Gulch adult community was so self-obsessed with its own practice that it missed what was going on at its feet. Richmond does provide several suggestions for how adult Buddhist converts might revise their worldviews and practice to be more engaged with and open to the religious lives of their children. Truthfully, the book is not primarily for or about these converts. Richmond's story is a testament to the perseverance of children's creative religious lives no matter how invisible they are to their parents.

For all this, *Silence and Noise* was a flop. Beyond being a compelling call to arms for second-generation Buddhist Americans written in an approachable style, the book had several high profile endorsements (Daniel Goleman and Sylvia Boorstein, among others) and was picked up by a major publisher (Simon & Schuster). These aspects make the book's lack of popularity initially surprising. The book sold relatively few copies. Popular journal reviews were brief and lackluster. The text was never mentioned in scholarly journals. Like the second-generation Buddhist Americans Richmond had written the text for, the book seemingly disappeared overnight.

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[1] Richmond, 9-10.

Why was the book not successful? I began this chapter by mentioning not one, but two books. Both books were written by second-generation Buddhist Americans and published in the same year. Compared to *Silence and Noise*, the tale of the other book tells a rather different story. This latter book sold hundreds of thousands of copies, spawned a documentary, multiple websites and dozens of new Buddhist communities around the United States. In a variety of words and ways, both books call their audience to follow the countercultural rebel Buddha and swim "against the... stream."[1] So the question is: why was Noah Levine's *Dharma Punx* so explosive while *Silence and Noise* was so muted?

Conversion and the Authority of Dharma Punx

Dharma Punx is also a memoir written by a child of a Buddhist parent. Like Richmond, Levine was born in the early 1970s in California. While the religious background of his mother is unclear, his father (Stephen Levine) was, like Richmond's father, an important leader among 1960s countercultural Buddhist American converts.[1] Despite these similarities, Levine and Richmond's conditions of life diverged fairly quickly. When Levine was a young child, his parents divorced. While he lived for a few periods with his father, for the most part Levine grew up with his mother and an abusive stepfather in Santa Cruz. Levine struggled with depression, and began having suicidal thoughts as early as six years old. Levine began drinking as a preteen, and started heavy drug use a few years later.

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[1] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 247.

Levine describes punk rock and the surrounding punk community as one of the few positive influences in his childhood life. Punk rock gave him a sense of meaning and a channel for his rebellion, violence, and dissatisfaction with the world. Levine credits punk music for helping him become aware of the injustices of the world—from racism to capitalism, and sexism to nationalism. Punk lyrics named the corrupt structures of power and encouraged revolt against every "ism."[1]

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[1] For a small selection of some of Stephen Levine's most popular books, consider the following: Stephen Levine, *A Gradual Awakening* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989); Stephen Levine, *A Year to Live* (New York: Bell Tower, 1997); Stephen Levine and Ondrea Levine, *Who Dies?* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989).

After being incarcerated several times and being shuttled around between his parents in order to try to reform his life, Levine describes a moment in jail in which he hit rock bottom.[2] Feeling trapped, he attempted suicide in the cell and was restrained and put into a padded cell.[3] Calling his father, he asked for help:

> On the phone with my father I told him all the regret and fear I was experiencing. He suggested that some simple meditation techniques might help alleviate some of the pain I was feeling. He explained to me that by "bringing the mind into the present moment, the present experience of being, [I] may be able to find some freedom in that moment from the regret of the past and fear

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[1] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 215.

[2] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 58-61.

[3] For all the spiritual diagnoses in the text, strangely absent is any discussion of Levine's obvious claustrophobia. At several points in his memoir (from prison cells to meditation retreat huts), Levine describes feeling trapped in small spaces, restricted, closed in, restrained. The panic and anxiety gradually ends when he leaves the space. The possibility that Levine's parents and teachers could be blind to this (and often even aggravate it by actively encouraging him to be in small spaces) reveals how inflexible the framework of the Buddhist American "convert" journey is. True empathy and sensitivity to the particulars of individual situations is impossible because the "convert" model is bound to a particular set of tropes. The full breadth of Levine's life is invisible because it does not fit the dominant frame. Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 58-59.

> of the future." He said that much of the pain I was experiencing had to do with replaying the events of the past and making up stories about the future... After talking for a little while about other things I thanked him for the suggestion about meditation and said I would give it a try.[1]

Levine names that moment as "the beginning of a meditation practice that would be one of the main focuses" of his life.[2] At first glance, this is the moment Levine converted to Buddhism.

After this event, Levine joined AA and began to study with all the biggest names in the canon of teachers for Buddhist American converts—ranging from Jack Kornfield to Ajahn Amaro. Levine even emphasizes brief encounters with the 14th Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh as profound teaching moments. Levine read dozens of books for Buddhist American converts, including all of his father's books. He went on several meditation retreats. He traveled to Asia as a "spiritual" tourist.[3] At face value, Levine embraced every aspect of the Buddhist American convert lifestyle. In the words of his father, Levine had become a "hippie."[4] Fittingly, despite being a narrative memoir, the book does not end with a reflection or cumulative event, but rather instructions for the aspiring convert on how to meditate.[1]

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[1] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 60-61.

[2] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 61.

[3] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 154.

[4] *Meditate and Destroy*, directed by Sarah Fisher, (Blue Lotus Films, 2007), DVD (Blue Lotus Films, 2009), 89:35. (I include

Dharma Punx was wildly popular. Hundreds of thousands of copies have sold. Levine was the subject of a 2007 documentary entitled *Meditate and Destroy*. He has also written three more very successful books (2007's *Against the Stream*, 2011's *The Heart of the Revolution*, and 2014's *Refuge Recovery*) on subjects including the Buddha's philosophy, meditation instructions for lay readers, and Buddhist tools for recovery from addiction.[2] He is one of the faces of the rapidly expanding programs of teaching meditation and mindfulness to prison inmates. Perhaps most tellingly, by 2014, over 20 "Dharma Punx" communities had emerged across the United States and Canada.[3] Levine has truly sparked a movement.

As I have already noted, not only does Levine claim that he primarily writes for entry-level converts,

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timestamps in my film citations to aid the reader in locating quotes.)

[1] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 249-52.

[2] Noah Levine, *Against the Stream* (New York: HarperOne, 2007); Noah Levine, *The Heart of the Revolution* (New York: HarperOne, 2011); Noah Levine, *Refuge Recovery* (New York: HarperOne, 2014).

[3] The Dharma Punx website, accessed via Wayback Machine, June 16, 2014, http://www.dharma punx.com.

but many in the Dharma Punx communities are convert Buddhists.[1] Levine's presentation of the trajectory of his life seemingly conforms to the convert mold as well—complete with an epiphany moment and cultivated relationships with Buddhist teachers. Most of the signs are there. Levine also downplays the Buddhist influences in his early years. One must ask: can the difference in popularity between *Dharma Punx* and *Silence and Noise* be explained by the idea that Levine has a more established and powerful audience—because, unlike Richmond, he is not actually a second-generation Buddhist American, but rather a Buddhist American convert?

What makes a Buddhist American convert a convert? As we saw in Chapter 3, the politics of Buddhist American conversion is about *author-ity*—the power to command and determine one's own life-narrative completely. This is closely tied to the representation of the convert as the pure site of ever-renewed youth. Conversion is about self-mastery. Given the reality of interlocking relationships and local and global interdependence, this aspiration has the aftereffect of not only commanding one's own narrative, but also forcibly determining the conditions of others as well. As such, in this context, conversion as self-mastery results in desires for total mastery pure and simple. The terms of what it means to be Buddhist are set by the converts. Others are forced to wrestle within and against this frame.

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[1] Levine, *Against the Stream*, xviii.

Conversion can be and has been a mode of resistance (re-seizing authorship) when it comes from a place of marginalization. In the case of Buddhist American converts though (represented as youthful white male adults), conversion is a strategy of the further re-entrenchment of power—not the challenging of hierarchies, but rather the reinforcement of those power differences. The very existence of other Buddhists challenges the dominance of this style of hegemony. As such, other Buddhists are pushed into the background, only existing behind a shroud of invisibility.

The question remains: does Levine's story fit into this mold? Admittedly, the answer to this question is difficult to pin down, as Levine's own body of work has evolved over the course of a decade. However, a close reading of Levine's books, beginning with *Dharma Punx*, reveals the hints of resistance beneath convert's robes. The question is not whether Levine uses the convert's tools. It is indisputable that the overall plainly visible narrative frame in his texts is one of conversion. Epiphany moments. Masters. Yearning for absolute freedom. A life of meditation and "mindfulness."[1] The question is: Might Levine be using the language and tropes of Buddhist American converts for other ends? In order to address this question, we must delve into a related issue—one of the central questions in all of postcolonial studies. Can the master's tools dismantle the master's house?[2] Before we can ask whether Levine is engaging in acts of sabotage, we must first address whether such an act would even be possible. Or, to rephrase the question for the particular issues at hand: can the child play with the master's tools?

Master's Tools Play-break

In 1979 at a panel on the personal and the political at New York University, Audre Lorde delivered her bombshell paper on racism and feminism entitled "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House."[3] In the piece, Lorde calls the white feminist conference conveners to account for the minimal amount of diversity on the panels and the tokenization of Lorde and one other panelist as sufficient to represent the entirety of diversity at an entire conference on feminism and patriarchy. Lorde lambasts white feminists simultaneously ignoring and benefiting from the racist dynamics fully embedded within patriarchy. As Lorde writes, feminism is hollow if white participants in conferences on feminism can only attend because of "women who clean your houses and tend your children... for the most part, poor women and women of Color."[1] By passing over the importance of other differences (including race), white feminists have actually reinforced the structure of patriarchy rather than challenge it.

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[1] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 249.

[2] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider* (New York: Crossing Press, 2007), 110.

[3] Lorde, "Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 110-14.

It is within this context that the following oft-quoted passage appears in the essay:

> Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference -- those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older -- know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who

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[1] Lorde, "Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 112.

> still define the master's house as their only source of support.[1]

The relevance of Lorde's argument to my own reflections on second-generation Buddhist Americans in this chapter is obvious. What is less obvious, however, is what Lorde meant by her now-famous words.

The full effects of Lorde's ten words—"For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"—still reverberate today. Most commonly, the sentence is quoted as a dismissive conversation stopper throughout conferences and book reviews as a sound-bite with little of the surrounding context. While the context of Lorde's words suggests she sought to encourage creativity through a closer consideration of diversity and the practices of marginalized groups, the invocation of those words today more often has the opposite effect—stifling creativity by controlling and policing the boundaries of appropriate language. For the latter view, Lorde's argument is taken to mean that the ostracized and marginalized will never succeed in bringing about a fully new and just world if they use any of the creations of their oppressors. Everything from objects to ideas, language to stories is unusable. The brand cannot be removed.

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[1] Lorde, "Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 112.

I want to suggest that this interpretation is not only nonsensical, but it does a disservice to Lorde's insight and the creativity of the marginalized. For as it stands, that version of the argument quickly becomes meaningless. First, where exactly would we draw the line? Are entire languages useless for marginalized groups? Should marginalized groups refrain from using any tools or technology that might have been created by their oppressors? Are ideas first created by marginalized groups but appropriated and redesigned by their oppressors suddenly off limits? In a world with few places that the colonizers have not touched, we might find ourselves to be on sinking sand.

Not only does the argument become absurd following this line of thought, but Lorde herself becomes openly inconsistent for no particular reason or end. Lorde is confident enough in her own power and agency and the importance of her cause that she uses a conference grounded on racist exclusions as her own platform for her message. Following the lead of Aimé Césaire, Lorde invokes Shakespeare (albeit with a twist) at the conclusion of her essay. Even the core of her famous quote about the master's house and tools is from Hegel. As was shown in other moments in her life, Lorde could be disingenuous for particular ends, but in this case such inconsistencies do not gain her anything.[1] A charitable hermeneutic must look for an alternate explanation.

But this is only the beginning of the problems with the argument so construed. Not only is it infeasible, it presents an incredibly low view of marginalized groups. Are marginalized groups not intelligent or creative enough to reshape old tools for new purposes? Do they have no agency of their own? We should not assume that plagiarism cannot be a tool of resistance for oppressed groups. As James Scott has shown with his field work in Malaysia, marginalized groups can deploy a dizzying array of creative strategies against their oppressors, some subtle, some not, and we should never sell them short in their ability to use everything at hand.[1] As Scott notes, the most common tactic of resistance practiced by marginalized groups is theft.[2] This practice is grounded on a blatant disregard for the very concept of ownership. The truth is there is no such thing as some idea or object that is *essentially* a tool of the master. What makes something a tool of the master is that it is in the master's hands. Otherwise, anything is fair game.

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[1] Lorde's capability to mislead was exemplified in the scandal surrounding her open letter to the feminist theologian and activist Mary Daly. In her letter, Lorde accused Daly of being blind to the interconnections between racism and white feminism. Lorde claimed that Daly never responded. After her death, a response from Daly was found in Lorde's personal effects. Many scholars have argued that this discredits Lorde's arguments and reveals her to be a charlatan. However, these scholars ignore the fact that marginalized individuals often resort to lies and deception in order to counter power differences. Scholarly life is not somehow immune from the realities of power nor the counter-tactics of the marginalized. In the case of the Lorde-Daly conflict, whatever we might think about the moral justifications (or lack thereof) for Lorde's deception, Lorde had reasons for her act of deception. In the case of Lorde's quote about the master's tools outlined here, not only is it difficult to ascertain any good reasons for Lorde to be intentionally misleading, it is difficult to find any reasons for deception at all. Audre Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," in *Sister Outsider*, 66-71.

If not the former interpretation, what could Lorde have meant by her famous words? To answer this question, we must return to the wider context of the quote. Lorde's concern is not so much a logical problem that might suggest that all tools are somehow tainted, but rather that white feminists are structurally limited by their privilege in their ability to see the entirety of the master's house (and thus the breadth of the structure that must be brought down). As such, these white feminists' supposedly subversive tactics remain bound to the goals and tools of the master *precisely because they cannot see the whole picture*. The ends and the supporting community are the problem. There is nothing *inherent* within particular ideas or language that makes them naturally corrupt. As the common Buddhist wisdom goes, there is nothing *inherent* in anything.[1]

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[1] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 345-50.

[2] Scott, 34.

Only by becoming aware of the full breadth of difference—the real climax of Lorde's piece—will white feminists become increasingly aware of the ways they remain linked to the chains of racist patriarchy.[2] The problem is not that particular tools are owned by the master and are therefore corrupt. This implies that Lorde believed that white feminists just need to find the *right* tools and no awakening to the full reality of racism is necessary. The problem is who remains bound to the ends and goods of the master. The right tools will be in the right hands.

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[1] Admittedly, I came to this conclusion gradually and with a great deal of resistance. I spent a great deal of my own academic reflection searching for metaphorical locks that could be attached to native ideas in order to protect them from appropriation. Despite his profound influence on my thought, on this particular point I searched for any ground to stand upon in order to disagree with Jacques Derrida's assertion that anything can be copied (albeit always in a new context). I never found solid earth on that front. I still wish there were such locks. Perhaps I will be surprised one day. But this much is obvious: locks protect the privileged and nothing more. After all, who has the most to lose? Who is the most anxious about theft? This is not to say that colonialist appropriation is not a serious moral and political problem—it is. Colonialist appropriation—particularly, although certainly not confined to, in regards to Buddhism—is a serious—if underdeveloped—moral and political wrong that should be opposed on every level. Unfortunately, however, there is no failsafe substitute to protect native ideas from appropriation; only constant mobilization and resistance by marginalized groups can combat these kinds of appropriation. Regardless, more theorization and practical work on this topic needs to be done. Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 307-30.

[2] Lorde, "Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 111.

This conclusion is quite relevant to the questions concerning the master's tools and second-generation Buddhist Americans, but not in the way that was originally suggested. Exploring the possibilities with Lorde has shown that the master's tools can be re-appropriated to other ends. That is not the potential problem. The potential problem amounts to this: are second-generation Buddhist Americans so bound by their own privilege that any tool of resistance they might use remains a master's tool? This problem should not be easily pushed aside, as both Richmond and Levine, despite overt commitments to combating racism, show troubling blindness to the full depth of racism and colonialism. As such, it would be impossible for me to argue that all second-generation Buddhist Americans are naturally allies for Buddhists of color. Instead, all I wish to suggest here is that the potential for true resistance—sometimes, but not always, actualized—is there. The master's tools *can* become children's toys in the right hands. But do they?

Old Families and New Ones

As I have already suggested, Lorde's famous words about the master's tools should be read in complete context. An important part of that context is the title of the panel Lorde delivered her famous essay: "The Personal and the Political."[1] Every idea has a lineage. This title echoes a critical theme in feminist thought that was first critically theorized by the feminist activist Carol Hanisch. In 1969, at the height of second-wave feminism, spurred by conflict that had emerged within the feminist movement over a protest at a Miss America Pageant, Hanisch penned an essay that was rapidly reprinted and spread like wildfire across feminist liberationist movements. At first the essay had no title; only later would a few editors title the piece "The Personal is Political."[2]

In the essay, Hanisch responds to unnamed activists who criticized her and other feminists for focusing on "therapy" and other "personal" issues.[3] These critics argued that Hanisch and others were at best wasting time, and at worst supporting patriarchal systems of dependency. For this logic, the personal and political, as well as the private and public are necessarily opposed and contradictory spheres—one can live in one or the other but not both. Feminism should acknowledge that patriarchy is strictly a political and public issue.

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[1] Lorde, "Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 110.

[2] Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," Carol Hanisch's personal website, accessed December 15, 2018, http://carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html.

[3] Hanisch.

Rather than argue that feminists should also focus on the private sphere as a moral issue and thus reinforce the overall binary, Hanisch provides an entirely different response: focusing on the private sphere can be "a form of political action."[1] She acknowledges that this is not necessarily the case. For example, if "therapy" assumes particular women are "sick" in need of some "cure," then that kind of therapy might be political, but by blaming the victim-survivor it is certainly not liberating.[2] As Hanisch writes: "women are messed over, not messed up!"[3] However, if "therapy" involves women discussing seemingly personal issues (like having children), as they make connections and strategize collective action, then that kind of therapy is both political and liberating action. As Hanisch writes:

> So the reason I participate in these [therapy] meetings is not to solve any personal problem. One of the first things we discover in these groups is that

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[1] Hanisch.
[2] Hanisch.
[3] Hanisch.

> personal problems are political problems. There are not personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution.[1]

And yet, this is not the standard collective action of "Marx, Lenin, Engels, Mao, and Ho."[2] This is collective action that pursues liberation with no sphere off limits and recognizes "personal" strategies by women (like "giggl[ing]" to disarm a man) as potentially liberating political actions.[3] As Michel de Certeau would later suggest, cooking can be a political act.[4] Blaming women who engage in these tactics is the wrong course of action.

Hanisch concludes her essay by arguing that limited definitions of the political have done significant damage to activism because they have excluded the "consciousness" of many "so-called apolitical women" who have much of value to share.[5] For Hanisch, if feminism is not for these women, it is for no one. But perhaps more importantly, Hanisch suggests that limited definitions of politics have encouraged feminists to reinscribe one of the most troubling dimensions of patriarchy—the strategy of making the other invisible in order to leave the overall power structures intact. Unless feminists broaden their minds and definitions—unless they closely consider the personal as a hidden realm for political action—no women will be liberated. They will remain concealed. Recognition requires a shift in perspective.

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[1] Hanisch.

[2] Hanisch.

[3] Hanisch.

[4] Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1-4.

[5] Hanisch implies that many of these women have been ignored because they are women of color, poor, or both. Hanisch.

Up to this point, I have described a narrative of injustice. In order to preserve their own power and unrestricted agency, Buddhist American converts have reified the monk-convert lineage as an intricate colonialist structure that puts converts at the forefront of Buddhist history while pushing everyone else to the nearly invisible periphery. One of the most effective tools toward this end has been a complete rhetorical rejection of the political in favor of private and personal liberation.[1] While the whole foundation is built upon politics, the accoutrement emphasizes a fully depoliticized (or at least highly politically circumscribed) Buddhism. The message is simple: only unenlightened beings believe that the world will change with political action.

Second-generation Buddhist Americans are one of the groups of survivors of this tale. Given this reality, we must ask: what are the options open to this particular group? If the converts have delegitimized public politics as questionable and potentially not even Buddhist, other Buddhists can either embrace an all-out confrontation (with little power to be heard or seen) or they can engage in more subtle arts of sabotage. Truthfully, there is no contradiction between these two courses of action, and most Buddhists engage in both. But in considering the latter option, a question must be asked: can personal revolt be politically liberating? Or to put it another way, since in the course of their active depoliticization of Buddhism, the wolves have put on sheep's clothing to protect themselves, how could one turn the entire situation around? How would you disguise a sheep in wolf's clothing?

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[1] Steven M. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 95-175.

Hanisch has already provided a hint toward an answer. It is not so much that liberating political action has to be actively and consciously remade as personal action; *personal action is inherently political*. The trick is for the scholar or outsider to retrain herself to recognize it. In the case of Levine, we might ask: what are the potential politically subversive effects of his focus on the personal?

Levine uses the same words as his father and the wider Buddhist American convert community.

The real revolt begins "inside."[1] True rebellion is "spiritual."[2] Absolute revolution is "personal."[3] The lines remain the same. But the context has shifted in important ways.

The depoliticization of Buddhism by Buddhist American converts flows purely in one direction. The power of politics is kenotically emptied into the private realm. These converts do not shy away from using politically revolutionary language; they simply ground the immense power of that language within the private realm. In the movement from political to personal (Political->Personal), overt political revolt against hegemony loses its charge.

Levine uses the same rhetoric. The context, however, has changed. Levine writes within an already-established context in which political Buddhism has been emptied out into personal spirituality. Levine repeats again and again that politics is personal—it is about relationships.[4] As you meditate, Levine suggests, do not think of your enemies or friends in the abstract; always begin by summoning compassion for them as particular beings.[5] Real revolution is always specific and interpersonal—directly in your face.

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[1] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 216.

[2] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, xi.

[3] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 230.

[4] For example, see Levine, *Heart of the Revolution*, 59-79.

[5] Levine, *Heart of the Revolution*, 73-79.

As becomes particularly clear in his memoir, Levine's story is always a narrative of his concrete relationships with others. His friends. His partners. His family. By moving the power of politics into the personal realm, converts like his father disarmed the threat of that power—preserving the status quo that conceals relationships including relationships like the one between Levine and his father. By using the same words, but in a different context, Levine turns the flow around (Personal->Political), revealing that personal relationships are inherently political. While converts have depoliticized Buddhism by focusing on the personal, Levine repoliticizes Buddhism by focusing the light (and the power of political language) on the very relationships the converts wanted to conceal.

Shining light on invisible relationships and invisible groups is only the beginning of Levine's inversion. As we have already seen, freedom is the pinnacle value for Buddhist American converts. They define freedom as the unrestricted ability to determine one's identity regardless of the consequences. Simply put, this kind of freedom is freedom to define everything. They reimagine the Buddha in the light of dominant American norms; no longer did the Buddha come to end suffering, but rather, to bring this kind of unrestricted freedom to everyone.

At face value, Levine also affirms this kind of freedom, but closer examination reveals a much more subversive reality. As I argued in Chapter 3, Buddhist American convert parents often have a significant amount of political anxiety over the conflict between their values (absolute freedom, the monk-convert relationship, etc.) and their societal roles as parents. In order to makes these conflicts disappear, the parents often spiritually "disown" their children by rejecting their religiosity, and sometimes even their biological relationship entirely. Both of these aspects are not chosen, and thus are rendered invisible so as to not cause conflict with the dominant framework. One does not have to dig too deeply to see this same political anxiety in Levine's father. Falling along predictable gendered lines, Levine's mother engages in significant self-blame for her son's problems growing up, while Levine's father never even raises the question of personal responsibility.[1] In fact, the short periods Levine lived with his father always ended quickly (although Levine never says who prompted him to leave). At one point, Levine's father even supports Levine's decision to become emancipated.[2]

There is a particularly telling moment in an interview with Levine's father in *Meditate and Destroy*.

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[1] *Meditate and Destroy.*

[2] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 32.

As Levine's father describes his son's childhood pain, suffering, and struggles, he claims his son (and those that follow him) was searching for something:

> A lot of the people he [Noah] is talking to feel familyless, feel unsupported by family, feel that they don't have a true home. And they hear Noah, and they realize the Dharma is their true home. People who realize the Dharma is their true home give a home to the whole world.[1]

Levine's father says this with no sense of irony whatsoever. It is almost as though he himself has forgotten that Noah is his son! Much like the case of the book *If the Buddha Had Kids*, an erasure has occurred in which family ties (since they do not fit the ideal of absolute freedom) are made to disappear because they are politically inconvenient.[2] "If Noah is to have a family," one can imagine his father saying, "then he must choose it."

As many critics have argued, this sentiment fits into a wider trajectory in films, television shows, fiction, and everyday life—in the wake of the so-called collapse of the dominance of the "traditional" family, the chosen family reigns.[3] Passing over a critical analysis of the concept of freedom, the chosen family motif simultaneously affirms the highest American value as ultimate while solving the perceived shortcomings of the "traditional" family model. In reality, one kind of patriarchy has been replaced by another. Following this trend toward chosen families Levine takes his father's advice but to ultimately subversive results. In both the documentary and his books, Levine embraces the language about the "Dharma family" as a freely chosen family.

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[1] *Meditate and Destroy*, 40:20.

[2] Charlotte Kasl, *If the Buddha Had Kids* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

[3] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 39.

Levine's Dharma family does include other young Buddhists in his Dharma Punx communities around the United States. However, for the most part, as one reads Levine's memoir, one is struck by the fact that Levine's Dharma family basically just resembles his biological family and network of close friends. After being effectively spiritually dis-owned by his father, Levine uses his father's language about chosen families to re-own his biological family *as sangha*. Despite only being present in person unevenly throughout his son's early life, Levine's father appears more in the text than any other individual. Notably, while Levine does erase much of the religious influence his father had upon him as a child, a close reading reveals remainders of this erasure all over the text.

Despite the fact that Levine lived with his mother for most of his childhood, his father's presence and influence were inescapable. At one point, after getting into a particularly bloody fight, Levine was arrested and brought to juvenile hall. Levine had been in and out of juvenile hall several times as a child and many of the guards knew him. Tim and Jennifer—two of the guards—tried to take an active role in trying to reform Levine's behavior. Both had read many of Levine's father's books and were baffled how Levine could be so "fucked up" when his father "was such a wonderful spiritual teacher."[1] As we have seen, Buddhist American converts make the line between convert and teacher purposely blurry so that they can incarnate the power of both figures. In this case, while also a convert, Levine's father—as a "spiritual teacher"—is beyond reproach as is his responsibility for nurturing his children—he has ascended to another plane.[2] His students, on the other hand, assume the role of both converts and father-figures by proxy. They try—and fail—to bring Levine into the convert fold, even offering him some of his father's books. Levine balks at the offer:

> I didn't even know what my dad's books were about. I had never even read one—some hippie shit about being nice and passive, I figured. Meditation and all that boring crap. Not for me. Everyone knows that the hippies failed. A bunch of drugged

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[1] Levine, *Dharma* Punx, 42.

[2] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 42.

> out, dirty rich kids talking about peace and love. No fucking way. The only thing that was going to make a real change was to abolish government. Anarchy was the only solution. It was too late for peaceful protest—we had to fight the oppressors and the brain-dead followers of the dictates set up by the capitalist system. I got so mad thinking about all of this and how I was there [in juvenile hall] for standing up against a bully, fighting against the oppressor, caught up in the system.[1]

Levine is quite brilliant in the choice of "memoir" as his literary medium to convey his point of view. This narrative mode allows him to simultaneously blatantly condemn and affirm the "hippie" Buddhist values of his father. "Fuck them, fuck all parents...fuck all adults," one of Levine's friends shouts to his approval.[2] Since the narrative at face-value presents a troubled child who becomes reformed later as an adult, Levine can be even sharper with his criticism of his parents than Richmond, because Levine is immunized from any critical responses. These words express the fury of Levine as a child; today, Levine is a reformed adult. The points are made, but there are no targets to respond to, except a past long gone.

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[1] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 42.
[2] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 35.

In the above quote and elsewhere, Levine also seemingly disowns his religious heritage given to him by his father. As a child, Levine writes, he never meditated. He rejected hippie values. He did not even listen to his father. Only as an adult did Levine become interested in and influenced by Buddhism. From this perspective, his moment in the jail cell was a conversion moment—this is when his journey with Buddhism began.[1]

While this is the dominant narrative strand in *Dharma Punx,* it is important to note that there are plenty of loose threads in the text that suggest the reality is far more complicated. At a variety of moments scattered throughout the text prior to his "conversion" moment, Levine writes that he learned a significant amount from his father as a child—from confidence that Levine "would be okay no matter what happened" to the importance of relationships.[2] Through his father, Levine was clearly immersed in American convert Buddhism, as he writes that he met many of the most important figures in the movement—as one example, Levine states that Ram Dass was like an "uncle."[3] Early in the text, Levine contradicts himself and states that his father had taught him the basics of meditation as a child.[1] Even in Levine's strong response to Tim and Jennifer, his words betray a more intimate knowledge of his father's religion than the sentiment of the quote does. Levine recognizes his parents' highest values (countercultural peace and love) and dominant religious forms (texts, meditation). In fact, as a child, Levine was the ideal expert on the topic—both inside and outside the movement.

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[1] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 58-61.
[2] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 61, 169.
[3] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 227.

So why does Levine downplay his childhood authority? Rather than pursue outright confrontation over his belief that his "father was so dedicated to spiritual practice and service...it kept him from being as available to me as I probably needed," Levine invokes the authority of his father's values to make the same overall point.[2] Levine re-chooses his father as family in order to reconstruct an erased lineage. If Levine plays the convert, he needs a teacher. In all his books, Levine lists a spiritual lineage of teachers that would impress any convert.[3] However, at the top of every one of those lists is his father. Tellingly, Levine includes his father within the teachers section of his dedication section of all his books, and he is featured at the top of them all. Levine's father re-teaches him meditation. Levine reads all of his father's books. He even lives an entire year of his life following his father's call in one of those books to live as though you will die at the end of the year. Levine's father is his guru.

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[1] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 3

[2] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, x.

[3] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, xiii-xiv; Levine, *Against the Stream*, 171; Levine, *Heart of the Revolution*, 207-8.

Levine's father erased his connections to his son by affirming rhetoric about the Dharma as a chosen family. Levine invokes the same rhetoric, but to an entirely different end. As a child, Levine describes his friends, and not his biological relatives, as his chosen replacement family. At the end of the book, Levine describes his relationship with his best friend Toby:

> It seemed like when I was ten years old I had left home and found my real family. The day I met Toby I finally felt understood. We had been through everything together. When we were kids on the streets getting high, chasing girls, when we couldn't relate to our parents and they couldn't understand us, we always had each other.[1]

When he was a child, Levine's counterstrategy to his father's ambivalence toward his family relationships was to find another family. Miming his father's language, he chose a new family. To do so, he even echoes other Buddhist American convert language. Levine's new family—the punks—are the inheritors of the legacy of youth revolt his parents began—although this time that youth revolt is directed against his hippie parents. Absolute freedom, which his parents valorized, becomes for Levine the freedom to re-define. Levine managed to simultaneously critique his parents while forming new relationships.

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[1] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 237-38.

As a teenager and adult, Levine partially shifted tactics. By naming his father as his primary teacher, Levine reclaims his father as his parent and primary religious influence. The Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are family, but fortuitously, for Levine, his father is the face of that triple-structure. Choosing one's family becomes re-owning one's old family. Suddenly, the monk-convert paradigm becomes something much more. Something much messier. Something more profound. Something like a true family.

Levine renames his father his teacher while also leveling a sharp critique against the Buddhist American convert obsession with teachers. In *Dharma Punx*, Levine references how he became too close to a couple of abusive New Age teachers in order to make the point that teachers are also bound to material desire and the temptations of power.[1] In his later books, Levine invokes some of the most dominant and powerful values among Buddhist American convert communities—experientialism and radical empiricism—in order to counter the allure and dominance of the monk-convert paradigm. He writes in his 2007 book *Against the Stream*:

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[1] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 102-26.

> I urge us all to be cautious and suspicious of spiritual teachers. There have been countless betrayals and deep harm caused through the unskillful actions of teachers and the unwise or blind trust of students. A trustworthy teacher is hard to find. Train your own mind and heart and investigate and analyze for yourself all teachings you receive. Don't believe anything based on tradition or charismatic presentation. Don't even believe the Buddha, and certainly don't believe me. Study the texts, study your own mind, and the highest truth will be revealed. All of what you are looking for is here in your own direct experience... *Be a guiding light to yourself!*[1]

With these words, Levine destabilizes the power of the monk-convert paradigm. Personal experience is the ultimate authority—not teachers.[2] A critic might note that there is a contradiction between Levine's emphasis on experientialism as a tool to criticize teachers here, and his earlier embrace of the authority of his father as a teacher. However, coherency is not necessarily a goal of marginalized groups. Political and personal liberation is. Following the insights of de Certeau, we see that the tactics marginalized groups deploy—while always carefully selected and creatively redesigned—in any given moment are not systematic and coherent outlines of an entire world, but rather purposeful chaos.[1]

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[1] An idea that unfortunately his later actions would betray as revealed in his later scandals. Italics his. Levine, *Against the Stream*, 124.

[2] For an excellent deconstructive history of the modernist reconstruction of Buddhism (and Zen in particular) as a religious philosophy essentially linked to "experience" and radical empiricism, consider: Robert H. Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and

As a memoir, Levine's narratives and tactics come from his own individual experience. However, they are not limited to his experience. Like Richmond, Levine is caught within a structure that makes all second-generation Buddhist Americans invisible, and Levine is no exception. This is another lesson from Hanisch's provocative claim that the personal is political: individual experience is always collective experience. The effects of Levine's inversions are not confined to his own life. While Levine's words might just be about his relationship with his father, his personal reversal is necessarily political. We are not simply talking about one family. By challenging the

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the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," *Numen* 42, no. 3 (1995): 228-93.

[1] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91-110.

dominance of the monk-convert lineage through its own rhetorical authority, we are talking about the empowerment of many second-generation Buddhist Americans.[1] There is never just one. Either many will be visible or none will be.

Recognition has a double meaning in the modes of resistance of second-generation Buddhist Americans. First, these Buddhists want to be seen—seen as an integral part of the history of Buddhism in the United States, seen by their parents and each other, and seen as Buddhists. They want to be *recognized* as similar to their parents, but also fundamentally and irreducibly different. In order to achieve this end, Levine shows us a common tactic in their toolbox of subversion—the practice of re-appropriating their parents' traditions, narratives, and values for alternate ends. Turning their parents' norms and stories upside down, they create both new Buddhist narratives and a new space for those narratives. Second-generation Buddhist Americans engage in the practice of re-cognition: borrowing the personal traditions, narratives, and values that form their parents' Buddhism—their parents' religious

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[1] One might add here that since this structure oppresses many groups and not just second-generation Buddhist Americans (such as Buddhists of color), Levine's critique has the potential—although with no guarantee—to be in solidarity with these groups as well.

"minds"—and reworking that mental space as politically liberating. This creative practice functions as a reminder that second-generation Buddhist Americans exist. As we have already seen, reshaping the personal is a political act. In order to achieve recognition, Levine and others engage in re-cognition. In this context, recognition holds two complementary meanings—visibility is achieved by creating a new worldview out of parts that form the parental worldview. The colonizer's mind is re-tasked by the colonized mind—from the convert's mind to the child's mind.

If the dominance of the monk-convert model has the aftereffect of making all second-generation Buddhist Americans disappear, then Levine's performance might be one of the greatest magic tricks of all time: suddenly, an entire crowd appears in an instant. Through sleight of hand, an entire structure of oppression is turned upside down. The best tricks happen right in front of the audience's eyes. A nearly invisible tactic, an act of camouflage, all in the name of being seen. The irony is palpable. Second-generation Buddhist Americans will be seen. And yet, even more palpable in all of this is a terrifying worry: with all the hidden tricks and costumes, will anyone recognize them?

Recognition, Agency, and Resistance

There is a lengthy genealogy within continental philosophy concerning the possibility of recognition. Can the self recognize the other qua other? While Fichte was the first modern European philosopher to reflect on the concept of recognition in any depth, Hegel's reflections in *Phenomenology of Spirit* are far more influential in the history of continental philosophy.[1] In order to consider the question of whether modern continental philosophy has the tools to assist in reflecting on the possibility of recognition for second-generation Buddhist Americans, any examination should begin with Hegel and *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Within the section entitled "True Nature of Self-Certainty," Hegel famously describes the possibility of consciousness of self and other through an account of the archetypal "lord and bondsman," better known as the master and slave dialectic.[2] In this narrative, Hegel writes that everyone searches for understanding and self-awareness. However, self-cognition is not a gift that one can give oneself as an individual. This is because the problem of self-consciousness forms because of the gap between self and other—the self does not initially know how to reconcile seemingly external otherness within one's self-identity. As such, only through a relationship with another can true self-consciousness emerge.

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[1] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[2] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 104-38.

Hegel describes the most common form of this emergence as the relationship between the lord and bondsman. In the encounter between two individuals, the two become differentiated by the process of a struggle and one of the two individuals seizing the role of dominance. The lord forces the bondsman to use his labor to support the master. Ultimately victim-blaming, Hegel argues that the lord is able to seize power because he is not afraid of death, while the bondsman accepts slavery as a condition of survival. Because his freedom is restricted, the bondsman cultivates creativity in his engagement with reshaping the environment around him. Putting aside any ethical issues with a sharp power differential, Hegel still claims this is not a happy tale if it ends at this point. On one hand, the lord becomes increasingly alienated from himself because in his yearning for absolute freedom he is completely dependent on the bondsman's creativity. On the other hand, while the bondsman has a limited ability to become self-aware through his ownership of his creativity, full self-consciousness remains impossible because his relationship with the lord remains founded on unsublimated difference rather than mutual and equal recognition between two selves.

Up to this point, my analysis' dependence on Hegel's conceptualization of recognition should be obvious with one important exception. Hegel is right to identify both the emergent creativity among marginalized groups and the inevitable impossibility of absolute unrestricted freedom through relationships of dominance. However, Hegel is ultimately a philosopher of selfhood—he does not consider the full depth of the asymmetrical possible perspectives from a site of otherness. After all, Hegel's *telos* for the encounter of self and other is for the self to recognize *selfhood* (not otherness) in the other, and then become self-aware through this recognition. Difference, in this narrative, is strictly the medium or midwife to the birthing of fully free selves. Hegel's highest value and end in this process of mutual recognition—while admittedly grounded in relationships—is the thoroughly modern obsession with absolute and unrestricted self-freedom.

Hegel assumes that one begins as a self and is only made a marginalized other through the process of alienation.[1] But what of those that *begin* as others?

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[1] As I will briefly mention below, Hegel does discuss childhood in other texts, and suggests that children are not selves and do not have any "moral will"—revealing a possible contradiction here. What Hegel believes children to be, however, remains unclear. G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen. W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 211-13.

From the moment they are born, second-generation Buddhist Americans (and one might add children in general) begin in relationships of religious domination, control, and manipulation. These children are caught in a seemingly inescapable prison. They are taught to conform to adult norms in order to be visible and recognized. However, by doing so, they repress and conceal their differences, and thus functionally remain invisible as the *different* individuals they actually are.

Truthfully, Hegel does not consider the full implications of childhood for his account of selfhood. He does not consider children in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In his much later text *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel's discussions of children are confined to the moral responsibilities parents have toward their children.[1] Children have very limited agency or selfhood in these discussions—not only are they not ultimately the subjects of Hegel's reflection in these sections on the moral nature of the family, they are not subjects, period. Instead, children are passive receptacles. Parents should give them love (first modeled by adult love between the two parents). Parents should educate them with technical knowledge and a moral education. To the extent that children display individual desires, parents should control and coercively reshape those desires to conform to adult norms. Eventually, when children grow up and become adults, and only then, are they able to become free and autonomous selves. For Hegel, the process of maturation is functionally a "conversion moment" from child-object to adult-subject.

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[1] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 211-13.

As we have seen, language of conversion often justifies relationships of domination and control, and Hegel's own description of childhood and maturation reflects the broader radical trends in European and American understandings of childhood that began in the modern period. No longer small adults, children become trainable objects—canvases for their parents to paint to their hearts' desires. Since Hegel's story of the lord and bondsman is a tale of two adult selves, children can be safely ignored and pushed to the periphery (with women, people of color, and a multitude of others).

What happens when we begin with a different starting point from Hegel? Shifting epistemic privilege, the concept and process of recognition takes on new meaning from the perspective of the child-other. While beginning with a relationship between self and other, Hegel assumes that recognition emerges as an interaction between selves. For the most part, modern continental philosophy has followed this assumption. Even the critics of Hegel's concept of recognition have accepted that "recognition" and "selfhood" are inextricably linked. For example, in his criticism of Hegel, Levinas rejects the concept of "recognition" all together as being too closely bound to selfhood.[1] For Levinas, recognition is a lost cause—the self simply cannot recognize the other.[2]

Levinas does write about a kind of self-recognition of the other—although he does not name it recognition—but it turns Hegel upside down. The Levinasian self does not recognize the other by recognizing her selfhood, but rather sees the other as the exception to the rules and norms of selfhood. Or, to put it another way, the self can only recognize the other when the other breaks in upon the dominance of the domain of the self as a challenge.[3] For this view, the other is 'recognized' as precisely someone who cannot be reduced or assimilated to the framework of the self-same. This other is danger personified—a threat to the egomania of the self. There is some symmetry with this Levinasian view and Badiou's later notion of the "event."[4] In order to break from Hegel, Levinas does not call this phenomenon recognition. And yet, when the other challenges the structures that make her invisible, and suddenly appears in front of the self, manifest in her full difference, using the philosophical tools of Hegel against himself, we might term this moment "recognition."

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[1] Emmanuel Levinas. *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 37.

[2] Levinas, 37-38.

[3] Levinas, 39-40.

[4] Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2005).

While the (im)possibility of the other-recognition by the self is an interesting question worth some thought, by beginning with the positionality of the child-other, the question becomes something altogether different. This is no longer a tale of the adult-self at all. Even the question of other-recognition by the self still assumes that the self is the true site and source of agency and power. For this view, the child-other is dependent on the adult-self for recognition. Is it possible to rethink the possibility of recognition as completely separate from (or at least only peripherally related to) the self? What is seen from the child's eyes?

There is no question that recognition is a relational process. As I have already hinted, the child-other can actively pursue recognition by challenging the dominance of the complex structures that make her invisible. As Bhabha writes concerning colonialism and hybridity in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man," the colonizer does not make the colonized invisible by erasing all of the latter's differences.[1] If the colonized other was fully assimilated into the terms of selfhood, there would no longer be any justification for the hierarchy between the colonizer and the colonized. Instead, the colonized is covered in a shroud of "camouflage," as the colonizer represents the colonized simultaneously as both universally human and just different enough—or, as Bhabha quotes Lacan, "mottled."[2] Applying this logic, we see that Buddhist American convert parents represent their children as aspiring converts (the self-same) and childish non-agents (difference) in order to render the full breadth of their difference and creativity invisible.

These children can resist their marginalization by re-making their camouflage as an asset. Formerly, both aspects (similarity and difference) of the camouflage are created justifications for the children's invisibility. This kind of camouflage is a double bind. To the extent that the children are similar, they can be ignored because they are not meaningfully different from the real subjects of the story of Buddhism in the United States—their parents. To the extent that the children are different, they can be ignored because they are not real agents within the story of Buddhism in the United States. By playfully and creatively re-mixing the self-same and difference—taking up the master's tools and remaking them as children's toys—the children make a new kind of camouflage that reverses the entire structure of marginalization. No longer is camouflage a shroud of invisibility—using both similarities and differences as weaknesses—but rather it functions as a Trojan Horse, allowing the children to use the authority of their parents to sneak into the house gates and suddenly appear in plain sight. To the extent that the children represent themselves as similar, they cannot be ignored because they affirm the same values and norms their parents' identities are constructed upon. To the extent that the children represent themselves as different, they cannot be ignored because the old story of Buddhism in the United States no longer satisfies. Invoking the authority of their parents initially brings their parents' attention; revealing their differences breaks apart that authority and begins to tell a new story.

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[1] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 121-31.

[2] Bhabha, 121.

The heart of recognition for the child-other is not strictly just about challenging the authority of her parents. No doubt this challenge must always be part of the process because of the injustice of the children's invisibility. The core of recognition for the child-other is not from her parents, however, but rather from other child-others. Levine may write like a "hippie" convert, but he openly confesses that he writes for another community—a new generation of Buddhists.[1] There are many websites devoted to young Buddhists, and within those there is a significant subset devoted to growing up Buddhist.[2] Richmond writes to Buddhist American converts to let them know that he and other second-generation Buddhist Americans exist, but he also confesses that he writes to let others like him know that they are not alone.[3]

Hegel is right about at least one thing concerning recognition—the most damaging aspect of non-recognition is internalized oppression. The most overpowering common theme between Levine and Richmond is their struggles with internalized invisibility. Both—like so many other second-generation Buddhist Americans—have been told again and again to ignore their own religious identities. They have been told that they are not real people until they are adults. They have been told that they are not truly free—nor should they be—within a framework that upholds freedom above everything else. They have been told that their most important religious relationships are not authentic. They have been told that families and children get in the way of the practice of real enlightenment—as children, they are a burden. They have been told that the most important relationships are not given but chosen, despite the fact that they did not choose their relationships with their families. They have been told that they are not a part of the history of Buddhism in the United States. Even when they are told that they are exceptional, it is always within the context of being told that there are few like them. In all of this discussion of oppressive political structures, it is easy to lose sight of the very real personal effects of those structures. The personal is political. And yet, likewise, the political is personal. *These children are made to feel shameful. Valueless. Invisible. Alone.*

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[1] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, ix-xii.

[2] See, for example, The Dharma Punx website, accessed via Wayback Machine, June 16, 2014, http://www.dharmapunx.com.

[3] Richmond, xx, 184-86.

While confronting their parents and a network of colonialist structures that have all conspired to hide them, they can find some degree of empowerment and recognition, as outlined above, but they will struggle to leave behind their own internalized invisibility. If you are told you are a problematic exception all your life, your first instinct is to see if there are others like you: am I the only second-generation Buddhist American? Both Richmond and Levine wrote memoirs as testimony to themselves and an invisible community that they are not alone. At several points in his meditation instructions, Levine tells his audience to picture themselves as children so that they can have compassion for themselves.[1] The subtle byproduct of this invitation is the revising of the invitee's view of themselves *as a child*—revise your given history and have compassion for yourself as a child. Picture yourself as a child with value. A child that is seen (even just by yourself). A child recognized. In this case, the process of healing (itself a political act), is also about recognition, but the adult-self is not involved. These second-generation Buddhist Americans come to recognize each other. They will be seen together. As such, the two processes of recognition are revealed to be tandem projects, inextricably linked.

Of course, these two kinds of recognition are infinitely fragile. In the struggle for power, these child-others can be pushed back toward the edges of vision, just as there will always be more second-generation Buddhist Americans seeking recognition from each other. Even experience fades with time. In order to counter his parents' generation's grasping for perpetual youth, Levine writes that youth is fleeting—no one stays young forever.[2] The only rule of life is impermanence. The upside of impermanence is that no structure of oppression can last forever. The downside is that as time passes and second-generation Buddhist Americans wear convert robes all the longer, living within a shroud of privilege, they may forget who lives underneath. For example, in his later works, Levine has increasingly sympathized with Buddhist secularists like Sam Harris in his critiques of Asian Buddhist superstitions and "traditions," passing over the fact that this kind of Buddhist secularism is a central part of the problematic colonialist history of Buddhist convert hegemony.[1] As such, no matter one's social location, recognition is a constant struggle that must be ever-renewed. No one stays young forever.

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[1] See, for example, Levine, *Against the Stream*, 159.

[2] Levine, *Heart of the Revolution*, 159.

As I have noted at several points, all second-generation Buddhist Americans are significantly privileged because of their nationality, and many are also privileged because of their race and gender as well. Both Levine and Richmond are white male Americans. They are not a prototypical example of the subaltern. They are marginalized because of their age, generational status, and religious identities. Colonial relationships in reality are never neat binaries with absolute demarcations between completely powerless colonized groups and completely dominant colonizers; intersectionality guarantees that the colonial world consists of overlapping and contradictory hierarchies which are never equal, but also never just a series of zeroes and ones. Most, while they fall somewhere on the network of colonial hierarchies, are somewhere in the middle. Depending on one's lens of focus, second-generation Buddhist Americans are both privileged and oppressed. They are hierarchically privileged by their nationality (and often by their race and gender); second-generation Buddhist Americans are certainly not pure moral exemplars or universal heroes—they are not immunized from marginalizing others just as they themselves are marginalized.[1] This fact, however, does not deny the brute reality that the religious aspects of second-generation Buddhist Americans' identities are socially concealed because of their age and generational status.

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[1] There is a significant degree of overlap between Levine and Harris in their disdain for Buddhist "traditions." For example, compare: Levine, *Heart of the Revolution*, 35-40; Sam Harris, "Killing the Buddha," *Shambhala Sun*, March 2006, 73-75.

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[1] Beginning in 2018, allegations of sexual assault and misconduct emerged against Levine. Against the Stream (Levine's founded communities; known as ATS) investigated the allegations and found that Levine "more likely than not" violated Buddhism's third precept "to refrain from committing sexual misconduct." Subsequently, the original ATS disbanded, other communities ended their relationship with him, and his authorizing original community (Spirit Rock) revoked his authority to teach. Despite a decline in followers, Levine still teaches and leads newly formed ATS communities. He blames the accusations on the rise of "anti-white" sentiments and anti-male "Me-too culture." While this news broke after the completion of this book, this story makes several aspects clear in light of this book and this chapter in particular. First, there is a pressing need for new examination and action by scholars and practitioners concerning gender and sexual misconduct in Buddhist American communities; despite common suggestions to the contrary, Buddhism is not somehow immunized from the realities of power, privilege and violence in surrounding cultures. If anything, those realities are exacerbated in Buddhist American communities because of the sharp power differences within many of those communities. Second, as I have suggested several times in this book, second-

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generation Buddhist Americans' marginalized status as Buddhists should not lead anyone to think that second-generation Buddhist Americans are immunized from the realities of power, privilege, and violence either. Levine's racist and sexist insistence that he is the victim in a story in which he victimized so many is particularly disturbing; the marginalized status of second-generation Buddhist Americans is no excuse for the oppression of others. Levine has clearly lost sight of who the marginalized are. He is not alone. Finally, while one could attempt to explain away Levine's views and actions as *strictly* reflecting wider American culture and white toxic masculinity generally speaking—with his Buddhist identity being incidental to everything—such an attempt would fundamentally be a mistake. It would be a mistake because Levine used his position of power as a Buddhist leader to assault and harass women; it would be a mistake because Levine justifies his actions and views by appealing to his understanding of Buddhism; it would be a mistake because Levine's Buddhist views and words are not incidental to his actions in this case nor are they compartmentalized from the entirety of his life. As I have argued in this book, Levine took on the figurative clothing of the convert as an act of sabotage in order to empower second-generation Buddhist American voices. The success—the visibility—that came with such a strategy is undeniable. And yet, over the years, as Levine became more visible—more powerful—he came to resemble his (former) camouflage. His narcissism, entitlement, and entrenched mentality reveal he has forgotten his (true) roots as a second-generation Buddhism American; now he reflects his convert clothing. This is a tale of fragility. Rather than deny their fragility, second-generation Buddhist Americans would do well to learn from their parents in this case—nothing lasts forever. Behind enemy lines, it is so very easy to forget where one came from. Sean Elder, "Noah Levine Blames the #MeToo Movement for the Demise of His Punk Rock Buddhism Empire," *Los Angeles Magazine*, accessed July 10, 2019, https://www.lamag. com/citythinkblog/ noah-levine-buddhism-me-too.

As I analyze second-generation Buddhist Americans' struggles for recognition, I am not erasing their privilege; I am focusing on the aspects of their identities that colonial structures conceal for political purposes. There is no contradiction in the notion that second-generation Buddhist Americans as religious individuals are socially invisible, but that they might also structurally unable to recognize many other marginalized groups for other reasons. Recognition of second-generation Buddhist Americans will not destroy the full web of colonialism, but it does pull at some of the specifically ageist strands within the web. Given the complex interconnected nature of the web, the full effects of destabilizing some parts of it are difficult to anticipate. There is no question that increased visibility for second-generation Buddhist Americans might result in decreased visibility of other marginalized groups, but this is not guaranteed. The actualization of this possibility largely depends on second-generation Buddhist Americans' awareness of colonial intersectionality and the wider effects of their actions and narratives.

A critic might pose a different concern pertaining to the matter of recognition: certainly Levine himself would need to exhibit signs of being consciously aware of embracing the language of converts in order for such tactics to be defined as resistance, correct? Otherwise, would I not be projecting my own values as a scholar upon Levine and other second-generation Buddhist Americans, falling into the same trap as what I accuse Buddhist American converts of falling into?

Admittedly, these concerns are difficult to respond to completely, and the just scholar should always engage in active self-reflection to prevent such over-determinations. One of the reasons it is immensely difficult to respond to this concern adequately (either way) is that it is very difficult if not impossible, as Frantz Fanon famously suggested, to psychologize or interpret the motives of the marginalized.[1] If privilege truly comes with the "risk" of living in a house of self-reflected images, then scholars—even those that are part of the communities they study—as a more privileged group, are always in danger of living less in an ivory tower, and more a tower of mirrors.

While this fact is undeniable and shapes every study of marginalized groups, the problem is not insurmountable. As I have already argued, every tool has the possibility of being re-appropriated for the ends of the marginalized—academia is no exception to this rule. Obviously, this task is easier when scholars have immediate connections with the marginalized groups they work with. As I have already mentioned and will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, my own roots are within the second-generation Buddhist American community.

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[1] Fanon himself transitioned to this viewpoint in the decade between writing *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

In the particular case of Levine and *Dharma Punx*, however, the case of intentionality is itself part of the problem. Internal to the dominant concept of consciousness (of revolt or anything else) is the concept of agency. In order to resist, according to this logic, the rebel as a fully autonomous individual must freely decide to resist. Within the history of modern Western philosophy, the nearly inseparable bond between free will and consciousness is exposed by the fact that nearly all scholars that reject one reject the other.[1] Even for the critics, consciousness and freedom are closely linked within their philosophical history. This genealogical bond between the two demands that any attempt to deconstruct the roles the concept of freedom has played within modernity must deconstruct the concept of consciousness as well. If free will is not a value-neutral concept, we should begin to suspect that consciousness might not be either.

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[1] As just one example of a scholar who rejects both concepts and even invokes the authority of "modern" Buddhism to do so, consider: Sam Harris, *Free Will* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

As we have seen, this absolute affirmation of a particular model of freedom and individuality is not without its own history. We would be right to be skeptical of forcibly imposing models and norms for such critical concepts out of context, particularly given the role these models and norms have played in complicated histories of dominance, control, and marginalization. Despite a common pretension to universality, the rhetoric surrounding this kind of freedom—for Buddhist American converts anyway—is anything but universal, and inextricably linked to structures of dominance that necessarily privilege some over others. The fantasy of the unrestricted freedom of the self cannot be separated from a history of the oppression and restriction for everyone else.

As such, the particular case of second-generation Buddhist Americans calls us all as scholars to reexamine and revise our concepts of resistance in light of these and other critiques of dominant models of agency. In her important 2005 text *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood makes a similar critique of dominant models of agency and resistance by reflecting upon contemporary women's groups in Egypt.[1] However, largely because of her reliance on Foucault, Mahmood mistakenly discards the wide usefulness of the concept of resistance as being too closely bound to problematic models of agency.[1] As we have seen with the practices, rhetoric and worldviews of second-generation Buddhist Americans, the concept of resistance need not be attached to these problematic models of agency or an overvaluation of particular notions of freedom.

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[1] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1-17.

This leaves open the question of a new and revised model of resistance that challenges rather than incorporates dominant models of agency.[2] Given my conclusions drawn so far, in addition to many other criteria, this new complex model would need to:

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[1] Mahmood, 32-39.

[2] Recently, critics have commonly suggested that the academic treatment of the concept of "resistance" since the 1980s has become a fad or even an obsession. "Resistance is now seen everywhere," they say; "so much so," they add, "the term has lost all meaning." One might say that it has become a fad to criticize resistance as a fad. And yet, the assumption that the omnipresence of a concept like resistance is necessarily problematic has not prevented many scholars from invoking concepts like freedom or agency to explain nearly every situation as well. Further, if proponents of the wide usefulness of the concept of resistance are correct, power structures *are* everywhere (life could not exist without them!), so it should not be surprising that resistance can have some explanatory usefulness in nearly every context. Most critics of the wide deployment of the concept fail to follow a hermeneutical spirit of charity and inhabit the position they seek to criticize. For example, many Marxists criticize the wide use of the concept because they believe it dilutes the concept and undermines the power of large public revolutions. And yet, these same critics continue to assume a public/private split that postcolonial and feminist critics problematized long ago.

1) Acknowledge the immense creativity of marginalized groups in using whatever tools are at hand.
2) Problematize any neat split between public and private spheres, morality and politics, tradition and creativity, and subterfuge and outright revolution.
3) Recognize the power of reversals in not only deconstructing structures of oppression, but also creating new liberating structures as well.
4) Redefine freedom (both to oppress and to resist) as always responsive and relational. Agency and tradition (or family) do not form a binary. As Wendy Brown and others have noted, the either/or logic of pitting agency

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Believing the only important form of resistance occurs in the public sphere does not conjure away forms of resistance in the private sphere. But perhaps most importantly, popular dismissals of concepts of resistance most commonly involve the further reification of the binary between objective and disinterested academic scholarship (its own form of self-mastery) and the moral realm. This binary not only creates a gap between the scholar and the ordinary human which is completely illusory, but it ultimately erases any responsibility academics might have as ordinary humans. As scholars, we should not primarily be asking "does resistance accurately describe the situation?" as though this query can be posed separately from the second question "is the concept of resistance useful in this situation for the marginalized groups at hand?"

> against tradition is a colonial logic designed to disarm the possibility of marginalized populations from using either in the name of liberation and empowerment.[1]

Beyond this limited outline, however, such a task is well beyond the scope of this particular book.

Putting aside for the moment questions of consciousness and agency, what is within the scope of this book is a consideration of the specific ends of the particular modes of resistance of second-generation Buddhist Americans like Levine. At first, it might appear odd to consider the question of "ends" while bracketing the seemingly related issue of consciousness. But this language is merely shorthand for designating the actual results (regardless of intentionality) of Levine's body of work. For all these reversals, what does *Dharma Punx* actually accomplish?

As we have seen, Levine's corpus is about recognition. It is about rebuilding one mind into another—one worldview into another. This practice is done in the name of being seen by other second-generation Buddhist Americans. This is the goal. The primary goal is not to be fully recognized and understood by the parents who have contributed to making them invisible because of their structural privilege and self-attachment. That much might be impossible. Nor is this some psychological tale of children acting out for attention by their parents. Such psychological narratives continue to erase the true power of these children's own stories. Perhaps from time to time, one or some of these parents—in a flash of enlightenment[1]—recognize something in their child—something truly different. They do not see a hippie. They see a punk.

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[1] Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 149-75.

And perhaps in those moments, they are even proud, seeing the small part they have played as parents in bringing about the end of their self-mastery. But even these moments are fragile and fleeting, and not to be hoped for. This is what Levine means, quoting lines he learned from his father, when he writes that Buddhists should "find some freedom in that [present] moment from the regret of the past and the fear of the future."[2] Just as no one stays young forever, no moment lasts forever. Regardless, this is not the goal. After all, this is no longer even a story centrally about the converts anymore.

Instead, for Levine, the goal is to be seen by each other. Interdependence. Solidarity. The goal is to see oneself as a native of Buddhism. The goal is to resist being hidden away. For when all the mirrors have been broken, all the selves shattered, only the Buddhist no-self remains.

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[1] If one believes in such things; Levine, for example, does not follow that particular Zen line of thought.

[2] Levine, *Dharma Punx*, 60.

Radicals or Reformers?

It would be entirely too easy to allow this story of two second-generation Buddhist American authors to collapse into an easy dichotomy between a radical and a reformer. No doubt their styles of resistance are different. Richmond openly challenges an oppressive structure that has rendered his differences invisible. Levine wears the cloak of a convert in order to counter that same oppressive structure. This difference certainly allows us to explain the sharp difference in reception between the two texts. And yet, we should not exaggerate the differences between the two. Or, perhaps more properly, exactly by focusing on the differences between the two, we will uncover that the differences are only a matter of degree and that neither author is strictly a radical or reformer.

An essentialized distinction between radical and reformer blinds us to the realities of resistance. Typically, a spatial metaphor is used to distinguish a radical from a reformer—while a reformer works from *within* a system to change it without fundamentally altering its framework, a radical works from *without* a system to break it apart and start anew. But as we have seen, there are a number of issues with this logic. With Judith Butler, we might wonder: can we theorize a pure exterior?[1] With Homi Bhabha, we might ask: in actuality, whose fantasy is to escape an impure world?[2] With James Scott, we might ponder: does the Marxist obsession with overt and visible revolt obscure more common and subtle methods of sabotage that would not be properly classed as "reform?"[3] But most importantly, with Levine and Richmond together, we should never leave unasked: can the master's tools actually be remade as child's toys?

After all, as we have already seen, it is no accident that even the more blatant critic of the two, Richmond, grounds his critique of the structures that oppress him upon the values his family and community taught him. Richmond productively invokes the author(ity) against itself; for a community that professes compassion and inter-relationality, Richmond claims the adults of the community are still caught in Samsara, grasping at their own egos and projects of self-mastery. This rhetorical gesture is not simply deconstructive or self-destructive, however, as with this critique, Richmond re-claims for himself and his fellow second-generation Buddhist Americans a re-appropriated framework of values and norms that has ties of authority to a past without being bound to it. As Richmond suggests (subtly challenging Buddhist converts' obsession with uncovering a pure fountain of youth), second-generation Buddhist Americans are both something old and something new. They will not stay invisible.

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[1] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 18-34.

[2] Bhabha, 130-31.

[3] Scott, xv-xvi.

Likewise, while he may seemingly put on the robes of a convert, a close reading of Levine's works tell a broader and more complicated tale. Levine's narrative is one of re-cognition. Initially invisible to his parents and Buddhist communities, Levine claims and reshapes a Buddhist heritage in order to make his visibility a matter of his own terms. By expressing exact or similar words and themes first uttered by his parents, Levine shifts their contexts to achieve different ends. Common tactics we have seen enacted by Buddhist converts in order to maintain their power become completely inverted with few actual changes to the tactics themselves. Depoliticization through a movement from the political to the personal becomes a repoliticization through a re-emphasis that the personal is, in actuality, truly political. Spiritually disowned by his parents because of their obsession with freedom and chosen relationships, Levine turns around those same values to claim his parents as his spiritual teachers and family. Levine will not allow the religious lineages that Buddhist converts want to make invisible to remain hidden.

I began this chapter by insisting on the importance of focusing on the differences between Levine and Richmond. By beginning with these differences, I have demonstrated that any easy distinction between these two as radicals and reformers is false in a way that would not have been possible by focusing on their similarities. It is not an accident that both second-generation Buddhist American authors cite many of the same books including Jack Kornfield's *A Path with Heart* as some of the most important books on Buddhism.[1] For both, this nod is an homage to the religion of their parents. There is no absolute failsafe on the master's tools that prevent them from being used to break apart the master's house and begin again from the wreckage. Marginalized groups will often creatively use anything at hand for the tactics of their own empowerment.

At this juncture, someone might pose an entirely different critique: while the scope of Levine's influence is certainly impressive, the size of his communities of a few ten thousand and a readership of a few million hardly support my arguments that claim to reveal important features of American and global religious dynamics via an analysis of second-generation Buddhist Americans. Even if one accepts my claim that the narratives by both Levine and Richmond reveal aspects of the broader group of self-identifying second-generation Buddhist Americans, even the most optimistic estimate of this group would probably be several hundred thousand. How do I hope to make claims about the nature of resistance and religion in the United States upon such a seemingly circumscribed base? How might I draw a wider circle?

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[1] Notably, Levine also includes Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* within his list of favorite books on Buddhism. Levine, *Against the Stream*, 166; Ivan Richmond, "Zen," Ivan Richmond's personal website, accessed December 15, 2018, http://www.ivanrichmond.com.

To answer these questions, we must posit further questions concerning the nature of religious identity. What makes someone Buddhist? As I will suggest in the next chapter, posing such a question opens new doors for research. The scope of this book widens, as we begin to notice that even the way we have asked questions about what it means to be Buddhist has been shaped by the dominant model that favors Buddhist converts in the United States. The questions we ask and do not ask are the ground of visibility. And so, we must dig deeper. We might not be talking about just a few second-generation Buddhist Americans that have been made invisible in both the public and private spheres. Ask different questions, and suddenly, we might end up with many million.

CHILD'S MIND, PARENT'S MIND

NIGHTLIGHT BUDDHISTS, ALTERNATIVE LINEAGES OF AUTHORITY, AND (DIS)PLACING THE BUDDHIST AMERICAN CANON

Buddhism in the United States and Widening the Scope of Critique

In the early stages of this book, I decided to talk with my father to learn more about his perspective raising children as a Buddhist American convert. On a summer trip home, he invited me over for dinner. It was just the two of us—a good opportunity to talk. I had also been concerned about what he would think about my project, and thought that this would be a good time to tell him about it. After some light-hearted conversation about other family matters, I awkwardly brought up my book. I told him I would be writing about Buddhist American converts, their children, and Buddhist family dynamics in the United States. After telling him a little more about the topic, I told him I wanted to talk to him about his experience raising my brother and me. My dad raised an eyebrow. "Are we changing the subject?" he asked. "I am happy to talk about raising you two," he said, "but I do not see how that is related to your book." My father, who had meditated off and on for decades, read dozens of books on Buddhism, eagerly quoted koans and wisdom statements attributed to the Buddha, and even attended different meditation communities from time to time, told me with a completely straight face, "I am not Buddhist. I mean, I am certainly not religious."

I realized in that moment the original scope of this book was wrong; I had originally intended to focus only on self-identifying Buddhist converts and their children. And yet, a project that could not explain the millions of Americans like my father who claim to be influenced by Buddhism but reject the label "Buddhist" (at least occasionally) would miss a crucial part of the history of Buddhist converts in the United States. Through my early analysis of the experiences of second-generation Buddhist Americans, I had come to recognize that religious identities are far more complicated than self-identification. No one freely chooses any identity completely, and the power-politics of representations shapes how particular people can identify. It truly depends on the day and context whether my dad identifies as Buddhist, and yet, due in large part to his influence, at least one of his children identifies as Buddhist. Buddhism is a meaningful part of his life including his approach to family relationships. If I could not explain the role people like my father have played in the history of Buddhism in the United States, the full effects of the cultural structures I had analyzed would be undersold. After all, Buddhist sympathizers like my father read Kerouac, Buddhist parenting manuals, and watched films like *Little Buddha*. They were one of the primary audiences for these narratives. As I will argue below, in a way, they are the quintessential Buddhist American converts. To not tell their stories would be to not tell the full story of Buddhist American converts. And as such, to not tell their stories would fail to tell the full story of second-generation Buddhist Americans. So the question is: how do Buddhist sympathizers like my father fit into the broader narrative I have described so far?

In Chapter 3 and 4, I critically examined the troubling history of marginalization at the heart of Buddhist American convert family life—the monk-convert lineage. In Chapter 3, through a reconstruction of the genealogy of this concept, I showed that Buddhist American converts have told, lived, and embodied narratives that have reinforced their power and authority at the expense of the visibility of other Buddhists in the United States—from Asian-American "cradle" Buddhists to the converts' own children. I argued that this structure of oppression is not the result of individual actions, nor are Buddhist American converts simply partly responsible for an Orientalist frame that makes several groups effectively invisible. The monk-convert lineage is not so much first a moral issue, as it is an embedded political reality. The very foundation of Buddhist American converts' identities is the power-politics of visibility.

What happens if we interpret history from the eyes of the invisible? In Chapter 4, through an analysis of several narratives by second-generation Buddhist Americans, I showed that the children rendered invisible by the dominance of the monk-convert lineage cleverly and subtly invoke every tool at hand in order to subvert the structure that marginalizes their identities. Many of these strategies can be broadly summarized as reconstructing an alternative lineage of parent-child to challenge the monolithic nature of the monk-convert paradigm. By simultaneously identifying their parents as their initial link to Buddhism while ultimately differentiating their Buddhist identities from those same parents, second-generation Buddhist Americans give voice to their own struggles and triumphs.

At this juncture, one might object: given the relatively small numbers of Buddhist American converts (and their children), even if it is true, does this book amount to anything more than a brief and relatively unimportant historical footnote in the wider history of religion in the United States? After all, over the course of a half-century, are we simply talking about only a few million people?

However, this kind of exclusivistic logic shrouded in a veneer of pragmatism shares an assumption held by Buddhist American converts—only the majority plays a role in shaping history. The fact that Buddhist American converts are not even the majority among American Buddhists should give us pause over this rhetoric. More importantly, the stories of Buddhist American converts might serve as an allegory for the wider problems inherent in these kinds of a priori determinations in any sector. Determinations of who matters most in any history often have less to do with reality and more to do with the politics of identity and power. Historians are not immune to this rule.

But pushing aside these matters for the moment, the tendrils of the monk-convert lineage extend far beyond the several million self-identifying Buddhist American converts and their children. In Chapter 3, I critically examined Kerouac and *Little Buddha* precisely because popular cultural representations of Buddhism reveal wider conceptions of Buddhism than those held just by self-identifying Buddhists. In this chapter, I argue that similar effects of the monk-convert paradigm are equally visible in a much larger group than self-identifying Buddhists and their families. How does the monk-convert paradigm manifest itself in the lives of those that do not explicitly identify as Buddhist but claim that Buddhism has influenced their spirituality?

While there are roughly 4 million Buddhists in the United States, supported by large surveys, Wendy Cadge and Robert Wuthnow estimate that there were roughly 25-30 million Americans in 2004 that would say "that Buddhist teachings or practices have been important to their thinking about religion or spirituality."[1] This is just a snapshot; over the history of the United States, the number must be much larger. Given trends, that number almost certainly has also grown since the survey.

In the 1999 edited volume *American Buddhism*, Thomas A. Tweed shook up the nascent academic field of Buddhism in the United States with his article "Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures."[2] In the article, Tweed claims that scholars have solely focused upon 'serious' practitioners of Buddhism in the United States and ignored the novel existence of millions of "Buddhist sympathizers" who (while not necessarily belonging to a Buddhist community or even describing themselves as Buddhist) have been significantly influenced by certain aspects of Buddhism. Tweed suggests that the most common avenue for this influence is textual, and that these "Night-Stand Buddhists" share a de-facto canon of books that includes texts like Philip Kapleau's *The Three Pillars of Zen*.[1]

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[1] Robert Wuthnow and Wendy Cadge, "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 3 (September 2004): 363-80.

[2] All future references to this article are to the revised version of the essay in *Westward Dharma*. Thomas A. Tweed, "Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures," in *American Buddhism*, ed. Duncan Ryūken Williams and Christopher S. Queen (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 71-90; Thomas A. Tweed, "Who Is a Buddhist? Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures," in *Westward Dharma*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 17-33.

Tweed argues that Buddhist studies scholars should not just consider self-identified Buddhists in order to understand how "Buddhism" functions within wider cultural contexts, but should also examine others who relate to "Buddhism" in ways besides self-identification.[2] In order to understand the variety of roles "Buddhism" or any other religion plays in a specific context, the scholar must consider the wide diversity of representations and practices that relate to that term. The cultural meaning of a religion is influenced by more than the content that self-identifiers of that religion give it.[3]

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[1] Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?" 21.

[2] Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?" 17-22.

[3] In addition, self-identifiers of Buddhism (or any religious tradition) do not live in a cultural vacuum, nor will they ever get their understandings of Buddhism only from other self-

Following this insight, Tweed widens the scope of relevant topics within the academic study of Buddhism in the United States, but he does not draw the circle wide enough. Tweed presents Nightstand Buddhists as individuals who succeed in relating to Buddhism as individuals on their own terms.[1] Since Buddhist sympathizers are often ambivalent about organized religion, scholars have assumed that they strive not to raise their children Buddhist. However, do these parents succeed in keeping their Buddhist "sympathies" from their children? These children, through their relationships with their parents (even just by witnessing their parents meditating), might also be said to have been influenced by Buddhism. Playfully, following Tweed, I refer to these children as "Nightlight Buddhists." [2] What has their relationship

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identifiers. As such, as scholars, even if we only wish to understand the "Buddhism" of self-identifiers, we must still cast our net wider than that particular group.

[1] Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?" 20-22.

[2] I use the phrase "Nightlight Buddhists" to designate children of Nightstand Buddhists for several reasons. First, the first phrase is both connected enough to the latter that the importance of the relationship between the two is clear, even while the two remain distinct groups. Second, in contrast to their parents, Nightlight Buddhists' first experiences with "Buddhism" occur when they are young children, and so "nightlight" hints at this early influence. Third, while both a nightlight and a nightstand lamp illuminate, only the latter is used for reading. Primarily, however, the term is a playful turn of phrase that I use for the sake of convenience to designate these children easily.

with Buddhism been like? How has this relationship been similar and different from their parents' relationship with Buddhism, particularly given the reality that children (with developing literacy) will necessarily relate to a textual canon in different ways than their adult parents? I answer these questions by drawing upon three sources—my own relevant experiences as a Nightlight Buddhist (expanding upon my previous reflections), and two short essays by Nightlight Buddhists in Sumi Loundon's two edited volumes on young Buddhists.[1]

In this chapter, by examining the family dynamics of Buddhist sympathizers, I not only show the wide influence and scope of the monk-convert paradigm, but also analyze those dynamics as a test case to rehearse the arguments I first articulated in earlier chapters. Despite common mutual antagonism between self-identifying Buddhist converts and Buddhist sympathizers, through this lens, I show that the two groups actually are a lot more alike than either group might wish.[2] Both groups reinforce their authority in relationship to Buddhism through lineages that can be drawn back to Oriental monks. Through this process, both groups ultimately erase all other Buddhists that do not conform to that logic.

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[1] Sumi Loundon, ed., *Blue Jean Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001); Sumi Loundon, ed., *The Buddha's Apprentices* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006).

[2] While outside the scope of my discussion here, the mutual antagonism between Buddhist sympathizers and self-identifying Buddhist converts are conflicts over who are the real, authentic, and authoritative American Buddhists. The history of these conflicts is quite long and could be traced through Alan

Much like we saw in Chapter 4 with the children of self-identifying Buddhist converts, Nightlight Buddhists resist their erasure through a variety of tactics. They engage in a precarious balancing act of identifying their parents as the primary source (or "door") of their connection to Buddhism, even while arguing that they have novel and unique voices on Buddhism over apart from their parents. Nightlight Buddhists draw upon the authority of their parents to affirm the importance of their own unique voices on Buddhism both within and against the hegemonic constraints of a textual conception of Buddhism given to them by those same parents.

Nightstand Buddhists

In his history of Buddhism in the United States, the journalist Rick Fields writes that "Buddhist history is the record of lineage—of who gave what to

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Watts's infamous 1958 article "Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen," back to elite Victorian parlor disagreements over the true nature of Buddhism. I trace the history back through Watts in Chapter 2. Alan Watts, "Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen," *Chicago Review* 12, no. 2 (1958): 3-11; Philip Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1-6.

whom."[1] Of course, broadly speaking, this feature is not unique to Buddhist history; after all, every social construction has a genealogy. Shaped by the complex forces of the past, all humans also carefully select and invoke particular strands of that past in order to bolster the authority of present traditions. While "Buddhism" is no stranger to this reality, it is also not alone in being a "record of lineage."

Fields, however, did not intend for this statement to be taken broadly; the term "lineage" takes on special meaning in the case of Buddhist history, in which monks' authority was established by their ties to previous masters. In the case of Chan Buddhism in China, for example, elaborate spiritual genealogies were constructed that traced the monastic line back to Bodhidharma and later patriarchs. As both John R. McRae and Alan Cole have shown, these lineages were relatively late constructions, and the actual transmission of monastic Buddhism in China was much more complicated and full of interruptions and breaks.[2] The relative truth of these monastic lineages mattered little, however, as they were often quite successful in reinforcing the power of particular monks—these monks created spiritual genealogies in order to establish their authority over other monks (connected to "lesser" lines).

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[1] Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1992), xiii.

[2] John R. McRae, *Seeing Through Zen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1-21; Alan Cole, *Text as Father* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 1-4.

In the context of the United States, Fields suggests that these lineages undergo a necessary shift, since most Americans have resisted becoming full monastics.[1] Despite this fact, most Buddhist American converts embrace certain "monastic" practices like meditation and often go on lengthy retreats.[2] Unlike most lay Buddhists over the history of Buddhism, they often study closely under a master, and through this master, trace their lineages back to authoritative monastics in China or Japan. As such, in the United States, the dominant lineages change from monk-monk to monk-convert.

While both lineage models reinforce the authority and power of particular groups over others via the politics of representation, the shift to the latter model in the context of the United States is significant. Certainly, the monk-monk lineages created hierarchies of monks. They also reinforced patriarchal structures by further marginalizing the role of nuns in the history of Buddhism.[1] Further, under the earlier model, the hundreds of millions of lay Buddhists across history become completely incidental bystanders to the passage of Buddhist traditions from generation to generation.

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[1] Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, xiii.

[2] The notion that meditation is the central monastic practice is itself the product of Orientalist representations of the mystical monk figure; in reality, across the history of Buddhist monastics, most monks never meditated. Robert E. Buswell, Jr., *The Zen Monastic Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 54.

The difference between the two models is not that one is not connected to power and politics, but rather that the construction of the monk-convert American lineage is inseparably linked to the politics and representations of Western Orientalism. Under this mode, the mystical and mysterious Eastern monk possesses all of the spiritual wisdom of the world. However, this wisdom is also alien to the West, and the transmission of this knowledge from East to West cannot occur as a simple word-for-word translation. The monk is not so much an agent (or even a person) as a static symbol for spiritual depth and knowledge that must be mined by the West. Converts establish their authority by connecting their lineages to these monks, even while the converts become the real site for creative agency, as they "must" adapt the wisdom of the East to its new context.

As I outlined in Chapter 3, in her book *Virtual Orientalism*, Jane Iwamura reveals the inner mechanisms of the monk-convert model via an analysis of the American representations of a variety of "monk" figures from the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to Kwai Chang Caine in the popular TV series *Kung Fu*.[1] In her discussion of D.T. Suzuki, Iwamura perfectly summarizes the monk-convert relationship. Recall the passage that I quoted in Chapter 1:

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[1] While outside the topic of this chapter, it is important to note that the monk-convert lineage is also connected to the politics of gender. Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 142-45.

> The Western Pupil... would come to represent the protagonist of the story that would make Eastern spirituality attractive to a popular audience. Without him, the labor of the Eastern sage or Oriental Monk, whose express mission it is to transmit his ancient spiritual heritage, would bear no fruit. The pupil's function in the narrative would come to depend not so much on his capacity to teach, but rather his ethos. It is the pupil's ability to challenge convention and embody the promise of a new cultural synthesis that transforms him into a hero.[2]

While both the monk and the pupil play a crucial role in this lineage, the pupil is the only one that controls the future of the "Eastern spirituality" in the West. The representation suggests a transfer of authority from East to West, from monk to convert; in reality, the authority never left the convert's fingertips.

While Iwamura is more interested in the role the monk-convert relationship plays in American culture most broadly, her analysis also applies to the dominant representations of the history of Buddhism in the United States.[1] As I noted in Chapter 2, in a now infamous editorial for *Tricycle*, Helen Tworkov writes that only white Buddhist converts have "figured prominently in the development of something called American Buddhism."[2] Even when these converts studied under other converts (as many have), they trace their spiritual genealogies back to the East. They construct an Oriental past that they invoke to maintain their power living into the future.

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[1] Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 3-22.

[2] Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 51.

Tweed explicitly rejects Fields's deployment of lineage as the proper metaphor for the history of Buddhism in the United States.[3] He argues any lineage of authority will necessarily "draw on essentialist-normative definitions of religious identity."[4] Tweed claims that these definitions force the scholar to engage in the non-scholarly practice of separating "authentic" Buddhists from inauthentic Buddhists.[5] Those that do not fit the normative criteria are left outside any account of the history of Buddhism in the United States. Instead, scholars should strive to

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[1] Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 8.

[2] Helen Tworkov, "Many Is More," *Tricycle* (winter 1991): 4.

[3] Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?" 24.

[4] Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?" 24.

[5] Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?" 27.

"understand" the full breadth of "religion and culture."[1]

I disagree with Tweed that it is possible for scholars (or anyone) to entirely avoid essentialist-normative definitions of religious identity. The shortcomings of Tweed's proposed standard of evaluation (self-identification) are revealed in his own article when he discusses the importance of many non-self-identifying Buddhists to understanding the history of Buddhism in the United States. While self-identification can be useful when used carefully, overemphasizing it not only privileges a particular post-Enlightenment notion of religious identify as fundamentally chosen, but also ignores the ways power inequalities shape the process of self-identification in different contexts (without completely erasing agency).

However, Tweed is right to be critical of the way the representation of monastic-convert lineages as *the dominant* essentialist-normative definition of Buddhist identity in the United States has favored particular groups while rendering others invisible. Scholars' goal should not be a cool and collected "understanding" of these situations, as though they even have the possibility of being completely removed from these contexts of power, but rather, a critique of the dominant structures. Further, by tentatively embracing norms (as all necessarily must) they should be allies to those marginalized by those structures by helping them to be heard.

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[1] Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?" 27.

In fact, Tweed makes such a critique in his description of Nightstand Buddhists. According to Tweed, Buddhist sympathizers have been ignored because they do not have "authentic" Buddhist teachers and do not belong to "authentic" Buddhist institutions.[1] In other words, they do not easily fit into the model of the monk-convert relationship. The monk appears to be absent, and the conversion is partial at most.

However, while Nightstand Buddhists have been ignored because of the common American discomfort with ambiguous religious identities, contra Tweed, their relationship to Buddhism closely parallels (even reinforces) the monk-convert lineage. As will become clearer below, many Buddhist sympathizers resist identifying with Buddhism precisely so that they can maintain their freedom and control over Buddhism. In this way, there is a great deal of overlap (both historically and conceptually) between the religious lives of Buddhist sympathizers and other related groups discussed by other scholars, like the "New Metaphysicals" (Courtney Bender) and

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[1] Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?" 24.

"Spiritual Shoppers" (Robert Wuthnow), as well as "New Age" religion more broadly.[1] Buddhism as a religious identity does not determine Buddhist sympathizers; separating the "philosophy" from the "religion," or the "wisdom" from the "culture," they selectively affirm some aspects and reject others. They are not converted; Buddhism is converted. This is an exaggeration of the reversal that we witnessed in the representation of the agency of Western Buddhist converts in the monk-convert lineage. As such, the Buddhist sympathizer is the *ideal* "convert" for the model.

Further, if Iwamura is right, and the "Oriental Monk" is a control-fantasy of Western Orientalism designed to reinforce particular imperialistic hierarchies, the Buddhist sympathizer might have a "master" after all.[1] As Tweed wrote, books are the primary source on Buddhism for Nightstand Buddhists. An informal canon of texts has emerged that nearly all Buddhist sympathizers inevitably encounter—beyond Kapleau's book, one could also include Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind,* D.T. Suzuki's *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, Robert Aitken's *Taking the Path of Zen*, Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, and Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics,* as well as dozens of books by the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Pema Chodron.[2] Since most Buddhist sympathizers do not regularly attend an institutionalized Buddhist community, their introduction and perspective on Buddhism is principally shaped by this canon. The canon is itself a firmly entrenched norm. In conversations among Nightstand Buddhists, if someone has not read any of these books (let alone heard of them), then that person will often be ostracized—whatever they are, by not following the canon, they are rejected as true Buddhist sympathizers.

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[1] Despite these connections, I would also point out that there are important historical and conceptual differences between Buddhist sympathizers and these groups as well. The scholarly tendency to treat unorthodox religious practices and beliefs under the same umbrella implicitly privileges the orthodoxy that marginalizes everyone outsides its bounds. While naming this common oppression is important, as well as identifying historical continuities between "different" groups, it is also important to evaluate each on their own terms in order to identify important differences between them all. Ghost belief, for example, is not the same as a belief in the powers of crystals, neither in the content of the two beliefs, nor in the ways believers societally and culturally position themselves vis-à-vis religious orthodoxy. Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 2-4; Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 106-29.

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[1] Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 8.

[2] Obviously, the gendered aspect of the Oriental monk-convert relationship is complicated by the inclusion of a few female authors (like Pema Chodron) in the canon. However, most of the authors of these texts are male.

But beyond being a criterion for belonging, the canon also provides the ideal fulfillment of the "Oriental Monk" as a control-fantasy. Unlike a person (no matter how draped in Orientalist representations), a text cannot *seemingly* talk back. As an object, it does not easily disrupt or confound expectations. Further, the relationship with these texts provides the illusion that the sympathizer has the ability to maintain a distinct sphere pertaining to her relationship with Buddhism, while other sectors (like family life) remain apparently separate from that influence. By reading the texts, the Buddhist sympathizer can connect to a line of authority (through the lineage of the author) back to the mystical East. Even if the words unsettle (since it is, of course, naive to assume that a text cannot disturb), the book can be put down.[1] This is why Tweed's moniker for Buddhist sympathizers is so fitting—they are truly Nightstand Buddhists. While drawing upon the authority of Buddhism, they, and only they, control their own destiny. This self-portrait functions by keeping others fully outside the bounds of the individual's religious identity. In reality, both in inception and execution, no picture is so neat.

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[1] Of course, this construction is fictive precisely because the collection of texts forms a canon that limits the freedom it purports to create. This will be particularly clear in the relationships between sympathizers and their children; the parents will not be able to keep their "Buddhism" from their children, and in fact, the limits that the children run up against in attempting to find their own voices will expose the fact that the textual canon has (in part) created those limits. Or, perhaps more properly, the canon as a construction of power creates a limited degree of freedom for the parents (since they too are bound to the canon) by restricting the freedom of their children.

Methodology

Much like their parents, Nightlight Buddhists are not easy to identify. As a reminder, recall that by "Nightlight Buddhist," I simply mean a child of a Buddhist sympathizer. This makes the scholarly task of finding common practices and beliefs among this group difficult. After all, the very definition of Buddhist sympathizers (and thus initially their children as well) is that they cannot be found on any Buddhist organizational roster—an easy method for finding other Buddhist groups. Of course, there are millions of Buddhist sympathizers in the United States, so one can fairly estimate that there are also millions of children of Buddhist sympathizers in the United States as well. Since there have been Buddhist sympathizers in this country for nearly 200 years, the majority of these children are probably not even children anymore; a Nightlight Buddhist might be 9 or 90.[1] The overall lesson is that most Americans

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[1] Further social location information is also difficult to ascertain, since there have been no in-depth studies of Buddhist sympathizers (let alone Nightlight Buddhists). While Buddhist

(including American scholars of Buddhism) probably interact with both of these groups all the time and have no idea.

However, these limitations do not force us to give up the topic entirely. Since by "Nightlight Buddhist" I simply mean to designate the children of Buddhist sympathizers, the difficult project is actually in identifying the Buddhist sympathizers themselves. This task is not impossible. In fact, with his initial invention of the term, Tweed provided a few profiles of Buddhist sympathizers. However, since most Buddhist sympathizers present a hyper-individualistic public face to their religiosity, children and family life are generally absent from their accounts of their relationship with Buddhism.

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sympathizers have often been racialized as white, there are no good reasons to believe that Buddhist sympathizers are any less racially diverse than self-identifying Buddhists in the United States. If the demographics of Buddhist sympathizers mirrors the demographics of self-identifying Buddhists in the United States (admittedly quite a leap), then they would be more likely to be highly educated and of a higher class status than the average American. But this assumption would be misguided, since given the absence of data, there is little reason to believe that the demographics of Buddhist sympathizers reflect the demographics of self-identifying Buddhists. Future demographic studies of "Buddhists" in the United States must continue to become more nuanced by including previously unasked questions (like "did you convert to Buddhism," and "has Buddhism influenced your spirituality?") in order to further complicate our understanding of Buddhism in the United States. Tweed, "Who Is a Buddhist?" 20-22.

As such, in order to understand the role "Buddhism" has played in Nightlight Buddhists' lives, we must begin with their own accounts.[1] Luckily, second-generation Buddhist Sumi Loundon has recently compiled two volumes of short autobiographical essays by young Buddhists. Since all of these essays are short and topical, it is often very unclear whether the authors are converts, "cradle" Buddhists, or children of Buddhist sympathizers. Usually, the only essays that make this aspect of the author's identity clear are those that reflect on the author's relationship with her parents. Further, while in theory it is easy to separate self-identifying Buddhist converts from Buddhist sympathizers, in practice the boundary between the two is much muddier. What about parents that were converts and then became sympathizers—or vice versa? Or what about parents that belong to a Buddhist community but do not identify as Buddhist? By only reflecting on texts by self-described Buddhists, I also do not consider the equally important population of children of Buddhist sympathizers that do not come to identify as Buddhist.[2]

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[1] While I do not examine them here, Internet discussion forums are also a good place to look for these accounts.

[2] Of course, there are even more serious methodological issues raised by attempting to examine this group. It becomes much more difficult to find children of Buddhist sympathizers

While these other cases are also important, since no work has been done on Nightlight Buddhists, I selected the two clearest cases of narratives by children of Buddhist sympathizers in Loundon's volumes. These two essays are Soren Gordhamer's "Juvenile Hall Dharma" and Hilary Miller's "I Try."[1] While this undoubtedly limits the value of my reflections, it also provides a base of comparison for future, more nuanced work.

Prior to my profiles of these two authors, I reflect upon my own experience as a child of a Nightstand Buddhist. While I have already provided some biographic information in Chapter 1, in this chapter I reflect deeply on the particularly unique elements of my experience as a child of a Buddhist sympathizer. I do this for three reasons. First, given the scarcity of data on Nightlight Buddhists, my experience as one provides helpful supplementary information alongside the other two cases I consider. Second, since my background as a Nightlight Buddhist inevitably informs my approach to the topic, I reflect on my experience for reasons of honesty. While all scholars have biases, my experience as a

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that do not later identify as Buddhist, since they will likely not appear in volumes by Buddhists (like Loundon's) or on Buddhist discussion forums.

[1] Soren Gordhamer, "Juvenile Hall Dharma," in *Blue Jean Buddha*, 160-66; Hilary Miller, "I Try," in *Buddha's Apprentices*, 3-6.

Nightlight Buddhist shapes my views in a distinct way that I feel must be named.[1] Lastly, I name my experience as an attempt to relativize that experience by presenting it alongside other different narratives. I hope this prevents my story from dominating the other stories, as it might if it were not named. I leave the reader to judge if my conclusions are fair and move beyond my own personal narrative.

Before I transition to my own narrative, however, allow me to remind the reader of one final point about my overall methodology. Second-generation Buddhist Americans (including Nightlight Buddhists) are both privileged and marginalized by the structures of colonialism, and while I argue that their experiences differ from their parents' experiences in important ways, I emphasize that they are not the model example of a subaltern class. On one hand, they are significantly privileged because of their national status, and many are also privileged because of their race and gender. On the other hand, they are marginalized because of their age, generational status, and religious identities. This intersectional status does make them unique, but it does not make them the heroes in the conflicts against colonial structures. Their parents pretend to be heroes; the children would do best to learn from their folly. They should not seek to replace their parents. However, without guaranteeing anything, the children's unique experiences and perspectives do enable them to be potential allies in the resistance struggle to challenge reified hierarchies of power established by colonialism. My project began and continues with the notion that any adequate portrait of second-generation Buddhist Americans must recognize the full intersectional nuances of their social power and visibility. Nightlight Buddhists—myself included—are no exception to this rule.

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[1] On the other hand, I might add that most scholars might have ignored Nightlight Buddhists precisely because they are not Nightlight Buddhists themselves.

Self-Reflection as a Nightlight Buddhist

As I outlined briefly in Chapter 1, I am a white male 32-year-old Buddhist that grew up in a lower-middle class family in Boise, Idaho. Both of my parents "converted" from Christianity before I was born. I put "converted" in scare quotes not because they still identified as Christian (they did not), but rather because the destination was unclear. Given their meditation practices and reading tastes, I feel confident saying that they were (at least) Buddhist sympathizers. My mother died when I was four, and so I am unsure of how she identified.[1] As I noted in the above, for my father, it really has depended on who was asking, as well as when and where the question was being asked. Some days he was Buddhist; other days he was "nothing"—a man interested in the Buddha's teachings, but resistant to being identified within any religious tradition. To some Christians, he was unaffiliated so that he could label religion as a source of evil in the world. To door-to-door evangelizing Christians, he was Buddhist so that he could simply close the door with little explanation.

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[1] While all Buddhist sympathizer parents in the narratives I consider in this chapter are fathers, given the small sample size, there is no reason to believe that these parent-child

I do not believe my father's strategic use of religious identity is unique or an outlier. Many people share similar tactics; this truth is often just less easy to recognize among majority groups. However, I imagine that it was not just a conscious strategy on my father's part; given his complicated feelings about organized religion, Buddhism and identity labels, he was also probably unsure at times. Combined with the American societal pressure to be religiously "something" at least, I suspect he asked himself the

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relationships are solely gendered as father-child relationships. In my own case, for instance, given that my mother was also (at least) a Buddhist sympathizer, if she had continued to live as I grew older, I imagine I would have more stories concerning Buddhism to reflect upon in relationship with her. Hopefully, future studies of Nightlight Buddhists can expand the scope of narratives examined to include a deeper sensitivity to potential differences that emerge given the politics of parental gender.

question "what am I?" from time to time.

At least from my point of view, however, the weight of that question never seemed to weigh as heavily on him as it did on me. As a child, I remember being anxious about my religious identity. Most of my friends were Evangelicals or Mormons, and they talked often about their religious lives. I grew up hearing about church services and playing Bible trivia games.[1] I often felt like an outsider, both in the little unconscious things my friends said and did, as well as in more overt ways. Once, in my public school elementary class, the teacher made a comparison to Noah's Ark. I raised my hand and asked, "What is Noah's Ark?" The teacher and the class laughed at me until I left the classroom in shame. When I told my father about events like this one, he generally told me to ignore the teasing; looking back, I do not think he could grasp how painful religious oppression within schools can be, since he had not grown up as a religious minority.[2] Eventually, I stopped talking to my father about these moments, as well as my more general feelings of being an outsider.

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[1] In the games, I am not sure I ever moved my piece even one square!

[2] For a good examination of religious oppression as a separate (albeit often related) factor from racial and gender oppression, consider Khyati Y. Joshi, *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 118-44.

Over time, I learned that it was easier to minimize conflict if I could at least identify as some recognizable religious identity rather than "I don't know." I was twelve, and I started telling my friends I was Buddhist. Several months later, my father overheard me tell a friend that I was Buddhist. He pulled me aside later and told me I should not call myself Buddhist—I could choose my religion when I was older. As a child, my father told me, I was religiously "nothing." My father wanted to give me the power and freedom he had felt he did not have as a child. And yet, in that moment, I felt completely ashamed, like a core part of me had been stripped away. I did not stop identifying as Buddhist entirely, but for several years, I ceased being "Buddhist" around my father.

Labels were one thing, but teaching was another. My father was always eager to share his wisdom on Buddhism with me. Before I read any books on Buddhism, everything I knew about Buddhism I gleaned from my father. Having watched him meditate for years outside our house, I started meditating when I was six, first imitating my father, and later asking him for guidance. My father also loved to pepper in stories, sayings and "wisdom" of the Buddha in everyday conversations, and I heard them all (often multiple times). His favorite saying was about killing the Buddha if one ever met him on the road. While he would occasionally go to meditation groups, I also knew he learned about Buddhism from the dozen or so books we owned. I knew how important those books were to him; besides how-to-manuals, the only books I ever saw my father reading were on Buddhism, and those books dominated the small family bookshelf. For me as a child, however, seeing the way my father engaged them, they did not appear to be attainable books that I could read—they were mystical objects with auras full of power and wisdom.

As a teenager, I started to express interest in Christianity and began attending different churches with friends. For obvious reasons, this concerned my father. Aware of my voracious reading habits, he pulled books related to Buddhism off of our bookshelf and gave them to me to read. He began with Pema Chodron's *The Wisdom of No Escape*, one of his favorites.[1] Eventually, I finished all of them. I was disappointed—not because they were bad books—but because the reality could not possibly meet the mystique.

Or perhaps more accurately, I was disappointed because what my father had taught me was not fully contained in those texts. This belief is not about childhood nostalgia for a purer past; what my father continued (and continues) to teach me about Buddhism surpasses any text. Contrary to popular belief about Buddhist sympathizers, my father's "Buddhism" was not compartmentalized. As I understood it growing up, and as I still do, his conception of Buddhism influenced everything he has said and done, and therefore, how he raised me. For example, he gave me my sense of anti-authoritarianism; this value can no less be separated from his understanding of Buddhism than his meditation practice can be. And truth be told, I believe that my father would agree with me. As he told me once, Buddhism is a "total mindset." Or, in my case, it would also become a gift; an ambiguous present from a religiously ambiguous parent to a child. Experiencing pressure from both my father and wider culture in how I should receive this gift, I was (and continue to be) ambivalent about it. While my Buddhist worldview came from my father, a different context and my partial social invisibility guaranteed that it would not be identical with my father's way of understanding Buddhism through texts. And yet, even from that first day, I honored my father by making his gift my own.

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[1] Pema Chodron, *The Wisdom of No Escape* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1991).

Nightlight Buddhist Profile

Hilary Miller

At the time of the publication of her essay, Hilary Miller was fourteen years old living in a rural town in California.[1] With the limited evidence given in the essay and the short companion bio, beyond her gender and age, her social location is unclear. Hints in the text and the bio suggest that she is middle-class or above.

The primary topic of Miller's essay is her relationship with her father. While at the end of the essay, Hilary argues that her father is Buddhist, she admits that "[h]e never called himself Buddhist," and that she doesn't even "think he even thought of himself as one."[2] Her father does not meditate. He is not connected to a Buddhist community. However, he does enjoy reading books on Buddhism, notably books on Zen. At the climax of her essay, Hilary's father insists that his understanding of Buddhism influences how he thinks and acts.[3] He "tries" to be mindful. Following Tweed's definition, Hilary's father is a Nightstand Buddhist, and therefore, Hilary herself is a Nightlight Buddhist.

The short narrative can be separated into three parts. First, the Miller family is at an art gallery.

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[1] Loundon, ed., *Buddha's Apprentices*, 212.

[2] Miller, "I Try," 5.

[3] Miller, "I Try," 5.

Impatient, Hilary tells her parents she wants to go home. Her father tells her to "walk and breathe" and practice "true meditation."[1] This command infuriates Hilary, as she feels at first as though her father does not have the right to lecture her on Buddhism, since she actually meditates and he does not. Next, Hilary narrates a brief flashback. In this flashback, Hilary is 12, in a car with her father, with a pile of books on her lap. She asks her father what the books are, and her father tells her about Buddhism. Finally, flashing forward once again, she moves past her anger when she realizes that her father gave her the "gift" of Buddhism.[2] She then invites her father to start meditating.

Besides a brief appearance by Hilary's mother, this story has three characters—a daughter, a father and a stack of books. Told from her perspective, the narrative provides a rare possibility to see how the first character as a Nightlight Buddhist navigates between and relates to the other two characters. Further, the story provides a window on how one Nightlight Buddhist understands her own identity vis-à-vis Buddhism. Add another source for comparison, and a portrait of the world of Nightlight Buddhists begins to take shape.

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[1] Miller, "I Try," 3.
[2] Miller, "I Try," 5.

Nightlight Buddhist Profile
Soren Gordhamer

While Soren Gordhamer was 32 at the time of the publication of his essay, some of the text is a reflection on his years as a teen.[1] Today, he is a popular speaker and author about Buddhism, meditation and technology, and has taught meditation to a wide range of audiences. Soren is white and appears to have grown up in a middle-class (or above) household in Texas.

A significant portion of Soren's essay is about his work teaching meditation to incarcerated teens in New York City. Prior to this discussion, however, Soren reflects on how Buddhism impacted his own life as a teen. While he provides few details, Soren claims that he was "bored, confused, and suffering" as a teen.[2] Concerned, his father began leaving books and tapes on Buddhism outside Soren's bedroom door. At first, Soren ignored these efforts. Eventually, Soren began reading the books and listening to the books-on-tape. He also began to meditate. Ashamed his father might find out that he was taking his advice, he always did these activities in private—usually in the bathroom. Eventually, Soren came to identify as a "Buddhist meditator."[3]

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[1] Loundon, ed., *Blue Jean Buddha*, 226.
[2] Gordhamer, "Juvenile Hall Dharma," 160.
[3] Gordhamer, "Juvenile Hall Dharma," 161.

Like in Hilary's essay, there are really only three characters in this portion of the essay—Soren, his father, and several texts on Buddhism. However, the father never actually speaks in the narrative. Soren describes his father as a "psychologist with *an interest* in Buddhism."[1] This phrasing is important, and "interest" language is often a key-marker of being a Nightstand Buddhist. When he was young, Soren also states that he was very unsure about if he and his family belonged to a particular religion, or if they were even religious (in contrast to his "highly Christian town").[2] All of this evidence plausibly suggests that Soren's father did not identify as Buddhist, but that he was still a Buddhist sympathizer. Therefore, Soren is also a Nightlight Buddhist.

While Hilary and her father talked about Buddhism extensively, both Soren and his father were very private and reserved about their relationships with Buddhism. The fact that Soren's father did not even verbally invite Soren to read the books on Buddhism, but rather just left them outside Soren's bedroom door reveals important dimensions of the relationship. Religion was a taboo topic in Soren's household. And yet, this reality did not prevent his father from introducing Soren to Buddhism. The act of concealment says a great deal. The lineage—the passing of Buddhism from parent to child—says more.

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[1] Italics mine. Gordhamer, "Juvenile Hall Dharma," 160.
[2] Gordhamer, "Juvenile Hall Dharma," 160.

The Nightlight Buddhist and Alternative Lineages of Authority

Comparing and contrasting these narratives enables us to discover the shared elements and trajectories present in the Nightlight Buddhist's relationship with Buddhism. To focus this analysis, I ask two questions. What are the most common ways Nightlight Buddhists are influenced by their parents' relationship with Buddhism? How do Nightlight Buddhists respond to this Buddhist influence? In an unequal power relationship, these children must navigate treacherous waters, on one hand, avoiding breaking from their parents' conception of Buddhism entirely, while on the other hand, avoiding completely assimilating to that conception.

In all three cases, the children identify their parents as the origin of their relationship with Buddhism. Hilary writes that her father was her "door to Buddhism."[1] Her relationship began the moment her father first laid the pile of books on Buddhism on her lap in the car. While he and his father never actually discussed Buddhism, Soren credits his father for introducing him to Buddhism. According to Soren, his father gave him books and tapes on Buddhism because he was concerned about Soren's emotional state. In my case, I would argue that my experience with Buddhism began the moment I was born, as according to both of my parents, their understanding of Buddhism shaped everything they thought and did, including raising me. I became conscious of this reality the moment I first heard and understood one of the stories about the Buddha that my father told me. I was probably three or four.

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[1] Miller, "I Try," 4.

In their narratives, texts on Buddhism play an important and inescapable backdrop for this relationship, but the Nightlight Buddhists identify their parents and not the texts as their primary source on Buddhism. On one hand, in that first moment in the car, Hilary quickly identifies the power and mystical authority her father had given the books on her lap. Her father's response to her question about the books only reinforces this impression; he tells her that these books are on Zen, a "very pure form" of Buddhism that tries "to go back to the original teachings of the Buddha."[1] Later, when she decides to learn more about Buddhism, she reads these books.

On the other hand, Hilary recognizes her father and not these texts as her introduction to Buddhism; the texts are a mode or medium (even an extension) of introduction, but they are not the source. Her father was not simply a "door" to her Buddhism, however—a portal she passed through and left behind long ago. The lesson Hilary learned in the story is that he continues to be her "mirror" on her Buddhist practice even after that first introduction.[1] Even though he does not meditate, she recognizes the moment when he tells her to meditate at the art gallery as a *teaching* moment.

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[1] Miller, "I Try," 4.

As in my own experience, these teaching moments are not compartmentalized or constrained solely to conversations that explicitly begin about Buddhism. Both the parent and child feel quite comfortable referencing Buddhism in a myriad of different contexts, from disobedience in art galleries to parental advice about sex and depression. This constant possibility of the permeation of Buddhism in any sector of family life is also real in Soren's case. As I already noted, Soren and his father did not talk about Buddhism. This silence was not one-sided; just as the father clearly felt uncomfortable talking to his son about Buddhism (or his son's depression), Soren also hid his later meditation practice from his father.[2] At first glance, it appears rather odd that Soren identifies his father as his introduction (and not the texts and tapes) as his introduction to Buddhism. Was stumbling upon books and tapes outside his bedroom door really any different from stumbling upon them in a library?

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[1] Miller, "I Try," 4-5.

[2] Meditation is the other most identified topic of conversation between the parents and children relating to Buddhism.

Soren clearly believes the two situations were different, and upon further analysis, he has good reason to believe this. The primary difference is context. Soren understands the leaving of books outside his door as an attempt (however misguided) by a father to help and communicate with his son. The act of leaving these texts outside Soren's door is an intentional parental act. While the texts might have provided some of the specific content on Buddhism, they were also simply the forms of communication between father and son. These moments too were teaching moments.

Texts are identified as modes of interaction concerning Buddhism between the parents and the children. These range from open invitations by the children (i.e. the child has a question, and the parent

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However, a close examination of these discussions reveals that nearly all of the conversations are closely linked with references to texts, since most Nightstand Buddhists have learned meditation through reading particular texts rather than directly from other practitioners. As in my case, however, this is not always true. In some cases, Nightlight Buddhists learned how to meditate from their parents.

suggests a book) to parental suggestions (i.e. the parent leaves a book outside the child's door) to more overt parental commands (i.e. "go read!"). The power difference between parents and children is clear throughout these narratives, as these children's struggle to formulate their own conceptions of Buddhism is closely linked with their parents' conceptions. Since these parents' relationships with Buddhism are predicated on the monk-convert lineage model discussed above, the authority the parents give the canon of Buddhist American texts marginalizes their children's religiosity because it falls outside the model.

The children's relationship with Buddhism significantly preexists their reading of the canon texts (through observation, conversation, and practice with their parents). These children did not read the texts until their mid-to-late teenage years. And yet, these children constantly reference texts from the canon in their narratives. Even before they had actually read the texts, they could identify the aura of power that their parents have given this canon.

The social anthropologist Brian Street has argued that literacy is a device used to reinforce (or resist) hierarchical power relationships.[1] Given that the particular facets of all hierarchies are shaped by the relevant cultural context, Street suggests that cross-cultural models of the "autonomous" impact of literacy on culture and cognition are misguided.[1] There is not one kind of literacy, nor is there a single role literacy plays in every culture. The meaning of literacy is determined by how different agents within a context use the term and related concepts (like textuality) to reinforce their power or subvert the power of others.

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[1] Brian V. Street, introduction to *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy*, ed. Brian V. Street (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 7-10.

Street and others have applied this insight to a wide variety of contexts, including within the sector of formal education.[2] Less has been done on the topic of one of the most common gaps between levels of literacy between different actors—within the home. As Maurice Bloch has noticed, in many cases in so-called Third World nations this often entails a higher level of literacy possessed by the children than their parents.[3] In order to avoid the pitfalls in only engaging in anthropology of the other, however, scholars must follow Street's example and also consider how different levels of literacy impact power dynamics even within the West.[1]

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[1] Street, introduction to *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy*, 5-7.

[2] Brian V. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 213-32.

[3] Maurice Bloch, "The Uses of Schooling and Literacy in a Zafimaniry Village," in *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy*, 87-109.

While the representation often does not meet reality, to the extent that the American education system is successful in its intended goal, U.S. native parents (having gone through that system) are more literate than their young children. This is even more likely to be true in the case of the three narratives considered here, because of the economic class background of the three families. Given this differential, one would expect the meaning and uses of literacy in the home to be particularly closely related to power dynamics. Literacy would be a means of control by parents over their children.

While this reality is not unique to the relationship between Nightstand Buddhist parents and their children, this relationship proves to be a helpful test case to uncover the ways in which literacy is inseparable from differences in power within the domestic sphere. Even before the children read the actual texts, they could identify the aura of power that their parents gave to the canon. Since their parents' relationship to Buddhism is grounded upon the text/monk-convert dynamic, the children necessarily struggle with a model that marginalizes their own relationship to Buddhism. They cannot fully escape the authority of their parents, nor therefore the canon of texts that the parents imbue with authority. Given this reality, it is unsurprising that these children constantly reference texts from the canon (even prior to reading them) in their understanding of Buddhism. The home is a space of hegemony.

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[1] Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 213-32.

In this light, the constant parental call (or demand) for the children to "go back to the text" is an attempt to forcibly constrain these children's religiosity within the text/monk-convert lineage model. These children must also go through the maturation ritual of reading these texts, since the canon is understood to be true Buddhism.[1] Even though Nightlight Buddhists were influenced by their parents' Buddhism even when they were young children, they too must "convert" to the structures of literacy in this context if they are to be understood as even partially related to Buddhism. Otherwise, the brute fact of the children's identities serves as a challenge to the wider structures of dominance that the parents have constructed their "Buddhism" upon.

The Buddhist American textual canon is omnipresent in all three of these children's relationships with Buddhism, but it is equally clear that these children do not have the same relationship with the texts as their parents did. Nor are these children simply passive receptacles for their parents' teachings on Buddhism. Their parents are both their "door" unto Buddhism as well as their provocation to a new performance of Buddhism.

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[1] Of course, this association of texts with "true" Buddhism goes well beyond Buddhist sympathizers. As Tomoko Masuzawa has noted, this connection has also dominated the academic field of Buddhist studies since its conception. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 125-38.

Nightlight Buddhists differentiate themselves from their parents' relationship with Buddhism in a number of ways. Despite the power differential reinforced by the parental invocation of the structures of literacy and textuality, the children do find a variety of ways to differentiate themselves from their parents, as well as revise, challenge and (even) resist the ways that their parents have insisted Buddhism be understood and lived through the canon of texts. While these strategies and experiences range from radical to minor, all of them should be taken seriously.

First, Nightlight Buddhists often identify alternate "favorite" texts within the canon instead of embracing their parents' favorites. Hilary does this when she claims that her father's favorite Zen texts are "bleak" and "stark."[1] She prefers "Thich Nhat Hanh's emphasis on peace and love."[2] Similarly, while later Soren would mock himself for his apparent arrogance, as a teen he often rejected books suggested by his dad like *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* because he did not consider himself a "beginner."[1] This rejection also hints at another strategy of resistance—all three narratives occasionally and subversively hint that Nightlight Buddhists have more experience with Buddhism than their parents because the children (unlike their parents) have been influenced by Buddhism since the "cradle."

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[1] Miller, "I Try," 4.

[2] Miller, "I Try," 4.

Second, all three Nightlight Buddhists considered here came to self-identify as Buddhist to differentiate themselves from their parents.[2] In order to avoid the judgment of their parents, Nightlight Buddhists often learn to only identify as Buddhist out of the hearing of their parents. Similarly, they also often learn to practice Buddhism (like meditation) out of the sight of their parents. In her anger at her father, Hilary claims that he only "reads" about Buddhism, while she actually practices it.[3] Such a strategy is a counter-appeal to another authority (the cultural importance of "living religion") against an overemphasis on the authority of texts. By this logic,

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[1] Gordhamer, "Juvenile Hall Dharma," 161.

[2] Of course, this should not be understood as a universal strategy of all Nightlight Buddhists, given my previous methodological discussion of my selection of narratives written by self-identifying Buddhists.

[3] Miller, "I Try," 5.

Hilary, not her father, knows what true Buddhism is. While she later regrets this claim, even her retraction is a subtle form of subversion. She writes that she has come "to understand that he was a Buddhist in practice, too, just in a different way than I was."[1] She believes this even though "[h]e never called himself Buddhist, and I don't think he even thought of himself as one."[2] Hilary ultimately rejects her father's process of self-identification (a process, as I argued previously, that maintains his power and control over Buddhist discourses). He is Buddhist because she learned about Buddhism from him, and now she is Buddhist. In other words, Hilary affirms her marginalized lineage (parent-child) over against the dominant lineage (text/monk-convert).

Third, Nightlight Buddhists make a variety of related claims that their parents cannot reduce the children's experience with Buddhism to the parents' understanding of Buddhism. Most broadly, these arguments generally suggest that the parents cannot understand their children's experience with Buddhism because the parents were not young children or teens when they first began "sympathizing" with Buddhism. In other words, the parents have no idea how Buddhism applies to issues and dilemmas posed by being a child or teen.

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[1] Miller, "I Try," 5.
[2] Miller, "I Try," 5.

Both Soren and I have experienced religious oppression for not being Christian (or being easily identified as within any religion). We both identify the school system as one of the most common sites of this marginalization. In both cases, as children, we did not feel comfortable talking with our parents about these experiences because we did not feel they would understand. The parents had chosen their ambiguous religious identity as adults—how could they understand what religious oppression was like as a child in school?

On a related note, Nightlight Buddhists often suggest that the uncertainties and ambivalences about religious identity that emerge from not having a singular religious identity (i.e. "Buddhist," etc.) are more omnipresent for the children of Buddhist sympathizers than for the sympathizers themselves. The parents are more comfortable with the ambiguity because they chose it, while their children are more overtly driven and haunted by the question "well, what am I?" This question appears again and again in these narratives. One can sense the anger in Soren's voice (still present over a decade after the fact) when he writes: "If we were not Christian what were we, for crying out loud? We had to be something, hadn't we?"[1] Soren identifies this initial difference of comfort level with religious ambiguity between parent and child as related to the religious oppression that these children experience in schools. While not subversive, both of these factors often lead to awareness among some Nightlight Buddhists that their experiences in connection to Buddhism are crucially different in some ways from their parents' experiences. This consciousness then leads to further possibilities for resistance.

Finally, Nightlight Buddhists often rhetorically place the child's voice and the parent's voice on equivalent authoritative levels concerning Buddhism. While not as radical as the outright rejection of the parents' textual Buddhism seen above, this strategy is often more successful, and unlike the rejection, rarely has to be retracted. Claims like "we both have something unique to contribute" or "we can teach each other" give authority to the child's relationship with Buddhism without completely erasing the value of the parent's relationship with Buddhism. Since the marginalization of Nightlight Buddhists' experiences occurs through the unequal distribution of power and the maintenance of relationships of domination through the modes of literacy and textuality, even just the affirmation of equality is subversive. While her father is her “door” to Buddhism, Hilary completes the circle (destabilizing the notion of lineages entirely) by claiming she has also taught her dad about Buddhism. She writes:

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[1] Gordhamer, "Juvenile Hall Dharma," 160.

> The path I walk is very much my own... it seemed to me that with our very different angles on Buddhism, my father and I had something to offer each other. In a strange and wonderful way, we keep each other in balance.[1]

Buddhist sympathizers are not islands unto themselves. This becomes particularly obvious in the case of the sympathizers with children. On one hand, their children argue that they learned about Buddhism primarily from their parents. On the other hand, their children argue that the sympathizers' relationship with Buddhism is profoundly incomplete without the different voices provided by their children.

Obviously, like any children, Nightlight Buddhists both repeat and revise the traditions of their parents. However, if we look at these particular relationships through a lens sensitive to power dynamics, interesting features of the relationship are revealed. To reiterate, these children claim that they have a unique “Buddhist” voice in comparison to their parents. And yet, they draw the lineage of this voice back to their parents; they hold unique relationships with Buddhism (that differ from their parents) *precisely because of* their parents. In many ways, the content of "Buddhism" is pre-given to these children, and yet, these children find creative ways of paradoxically invoking the authority of their parents to subvert that authority and the canon that they cannot fully escape. We can map many second-generation Buddhist Americans' tactics (as depicted in Chapter 4 and 5) to get a partial sense of the variety of creative options they have at their disposal (Figure 5.1).

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[1] Miller, “I Try,” 6.

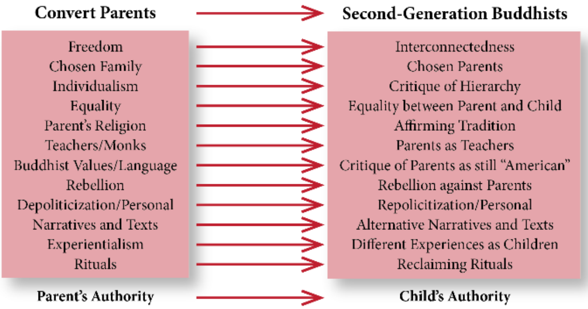
Convert Parents
Second-Generation Buddhists
Freedom
Interconnectedness
Chosen Family
Chosen Parents
Individualism
Critique of Hierarchy
Equality
Equality between Parent and Child
Parent's Religion
Affirming Tradition
Teachers/Monks
Parents as Teachers
Buddhist Values/Language
Critique of Parents as still "American"
Rebellion
Rebellion against Parents
Depoliticization/Personal
Repolicitization/Personal
Narratives and Texts
Alternative Narratives and Texts
Experientialism
Different Experiences as Children
Rituals
Reclaiming Rituals
Parent's Authority
Child's Authority

Figure 5.1. Second-Generation Buddhist American Responses: Acts of Re-cognition

In fact, perhaps the most subversive element of the children's religiosity is precisely their invocation of their parents as their primary authority on (or "door" to) Buddhism. While the lineages of authority in the United States among converts have typically been drawn to the pure, mystical Oriental monastic figure (or, more commonly, their textual symbolic stand-ins), these children construct alternate lineages of authority of the generational passage of Buddhism by connecting their "Buddhist" lineages to their parents rather than texts. While the canon is still omnipresent, it takes a different shape and plays a different role in the relationship between parent and child than in the more commonly represented model of the lineages of Buddhism (i.e., monk-convert). The contexts of literacy and textuality matter. Nightlight Buddhists still pay homage to the canon, but by putting the authority of their parents above the canon (as well as by simply differentiating between their parents' authority and the canon's authority), they call the absolute importance of the texts into question. In this case, the irony is that resistance amounts to putting the parents first. Since the parent-child relationship is marginalized (as a lineage of authority) within the hegemonic understanding of Buddhism in the United States, that relationship, while still unable to escape the power of the Buddhist American canon, might still be a site of more instability and potential resistance.

Orientalism and the Home

While this chapter is an in-depth analysis of the relationships between Buddhist sympathizers and Nightlight Buddhists, I do not mean to suggest that the power dynamics I have uncovered concerning parents, children, religions and texts are unique to these relationships. Different lineages of authority are deployed by many different groups to reinforce hierarchies. Despite this fact, I see this analysis as useful for at least two reasons. First, following in the footsteps of feminist critics, I hope to have shown why scholars must further expose the ways power dynamics (through textuality, literacy, models of parental agency, etc.) permeate family and domestic life as much as any other sector. The home is never safe from power or politics.

Second, I challenged the dominant scholarly modes of understanding Buddhism in the United States (that often explicitly or implicitly rely upon the monk-convert lineage model) by exploring how the existence of Nightlight Buddhists challenges the legitimacy of these previous approaches. Further, I presented a positive portrait of the agency of these Nightlight Buddhists. While constrained and marginalized by the monk-convert lineage they fall outside, Nightlight Buddhists cleverly resist that lineage by invoking the authority of their parents.

Of course, it is not uncommon for entire structures of marginalization to be hidden. The more distinct facet of this particular process of oppression is the way it is closely linked to the geopolitics of Orientalism. Children are not seen as legitimately Buddhist until they “convert,” even if they were raised by at least one “Buddhist” parent. While the children themselves often strongly identify links of authority to their parents concerning Buddhism, these chains are not so much disregarded as they are just completely ignored by other parties (including the parents). The hegemonic understanding of Buddhism in the United States formed by the Orientalist notion of a text/monk-convert relationship would be undermined by the revelation of alternate modes of the transmission of Buddhism, and so these alternate modes must be rendered completely invisible for the wider politics of Orientalism to remain unchallenged. I do not mean to imply that only Nightlight Buddhists can sabotage these structures, as a multitude of groups have been marginalized (in different ways) by Orientalist representations. Obviously, as Americans, Nightlight Buddhists are still quite privileged within the structures of imperialism. And yet, again, Edward Said said it best: Orientalism is as much about the representations of the West as it is about the representations of the East.[1] The children of Buddhist sympathizers in the United States must still inevitably wrestle with the canon that makes their Buddhism invisible. And as we witness these children drawing upon the authority of their parents in new ways, perhaps the ultimate lesson is that their greatest possibility for subversion comes from within.

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[1] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 4-9.

CONCLUSION

BUDDHISM IN THE MADE AND THE CREATIVE POSSIBILITIES OF TRADITION

Which Buddhism is in the Making?

In the first edition of *Buddhism in America,* Richard Hughes Seager's definitive introduction to Buddhism in the United States first published in 1999, Seager concludes the text by providing a thematic overview of recent challenges, developments, and trajectories among two groups: "Immigrant Buddhism" and "Convert Buddhism."[1] As I discussed in Chapter 2, Seager writes that the greatest upcoming challenge for Buddhist American converts will be "the 'graying' of American Buddhism," as the countercultural baby-boomers who originally turned to Buddhism in the 1960s continue to grow older.[2] Seager suggests that as they age, if Buddhist American converts do not find avenues for passing on their "many adaptations" of Buddhism, these new

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[1] Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 232-48.

[2] Seager, *Buddhism in America*, [1999], 242.

American lineages will die.[1] Seager implies that the process of conversion is inherently unstable—hoping for new waves of converts to replace old ones is simply not sustainable. If these lineages are to survive, they must be passed through native Buddhists—children raised and enculturated within Buddhist families.

For Seager, while the requirements for the survival of these strands might be clear, the actual situation is quite dire. As baby-boomer Buddhist American converts age, Seager writes that all the evidence suggests that they have failed to pass on their religious traditions to their children.

> Converts face new challenges unique to their status as native-born Americans, most of which are also related to a range of second-generation issues. To the extent that these Buddhists have raised their children in the dharma, the community is developing its own "birth-right" Buddhists, to borrow a Quaker term, who will surely influence the future of American Buddhism. *But I have seen very little hard evidence of a substantial rising generation within these communities…* I also recall a conversation with a prominent figure in the Buddhist publishing world that made a lasting impression, although it provides only anecdotal information. In response to my question about how

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[1] Seager, *Buddhism in America*, [1999], 242.

> converts educate their children to be Buddhists, he replied that, as far as he could see, many were reluctant to "lay their Buddhism on their children." At the very least, this provides a suggestive point of contrast with immigrants who, throughout American history, have deemed it a natural right, if not an absolute imperative, to pass on their religion to their offspring.[1]

Many of the features that define the dominant convert perspective on Buddhism in the United States as I have outlined in this book are vivid in this passage. While Seager provides more nuance at other points in the text, here he relies on a sharp distinction between two categories of American Buddhisms—"convert" Buddhism and Asian "immigrant" Buddhism.[2] For Seager, one of the defining differences between these two groups is how they approach cultural and religious tradition within the family sphere. On one hand, Asian immigrants are assumed to inflexibly hold to the ideal that children should come to perfectly reflect wider cultural and religious traditions with little regard for agency.[3] While Seager critiques the popular “Two Buddhisms” model and acknowledges that there is a great amount of diversity among Asian immigrant and Asian-American Buddhist groups, in this case, Seager troublingly assumes that they all share this parenting model in common.[1] On the other hand, American converts value freedom above all else, and in order to successfully execute this ideal, they resist indoctrinating their children in any religious or cultural traditions. Children are to remain blank slates until they are old enough to choose freely what they wish to believe and practice. Seager argues that the result of this approach has been the general absence of any population of second-generation Buddhist Americans.

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[1] Italics mine. Seager, *Buddhism in America*, [1999], 241.

[2] Seager, *Buddhism in America*, [1999], 232-48.

[3] It is important to note that Sharon A. Suh's findings in *Being Buddhist in a Christian World* directly contradict this common and problematic assumption. Sharon A. Suh, *Being Buddhist in a Christian World* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 3-7.

As I have noted in previous pages, one of the major problems in this approach is not that Buddhist American converts do not value a particular construction of absolute freedom (they do), or that there are not reified differences between the religious lives of American converts on one hand and Asian immigrant and Asian-American Buddhists on the other (among many other factors, sharp power differentials guarantee this), but rather that we have little reason to accept the notion that Buddhist American converts are successful at keeping their children away from their religious traditions. As I have argued, while Buddhist American converts benefit greatly in cultural power and visibility by perpetuating the stereotype that their children are a-religious, accepting this perspective without question actually furthers the damage by further reinforcing the assumption that Buddhist American converts are the only actors that take part in the shaping of American Buddhism. These parents are not acting on blank slates to shape freely according to their will. These children have their own power—they can resist. No one has asked the question: can these children as children become religious—become Buddhist—*despite their parents' desires*?

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[1] Seager, *Buddhism in America*, [1999], 8-11.

This question should be obvious, but it is not. It is not obvious, because, just like the very existence of these children, the question challenges the entrenched assumption that Buddhist American converts have been and will continue to be the protagonists of Buddhism in the United States. This assumption is so critical to the dominant understanding of Buddhism in the United States—across popular culture, scholarly culture, and convert culture—it defines the very realm of visibility from the dominant perspective. As long as we continue to take Buddhist American converts at their word, we will see what they see: their faces, their hands, their total reflections. As a feature of the dominant cultural structure, it is not as though these convert parents can choose to see their children as they actually are. Those children are out of their sight. No matter the ideal, there are real limits on freedom. Likewise, as shapers and reflections of the topics they study, many scholars of Buddhism in the United States are also complicit in and bound to these structures. Their assumptions about the true essence of religion and Buddhism in the United States determine who they can and cannot see. I do not disbelieve Seager when he writes that he has "seen very little hard evidence" of second-generation Buddhist Americans; but since my analysis in the previous pages has shown that they do exist, Seager's all-too-common sentiment reveals more about what many scholars are able to see, and less about what is actually there.[1] With the same field of vision, scholars necessarily repeat the same errors.

Since these blinders are a structural feature of the dominant mode of understanding Buddhism in the United States, as long as common assumptions about the topic are not challenged, these same errors are destined to be repeated, not just once, but again and again. In the beginning of the first edition of *Buddhism in America*, despite stretching over a period rapidly approaching two centuries, Seager argues that the history of Buddhism in the United States is still relatively young compared to the history of Buddhism in other areas.[1] As such, Seager argues that the nature of Buddhism in the United States is still largely indeterminate and in the process of being shaped. Extending this argument, Seager would later argue in his 2002 article "American Buddhism in the Making" that an "indigenous American form of the Dharma" has yet to emerge.[2] With more time ("twenty years or so") the distinct features of American Buddhism would develop.[3] In the meantime, while American Buddhism remained in the process of being made, Seager argues that scholars need to hold off on making definitive statements about the nature of American Buddhism. This promised period would only arrive with the future emergence of second-generation Buddhist Americans.

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[1] Seager, *Buddhism in America*, [1999], 241.

And yet, even with the passage of time, this narrative about the indeterminate nature of American

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[1] Seager, *Buddhism in America*, [1999], 247-48.

[2] Richard Hughes Seager, "American Buddhism in the Making," in *Westward Dharma*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 118.

[3] Thomas Tweed echoes this sentiment in the same volume when he writes that scholars should look for second-generation Buddhist Americans to emerge in the "next twenty-five years." Seager, "American Buddhism in the Making," 20; Thomas A. Tweed, "Who Is a Buddhist? Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures," in *Westward Dharma*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 19.

Buddhism and future promise—but not present existence—of second-generation Buddhist Americans has not changed. The story has not changed because the people in power and the storytellers have not changed. Consider one telling example: in the updated and heavily revised second edition of Seager's *Buddhism in America* published in 2012—thirteen years after the publication of the first edition cited above—Seager's summative thoughts about Buddhism in the United States at the end of the book remain largely the same.[1] In fact, the passage I quoted above (i.e., "I have seen very little hard evidence of a substantial rising generation within these communities") and surrounding paragraphs are repeated verbatim.[2] Even Seager's call to wait more time for more evidence reappears in the text. Time has passed, but nothing ultimately has changed. Converts are still the present face of Buddhism. They are the makers of Buddhism, the shapers of indeterminate clay, the free authors of stories without limits. Second-generation Buddhist Americans continue to be pushed into the future—as mere possibilities rather than realities—simultaneously alluring possibilities for salvation and anxiety-causing future familial threats, but not real people.[1]

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[1] Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 264-280.

[2] Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 2nd ed., 273.

The repetition of this idea in Seager's book might be more shocking if not for the fact that it is part of a long history of similar tactics pertaining to the maintenance of convert power and visibility over all others. After all, the notion that youth is both the promising site of salvation that can never be exhausted and the potential risk of familial responsibilities perpetually in the future did not originate with Seager. As I have shown, the genealogy of this concept can be traced back at least through Kerouac. Simultaneously fearful of and attracted to the notion of children, Kerouac also wrote of an idealized youth that never seems to die even with the passage of time, as the increasingly true markers of youth—children—are perpetually pushed back into an ever-delayed future. Considering the history of the concept reveals the oddity of Seager's claim that scholars need to wait for the future emergence of second-generation Buddhist Americans. If Buddhist American converts have been having families since at least the 1950s, and we recognize that children often adapt the religious traditions of their parents even despite their objections, there is not just one generation of second-generation Buddhist Americans—there are many. The call to wait is grounded in an illusion, because the passage of time suggests that the history of second-generation Buddhist Americans began very soon after the emergence of Buddhist converts. There are not just second-generation Buddhist Americans that will come of age in the 2010s, but there are also second-generation Buddhist Americans that did come of age in the 1950s-2000s. Many converts did not wait very long to have children, and the unsupported claim that these converts tried to keep their religion from their children is not enough to prove that these converts *successfully* prevented their children from being influenced at all by their religion. In fact, the breadth and depth of influence of relationships on identity formation would suggest the opposite.

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[1] Furthermore, the dominant idea that immigrant religions must undergo a "coming of age" or "maturing" in the United States in order to become truly American is a colonialist and ageist trap that assumes an omnipresent, singular, normative and essentialist ideal of "America" that simply does not exist. Such an idea infantilizes immigrants, otherizes children, and implies that both immigrants' religions and children's religions are somehow deficient when compared to normative American ideals. Religions in the United States should not have to pass some bar, scale, or metric in order to become "American" religions. While they always have histories, religions never stabilize, and they do not share some essential nature that requires them to follow a similar trajectory in a new land. This is true even taking for granted significant colonial power imbalances and dominant colonial notions of American normative identity that do hold a significant gravitational pull over all residents, albeit in different ways. Ultimately, such notions only wrongly dismiss the importance of immigrant religion—even in the very first moments of immigration—as American religion.

Ironically, the complicated ideals of youth and freedom at the heart of Buddhist American convert identity also make up a tradition. Even as the situation has shifted, and the first waves of Buddhist American converts aged and had children, the narrative itself has remained mostly the same. However, this is not a tradition passed from parent to child. As the first waves of Buddhist American converts age, they find younger individuals that conform to the dominant structure, who then take on the mantle of conversion and become the face of Buddhism. That face will remain forever young. This is a tradition passed from convert to convert. The passage of this tradition is the embodiment of these converts' worst fears: uncritically accepted, passed with authority and without freedom.

This is the core paradox at the heart of this tale. Converts' fear of an unproductive and uncreative tradition is realized, but such a tradition is not passed on by Asian Buddhists as the converts had assumed. This static tradition can only be found within the converts' self-identities passed on without any real agency or adaptation. The tradition that preaches the values of freedom and change—the organic—the most is ultimately revealed to be incapable of producing something novel and different.[1] Without intervention, this tradition will be passed from generation to generation of converts. The ideal of autonomous change will not change.

And yet, others who identify with alternate and marginalized lineages—traditions dismissed as fundamentally unreflective and uncreative—have the capability to use their traditions to bring about structural changes. In the case of second-generation Buddhist Americans, children have even used the religious traditions of their convert parents for new and empowering ends. Any tool can be liberating in the right hands. As scholars increasingly pay attention to these alternative voices, seemingly novel and creative perspectives will be revealed to larger audiences. We would do well to recognize, however, that while these traditions are creative, from the right eyes, they are far from novel. Buddhism is not just in the making in the United States. Buddhism is also in the made.

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[1] Many American religious practitioners, as well as many scholars of American religion, have conceived of American religion more broadly in these terms—free, unbound, creative, and novel—and theorized that these values are the unique features of American religion as a whole. The history of Buddhist American converts and second-generation Buddhist Americans presented here does not simply problematize these values in the more immediate context of Buddhism in the United States, but also serves as one limited step in deconstructing those dominant values on the wider scale of American religion altogether. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Looking toward the Future

Not all calls for future action are equally misguided. While I have aspired to balance deconstructive critique and constructive presentation in these pages, these two aspects symbiotically enable the greatest value of this particular book—by demonstrating—however partial—the view of Buddhism in the United States through a non-normative set of eyes, I hope to shift the scholarly perspective on the topic in new directions and make possible new productive studies, theorization, and reflection.

Crucially, this project must be extended by considering more extensively the full breadth of the religious lives of second-generation Buddhist Americans. While my focus has mostly remained at the level of textual and visual narratives from pop culture to personal essays, many of the complicated features of second-generation Buddhist Americans' religious lives will remain hidden until scholars spend time interacting directly with those lives. As I have already argued, narrow definitions of religion that assume religion can only be found in texts or at particular sites or times have a long and problematic history. These definitions have become an essential tool for pretending that the non-conformity of children's religious lives means that they are not actually religious. In order to understand the religious lives of second-generation Buddhist Americans, scholars must focus on their "everyday religion," found moment-to-moment in the seemingly ordinary spaces of home, school, and playground. This means that scholars need to do in-depth ethnographic studies of this group. Otherwise, our understanding of second-generation Buddhist Americans will continue to be partial and incomplete.

Similarly, we must take the lessons learned from the history of Buddhist American converts and their children to alter scholarly and popular concepts that continue to cause further harm to already marginalized groups. As such, the project to consider the "everyday religion" of second-generation Buddhist Americans cannot stop there, but must be used to reshape how we as scholars think about concepts like religion in every sector. We must also broaden our definitions of Buddhism beyond the standard scholarly conceptions that focus on texts, monks, and Siddhartha as the founding figure. If we do not take the lessons like this learned here by these children and extend them to other cases, we run the risk of ghettoizing their knowledge as minorities, and assuming that only already dominant voices have the capability to make statements that reach beyond the original context. Second-generation Buddhist Americans should be able to teach us about the religious lives of Christian American children (among others) as well. As I have argued throughout this book, no identity is fully isolated or autonomously insulated. While they are not alone in this fact, second-generation Buddhist Americans can teach us about the many worlds that surround them.

Likewise, as we begin to take the experiences of second-generation Buddhist Americans more seriously and particularly their accounts of being marginalized for being Buddhist, we will come to realize that more work on the overall structure of religious oppression in the United States needs to be accomplished. Following Khyati Joshi's lead, we must both broaden our perspective on what constitutes religious oppression and recognize it as a separate mode (albeit related to other modes) of marginalization.[1] Contrasting with their parents, as the narratives of second-generation Buddhist Americans suggest, religious oppression in the United States does not just consist of outright and overt physical, emotional and mental abuse, but like other modes of oppression, is fundamentally structural in nature and is an everyday phenomenon for all religious minorities in the United States. The question is not whether religious minorities suffer from and learn to navigate within the assumed frame of Christian privilege. That much is a given. The open questions that demand more study pertain to the precise nature of the myriad forms of religious oppression. Topics like religion-related bullying, religion and microaggressions, and the pervasive assumption that all Americans should be familiar with Christian mythology need to be examined in more depth. Scholars should also consider how state-supported Christian holidays and god-language, Bible classes in public education, and Christian monuments on public land all impact the lives of religious minorities. Scholars should no longer exteriorize religious oppression and religious privilege as phenomena confined to so-called Third World and "uncivilized" sectors, assuming the West supposedly overcame them through the advent of the Enlightenment and modern secularism. Instead, second-generation Buddhist Americans' experiences testify that scholars must look again at how this dominant colonial distinction has actually concealed the ways a structural alliance between secularism and particular forms of Christianity has resulted in new (often state-supported) forms of religious oppression and privilege. Concealed under the veil of secularism, Christian privilege and oppression of religious minorities are hidden from the sight of everyone but the survivors. More scholarly work on the topic can help to change this troubling reality.

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[1] Khyati Y. Joshi, *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 118-144.

Another topic that this book demonstrates is underdeveloped is the intersection of ageism and religion. As I suggested in Chapter 2, scholarly consideration of ageism against children, teens, and the young is nearly non-existent—to the point that some have even argued that it is not possible to be ageist against the young. This has also meant that the limited scholarly examination of the intersection of ageism and religion has been mostly confined to ageism against the elderly. If this book has shown anything, however, it is that representations of age and religion are often not only closely related, but intricately linked to power structures. Scholars must begin to ask questions like: how do dominant representations and conceptions of children and youth marginalize their experiences? Are certain children pushed to the margins of the religious traditions they call home, and if so, how so? What do we learn about religion if we focus on children's religious experiences?

As we have seen, second-generation Buddhist Americans resist the ageist religious structures and agents that marginalize their experiences and attempt to make the value of their differences invisible. And yet, I argued that dominant models of resistance were inadequate to explain the particular modes of resistance practiced by second-generation Buddhist Americans. As I wrote in Chapter 4, more work needs to be done in developing new models of resistance that 1) recognize the creativity of marginalized groups in using any tool at their disposal 2) reject binaries like public/private, politics/morality, tradition/creativity, and subterfuge/revolution 3) discern the creative possibilities of structural and rhetorical reversals and 4) redefine agency and freedom as never fully autonomous and always responsive and relational. Notions of resistance can no longer assume simplistic notions of agency that presuppose a colonial structure that the acts of resistance are designed to combat. Unless they are redesigned through the eyes and hands of marginalized groups, notions like freedom and agency must be separated from conceptualizations of resistance. As opposed to some idealized cultural vacuum, resistance always comes from somewhere. Resistance comes from within traditions.

In the case of second-generation Buddhist Americans, these traditions are passed from parent to child. In Chapter 3, I suggested that more work needs to be done on exploring the cultural norms that inform and shape parenting and family life. How do these norms reinforce the monk-convert paradigm? What resources do parents, on one hand, and children, on the other hand, have to combat the structural marginalization that renders second-generation Buddhist children invisible for the sake of the parents? While my explorations here are inherently interdisciplinary in nature, I have written this book upon a primary foundation of critical cultural history. The reader might wonder: after reading this history, what can and should be done?

Such an exercise in Buddhist practical theology cannot be done here, nor can I do such a project alone, but I have no doubt that it needs to be done. How can *all* Buddhists in the United States rethink race, childhood, and even Buddhism itself in order to dismantle the convert-monk paradigm and the wider structures that privilege certain Buddhists (white male youthful American converts) over all others? As we engage in such a task, we must learn from the stories of second-generation Buddhist Americans. Every tool—even the traditions of the fathers—can be used for the ends of liberation in the right hands.

Looking to the potential within many different Buddhist traditions, we return to where this book began: the story of Rahula. When I was a child, I remember asking my dad once what happened to Siddhartha's son. He did not know. As such, I often dreamed of new stories about Rahula. What happened to him? What were his adventures? Did he become a leader in Buddhism? How did he make Buddhism his own? Was he a hero in his own right? I learned much later that there are many different narratives about Rahula. Within different contexts and traditions, storytellers reinvented the figure of Rahula again and again to fit the present needs of their communities. While invention is one useful tool, Buddhist practical theologians can also learn from the art of recovery as they aim to redevelop resources to empower children within Buddhist families.

When I first learned about them, two stories about Rahula in particular stood out. First, I found the narrative of Rahula confronting his father for his inheritance as a young child empowering and inspiring. This is the story I told in the introduction. This was a story about someone with little societal power as a young child who risked the dangers of being insubordinate and cleverly invoked the norms of society in order to be seen—to be part of the Buddhist story. There is a significant amount of potential in this story to be repurposed for new empowering ends among second-generation Buddhist Americans.

The second story about Rahula that I found particularly memorable is a fitting ending to my penultimate concluding words on the children in this book. In some traditions in Buddhism, Rahula's living influence surpassed a normal lifetime. Before Rahula is to die, Siddhartha has a special request for him and several other monks. Siddhartha asks Rahula to forgo nirvana until Maitreya, the next Buddha, arrives. Rahula and the others will be protectors and preservers of the Dharma from generation to generation. By retelling these stories, second-generation Buddhist Americans can invoke the authority of their parents' traditions—concerning heroic selflessness and free creativity—for new goals and visibility. And yet, with new speakers, there is one crucial difference between the parents' traditions and the potential recovery of these traditions for their children. As one of the protectors of the Dharma, Rahula is not the sole hero, nor are any of these monks the saviors of Buddhism. Salvation will come with the unknown promise of Maitreya. But Rahula is a hero nonetheless, and as the many narratives about Rahula in this "second life" make clear, he is an ally to Buddhists everywhere. Together alongside others, Rahula will remake Buddhism old and new, as one ally—one hero—among many.

On the Road Home

Despite all this, these children will always remain at least partially at home—if not physically, then mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The home provides the tools of their empowerment and resistance, but it is also a place they will never be able to fully leave behind. Traditions chase all of us to the grave. Or, in this case, all roads lead home. As such, I conclude not with the words of second-generation Buddhist Americans, but rather the words of those that still fill every room of the home.

My question: if second-generation Buddhist Americans are correct, and all religious identities are more radically relational than their parents had ever believed, then how do the parents respond to the challenges of their children? No doubt, throughout this book, I have presented the dominant and most common response—Buddhist convert parents erase their children's religious identities in an attempt to preserve their own dominant status. But a careful reader would note at this point: if there is any power to my argument that second-generation Buddhist Americans *successfully* resist the structures and parties that marginalized their experiences, then necessarily fractures in the dominant narrative must appear. While I wrote in Chapter 4 that these children cannot hope for their parents to see them as they are, certainly there must be moments—glimpses—in which, because of the children's resistance, converts recognize otherness and difference. The parent sees the child.

Jack Kerouac had one estranged child in his lifetime. For most of his life, he refused to acknowledge Jan as his child (until a blood test), and he left her out of his estate. He died when she was 17.

They had only met twice. She was one more abandoned child among the history of Buddhist American converts.

And yet, Kerouac wrote *On the Road* just before Jan was born, potentially driven by a real and immediate possibility. Given the intersection of public and private life, it is important to not leave aside the influence of Kerouac's full family life on his creative body of work. This idea puts Kerouac's anxiety about children and family life in a new light. But in one self-confessional passage, Kerouac provides a hint of empathy and recognition as he describes Sal, Dean and several others nostalgically looking at several photos of the group:

> I realized these were all snapshots which our children would look at someday with wonder, thinking their parents had lived smooth, well-ordered, stabilized-with-the-photo lives and got up in the morning to walk proudly on the sidewalks of life, never dreaming the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, or actual night, the hell of it, the senseless nightmare road. All of it inside endless and beginningless emptiness. Pitiful forms of ignorance.[1]

In a surprising moment of empathy (albeit ultimately still self-focused), Kerouac shifts perspective. How will their children understand their lives? What will their view be like?

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[1] Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Viking, 2007), 253-54.

In this moment, Kerouac (through Sal) prays for only one thing. He does not pray that the group's children will see them as protagonists. Rejecting the falsity of photographs, he does hope that the children will recognize the dynamicity and organic nature of their parents lives. But not in order to see their power or creative mastery. Looking back, Kerouac does not imagine his child will see a hero. He fears his child will see flawless perfection.

Kerouac hopes that these children will see his generation and its senseless suffering. Kerouac asks for sympathy. As both a historian and a second-generation Buddhist American, I have aspired to this empathy throughout this book; if I could not adequately portray the contextual struggles and suffering of the generations of converts, this book would fail. Kerouac's prayer is quite reasonable—he prays that children will understand his generation as being imprisoned in an endless nightmare—ignorance and Samsara. There is movement in these lives, but no novelty. They walk a well-worn road that leads nowhere.

Kerouac would never know if he got his wish. And yet, over the course of the following decades, these children have thumbed through the photos of their parents. They have wrestled with what their parents' religious identities meant to them. They have no choice—the pictures are framed at every corner. These photographs make up the foundations, the walls, and the roofs of their homes. But how they live in those spaces—how they come to understand their parents and themselves—is an open question. Kerouac knew this. He feared this. What he could but glimpse was that this truth contained his only possibility for salvation. A photo taken long ago would become a moving picture once again.

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