The scholar and the Sage:
Sallie B. King, David Loy, and Thích Nhất Hạnh

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ABSTRACT

This thesis problematizes the way in which the Vietnamese Buddhist Thích Nhất Hạnh is represented sympathetically in academic discourse, and investigates how this representation conceals Orientalist methodologies which can inform scholarship about modern or engaged Buddhism. This study uses the framework of Jane Naomi Iwamura's conception of the Oriental Monk, and focuses on two texts in particular: Sallie B. King's *Socially Engaged Buddhism* and David Loy's *The Great Awakening: a Buddhist social theory*. Analyzing these two works not only reveals ways in which scholars might attempt to 'purify' and appropriate Asian religion, but also raises questions concerning the viability of the project of defining the '*Buddhistness*' of modern Buddhisms in light of the obligations of scholars who hold authority in Buddhist communities. This thesis does not attempt to offer alternative definitions of modern Buddhism or to demonize the 'scholar-practitioner', but rather brings to the forefront serious methodological problems in the academic study of modern Buddhist figures and traditions.

RESUME

Cette thèse problématise la façon dont le bouddhiste vietnamien Thích Nhất Hạnh est représenté avec sympathie dans le discours académique, et elle examine comment cette représentation cache les méthodologies Orientalistes qui peuvent informer sur les bourses d'études du bouddhisme moderne ou engagé. Cette étude utilise le concept de Jane Naomi Iwamura à propos du Moine Oriental, et se concentre particulièrement sur deux textes: «*Socially Engaged Buddism*» de Sallie B. King et «*The Great Awakening*» de David Loy. L'analyse de ces deux œuvres révèle non seulement comment les spécialistes pourraient tenter de «purifier» et de s'approprier la religion asiatique, mais soulève également des questions quant à la viabilité du projet de définition de la «*Bouddhistesse*» des bouddhismes modernes à la lumière des obligations des spécialistes qui détiennent une autorité dans les communautés bouddhistes. Cette thèse ne cherche pas à proposer d'autres définitions du bouddhisme moderne ou à diaboliser le «chercheur-praticien», mais elle met plutôt au premier plan de sérieux problèmes méthodologiques dans l'étude académique des personnages et traditions bouddhistes modernes.

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First of all, I must thank my advisor, Dr Lara Braitstein, who provided me with regular guidance throughout this thesis. Her willingness in allowing me to pursue my own interests and her trust in my ability to work hard on my own has been indispensable in the process of generating a critical perspective. Lara has been endlessly helpful with administrative issues and has pointed me in valuable research directions, and her critical insight and great enthusiasm is something that I hope that every graduate student has a chance to encounter.

The time I spent in Plum Village, in Thénac, France, although not discussed directly in this thesis, was an incredible experience that has encouraged me to continue my study of the Order of Interbeing, its complex demography, history, and practices, and the meaning of the tradition for adherents. Both the monastics and the laypeople I met during the Summer 2011 retreat lent me much kindness, and I hope to return to further my research in the future and to meet old friends once again.

Finally, my family has been extremely supportive throughout my degree and the writing of this thesis, and I am ever grateful for their love and understanding. Though there is great distance between British Columbia and Québec, we are close: for I am in you, and you are in me.

1. Introduction

For those interested in studying modern and engaged Buddhist movements in Western or Asian cultures, there are many immediate problems. Few authors have generated or explicated critical methods through which academics might investigate engaged Buddhist reform traditions; the field is constituted largely by descriptive rather than analytic works that seem to occupy a space between the academic and the popular and between the secular and the religious. Debate has been centered mainly on the issue of defining these traditions, and accordingly their labels – generally given as modern, or more specifically as engaged, globalized, Western, or reform – their historical origins, and perhaps most of all their relation to other forms of Buddhism remains unclear.

One figure and tradition that is invariably classified amidst these 'new' Buddhisms is Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Order of Interbeing. In the academy, there is a preponderance of sympathetic, non-critical accounts concerning this tradition, written by scholars who are often involved in the tradition itself; this, combined with the aforementioned methodological lacuna, has generated studies that, while sympathetic, rarely explore complicated context, choosing instead to merely pass over the tradition or, in other cases, to champion it as a necessary and valuable form of modern Buddhism. While sympathy should not be regarded as a problem in itself, the undefined nature of the field combined with such glorifications can leave unspoken approaches closely tied to Orientalist projects of appropriating Asian religion for the sake of what is considered to be a Western audience.

This thesis is one attempt, through the study of how Thích Nhất Hạnh is represented in two works on modern Buddhism, to address some of the central methodological problems at work in studying and writing about engaged Buddhist traditions. Questions raised touch on the role of the scholar as a secular cultural authority and as a Buddhist leader, on the way in which apparently sympathetic accounts can be informed by the need to legitimize particular religious traditions and delegitimize others, on the recurring decontextualization of famous Asian Buddhists, and, above all, on the avenues through which Orientalist methodologies can be subtly expressed in this complex and emerging field. This

thesis provides a great number of criticisms, and offers few solutions in recompense; yet through such critiques, it ultimately seeks to open a space for the lucid investigation of how modern Buddhisms and Buddhists, and centrally Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Order of Interbeing, reform, believe and practice today.

1.1. Method

In total, this thesis seeks to take a critical look at two scholar-practitioner accounts – Sallie B. King's *Socially Engaged Buddhism* and David Loy's *The Great Awakening* – that deal with definitions of engaged and modern Buddhisms and that employ Thích Nhất Hạnh as an Asian Buddhist source; I strive to ask questions of these texts concerning their authors and audience, their intent, their assumptions about the East, their depictions of Asia and the West, and possible hegemonic discourses at work in such depictions. While I do not thereby imply that all sympathetic accounts concerning the Order of Interbeing are subject to this same critique, I hope to suggest that a far more rigorous methodology and especially an awareness of the role of scholars in the field of engaged Buddhism must be explored for the field to move onto to more critical levels of analysis. Studies both on Thích Nhất Hạnh and more generally on engaged Buddhism are light on methodology[1] – and, in view of the very extensive issues concerning the study of 'the Orient' in Western scholarship, this lack of methodology is inexcusable and leaves serious gaps in many accounts of engaged Buddhism.

1.1.1. Edward Said, *Orientalism*

From the above statements, it should be clear that this study is best placed

[1] A point noted by Thomas Freeman Yarnall, "Engaged Buddhism: New and Improved? Made in the USA of Asian materials," *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Christopher Queen, Charles Prebish and Damien Keown (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 289. There do exist some attempts at methodological questions – see also James E. Deitrick, "Engaged Buddhist Ethics: Mistaking the Boat for the Shore," in Queen, Prebish, and Keown, *Action Dharma*, 252-269. 'Calling for methodology' might even be regarded as a scholastic trope in Buddhist Studies: this has recurred at least since the mid-1990s, but such discussions have not been widely integrated (perhaps especially in studies of modern Buddhism). For an early discussion of methodological issues, see José Ignacio Cabezón, "Buddhist Studies as a Discipline and the Role of Theory," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 18, no.2 (Winter 1995), 231-268. My study is, in many ways, yet another 'call' for methodological awareness.

within the framework of Edward Said's *Orientalism*; that is, most generally stated, this thesis is a study of certain Western academic discourse concerning 'the Orient'. Said defines Orientalism early in his introduction as "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience."[2] While Said focuses most sharply on discourses concerning the Near East or Middle East, he does acknowledge that Orientalism has important implications for the study of other Eastern cultures, insofar as they are also a subject of Western (not only European but American as well) academic knowledge and discourse.[3] The 'Near' and 'Far East' hold related, albeit distinct, places in scholarship as distant, foreign lands, far from 'us' and our world, and both have been subject to considerable colonization by Western powers.

Said's argument focuses in on a number of key points that are relevant to my analysis and to the questions I bring to my central sources. Said relates that "Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[4] Orientalism *produces* an Orient for Western consideration, consumption, and appropriation – this Orient represents not a Western "imperialist plot"[5] but rather a Western "underground self",[6] full of contradictions and inverted mirrors; it is an image about the West, much more than it is an image of any 'real' Orient or Orientals that may exist. This inability to fully access the 'real' other is, Said states, an inevitable effect of the need for cultures to incorporate difference; but, in the case of the West, this process runs parallel with a history of hegemonic power over numerous 'Eastern cultures', and is characterized by Western assertions of extreme difference, in which 'the Orient' is continually placed within an existing set of stereotypes about the East. This "created consistency"[7] of Oriental cultures is "...premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never

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[2] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Toronto: Random House, 1978), 1.
[3] See ibid., 17.
[4] Ibid., 3.
[5] Ibid., 12.
[6] Ibid., 3.
[7] Ibid., 5.

concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says."[8] The Orient is scripted, as in a play, by the scholar or poet, and is thereby incorporated as an integral part of Western self-representation.

These basic points from Said have led me to ask a few general questions of the texts on which my analysis rests. In which academic fields are my sources found? How are 'we', the West, characterized, and correspondingly, how are 'they', the Orientals, depicted? Who speaks for the Orient in these texts, where is the Orient located in time and space, and what purpose does the wisdom, knowledge, and history of the Orient serve for authors and readers? Furthermore, what hegemonies might need to be considered when examining such texts and their authors and readers?

1.1.2. Donald S. Lopez Jr, "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet"

Donald S. Lopez Jr's 1995 volume, *Curators of the Buddha*, attempts to address from within the field of Asian or Buddhist Studies[9] some of the ways in which issues of Orientalism have continued to manifest. In his final chapter, "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet," Lopez discusses how Tibet has been perceived by many in the West as a land of mystical Buddhist tradition; it has been 'held' from Western knowledge by historical circumstance and revealed only in stages, particularly after the 1959 exile of hundreds of Tibetan lamas to India.[10] Lopez relates his personal experience as an American graduate student in 1960s India and Tibet, where he sought to discern and thereby protect from extinction the central texts and philosophies of the 'ancient' Tibetan culture and religion.[11] In this, he found it necessary to both learn from Tibetan lamas and to engage critically with them as questionable inheritors of their own tradition: the goal,

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[8] Said, *Orientalism*, 20.

[9] It is difficult to properly label this diverse field: is 'Buddhist Studies' a subset of Religious Studies? of Philosophy? of Asian Studies? Is 'Asian' simply a more politically correct term for 'Oriental'? Is Buddhist Studies its own discipline altogether? Cabezón, "Buddhist Studies," 235-238, discusses the heterogenous and "parasitic" nature of Buddhist Studies.

[10] Donald S. Lopez Jr, "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet," *Curators of the Buddha: the study of Buddhism under colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 251-253. Lopez's text here and his "Introduction" to the same volume (1-30) both touch on these central points.

[11] Lopez, "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet," 270-275.

Lopez states, was for "American graduate students" to save Tibetan Buddhism from its impending destruction at the hands of the intrusive modern world.[12]

Lopez's analysis – which is a self-analysis, in that Lopez critiques his own attempts to dominate and speak for 'the Orient' – turns the questions of Said's *Orientalism* towards the academic field of modern Buddhist Studies, where I locate my own writing and those of my sources. Lopez raises difficult and perhaps uncomfortable questions for today's scholars of Asia and Buddhism, insofar as he seeks to investigate the power and continuing influence of Orientalist methodologies in Buddhist Studies. What role can the Orientalist need to 'urgently' recover and 'save' dying or disappearing wisdom play in this academic field? What is the place of the modern scholar of Buddhism in this recovery, and how might scholars see themselves in a position where they are able to discern what is worth saving (what is authentic) and what is not (what is unnecessary or a pollution)? Third, what role does the lama or Buddhist sage, as a representative of the ancient traditions of Buddhism, play in the scholar's discourse on Eastern culture?

1.1.3. Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*

Jane Naomi Iwamura addresses the question of the Eastern sage, which is represented in this thesis by the figure of Thích Nhất Hạnh, in her 2011 *Virtual Orientalism*. In this study, Iwamura explores a number of 'virtual' depictions of Asian sages – for example, images of D.T. Suzuki or the appearance of Shaolin monks in the 1960s television series *Kung Fu* – in order to understand what these images depict, to whom these images are presented, and who is left out in the depiction of Asian religion. Iwamura shows that the 'Asian sage' is consistently re-worked into an 'Oriental Monk' – an iconic, mystical, deferential, male, explicitly *authentic* representative of Asian religion.[13] The Asian sage tends to be dressed in foreign garb, and is the subject upon whom the Western audience gazes in order to incorporate 'traditional Eastern wisdom' into the moral and religious

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[12] Lopez, "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet," 268.
[13] Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religion and American Pop Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5-8.

universe of the West. The subject for whom the Asian sage exists is described by Iwamura as the 'Anglo pupil': a virtual self-image of the spiritual West, capable and ready to not only receive the wisdom of the East, but to act as its guardian in today's apparently violent, destructive modern world. Iwamura states that

> Indeed, the primary significance of the Oriental Monk is that the icon operates as an imaginative construction, circulating widely and subjectively reinforcing this new system of Western dominance, even in instances when the icon serves as a vehicle for social critique. In addition, the particular way in which Americans write themselves into the story is not a benign, nonideological act; rather, it constructs a *modernized cultural patriarchy* in which Anglo-Americans reimagine themselves as the protectors, innovators, and guardians of Asian religions and culture and wrest the authority to define these traditions from others.[14]

> …the Monk as signifier serves as a way for Americans to manage Asian American religious communities by re-presenting Asian spiritual heritages in a specific way – that is, by reinforcing certain comforting assumptions and presenting the Other in a manner that is recognizable and acceptable. The role of the Oriental Monk as a popular representation and Virtual Orientalism as its milieu, therefore, has important implications for the American engagement with Asian religions and for Asian American self-understanding.[15]

In this depiction, Asian religious practitioners other than the familiar sage – the 'Asian masses' – must be marginalized or excluded entirely, and when they do appear, their beliefs must be sidelined in order to make way for the appropriation of Asian religion by the 'qualified' Anglo pupil. Iwamura's analysis will provide not only a number of questions with which I approach my sources, but an organizational structure in her three-part understanding of the Asian sage, the Anglo pupil, and the Asian masses, related as follows:

> In many ways, the myth has become so condensed that it no longer needs to be told; the icon of the Oriental Monk is sufficient. Examining its semiological form, the narrative the icon encapsulates depends on several figures to consolidate its meaning: the wise Asian sage, his Anglo pupil, and the Asian masses that fail to appreciate the value of their inherited tradition. From the racial and gender specificity of these "characters," one is able to discern the ideological impetus or the underlying "social usage" of the myth.[16]

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[14] Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 21.
[15] Ibid., 22.
[16] Ibid., 62.

Specifically, Iwamura's analysis raises questions about the 'virtual' representation of figures of Asian, or Eastern, wisdom – how do such figures 'enter' scenes, how are they depicted, and who gazes upon them? Though Iwamura tends to study manifestations of the Oriental Monk in television or in photographs, I will seek to apply these questions of virtual representation to academic texts in the field of Buddhist Studies. What are the ways in which the Asian sage is introduced, speaks, and finally exits academic works? These virtual representations can relate a great deal about the way in which 'we', as scholars of Asia, encounter such figures and interact with Asian religions. Iwamura also returns my analysis to this very question of 'we', the Anglo audience: how is this audience characterized, and how is it implicated in the reception and, ultimately, appropriation of Asian religion and tradition? How is Asian religion remade for a virtual Western academic or Buddhist public? What is Asian religion in these accounts? Who must be silenced or marginalized?

1.2. Source Review

These three sources serve as the basis for my methodological framework, which admittedly could be applied to a vast variety of texts. Owing to the nature of the short graduate thesis, I have chosen to focus on a very limited number of texts and on the depiction of one Asian sage, represented by the Vietnamese Buddhist Thích Nhất Hạnh. I have focused on Thích Nhất Hạnh because of my own personal interest in this monk and his teachings, and because throughout the course of my graduate research I have encountered numerous problems with the ways in which he appears (or does not appear) in scholarship. In this thesis, I will not attempt to give any exhaustive historical or religious account of Thích Nhất Hạnh, Lâm Tế Thiền Buddhism, or the Order of Interbeing, but I have surveyed the available scholastic sources and have included a variety of notes of historical or religious import throughout. At this point, I will give a brief source review of a number of works that use Thích Nhất Hạnh as a source and a summary of why I have chosen to focus on two of these works in particular.

Firstly, it must be noted that detailed, and in particular critical, analyses of

Thích Nhất Hạnh or the Order of Interbeing are generally lacking in scholastic discourse. That being said, many descriptive accounts relate a good deal of important information about the Order of Interbeing. Into this category of 'descriptive accounts', which seek to outline the history, practices and tenets of the Order, can be included Patricia Hunt-Perry and Lyn Fine's *All Buddhism is Engaged: Thich Nhat Hanh and the Order of Interbeing*, Andrea Miller's *Peace in Every Step: Thich Nhat Hanh's life of courage and compassion*, Stephen Batchelor's *The Awakening of the West: the encounter of Buddhism and Western culture,* James Ishmael Ford's *Zen Master Who? A Guide to the People and Stories of Zen*, Văn Minh Phạm's *Vietnamese Engaged Buddhism: the struggle movement of 1963-1966,* James Deitrick's *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* entry, and a number of encyclopedic online sources.[17] Though these sources do occasionally engage in analysis of the tradition, they generally focus on relating details about the history and practices of the tradition today and not on comparing the tradition to others or examining its teachings critically.[18] This is not to take away from such accounts, however: they prove very useful and informative and represent what is likely the most comprehensive historical information available on the tradition to date.

Descriptive accounts do not make up all of the literature, and there are a considerable number of more analytic accounts that discuss or mention Thích Nhất Hạnh or the Order of Interbeing in attempting to define engaged Buddhism or Buddhist ethics, or that seek to understand Thích Nhất Hạnh in relation to other religious reform movements. In regards to understanding the emergence of engaged Buddhism, these accounts include Ken Jones's *The Social Face of Buddhism* and *The New Social Face of Buddhism*, Sallie B. King's *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, Charles S. Prebish and Damien Keown's *Introducing Buddhism*, Christopher Queen's "Engaged Buddhism: Agnosticism,

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[17] For example, "Thich Nhat Hanh," BBC Religions, last modified April 4, 2006, http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/people/thichnhathanh.shtml.

[18] It should be noted here that other, equally useful descriptive accounts can be found in a variety of Thích Nhất Hạnh's books, including Anne Cushman, introduction to *A Joyful Path: Community, Transformation, and Peace*, by Thich Nhat Hanh (Parallax Press, 1994), and Sister Annabel Laity, introduction to *Thich Nhat Hanh: Essential Writings*, by Thich Nhat Hanh (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001).

Interdependence, Globalization" and his "Introduction" to *Action Dharma*, and Donald Rothberg's "Responding to the Cries of the World: Socially Engaged Buddhism in North America" in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. Accounts concerning Buddhist ethics which mention Thích Nhất Hạnh in varying degrees of detail include Sallie B. King's "Transformative nonviolence: the social ethics of George Fox and Thich Nhat Hanh," Wioleta Polinska's "Christian-Buddhist Dialogue on Loving the Enemy," Karma Lekshe Tsomo's *Buddhist women and Social Justice: ideals, challenges and achievements* and "Mahaprajapati's Legacy: The Buddhist Women's Movement: an introduction," the volume *Dharma Gaia* (which features works by Thích Nhất Hạnh), David Cooper & Simon James's *Buddhism, Virtue, and Environment*, and David Loy's *The Great Awakening: a Buddhist social theory*. *Westward Dharma*, edited by Christopher Queen, contains a number of accounts that connect Thích Nhất Hạnh to modern reform Buddhism in general, such as Martin Baumann's "Buddhism in Europe: Past, Present, Prospects"; another account in this vein is the volume *Action Dharma*, edited by Keown, Prebish, and Queen. A number of broader accounts of American Buddhism, such Rick Field's *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, however, mention Thích Nhất Hạnh only in passing.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive source list, but these comprise a few of the central sources that I have encountered in attempting to learn about the tradition from scholarship. I have noted that many of these accounts – descriptive or analytic – take a sympathetic tack when approaching the tradition, and a large number are written by scholars or authors who are themselves involved in a personal or religious manner with the Order of Interbeing, with Zen,[19] or with modern Buddhism. Batchelor's *The Awakening of the West,* for instance, is published by Parallax Press, the publishing wing of the Order of Interbeing;[20] Lyn

[19] Thích Nhất Hạnh's root lineage, Lâm Tế Thiền, has a complex lineage but is often associated with Japanese Zen: see Thích Thiện Ân, *Buddhism and Zen in Vietnam: in relation to the development of Buddhism in Asia* (Charles E. Tuttle, 1975), 4-5, 22-24, 171. Despite this categorization, the Order of Interbeing is difficult to locate precisely within the Buddhist and specifically Zen tradition: see James Ishmael Ford, *Zen Master Who? A Guide to the People and Stories of Zen* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 89.

[20] Specifically, of the Unified Buddhist Church: see "About Parallax", Parallax.org, accessed October 21 2012, http://www.parallax.org/about_parallax.html.

Fine is a lay monastic in the Order of Interbeing; Ford and Loy are ordained Zen Buddhist monks. Many, though not all, of these accounts – perhaps especially those dealing with the emergence of engaged Buddhism, such as in Jones and King – tend to take an explicitly sympathetic rather than critical view of Thích Nhất Hạnh, his teachings, and his history in Vietnam. This sympathetic approach is further illustrated by less academically-oriented books on modern Buddhism which mention Thích Nhất Hạnh or relate his teachings to the reader, such as Jeffrey Eaton's "From Nowhere to Now-Here"[21] or Dainin Katagiri's *Each Moment is the Universe: Zen and the way of being time*.[22]

While at least one detailed critical analysis does exist – Raphaël Liogier's *Le Bouddhisme mondialisé: une perspective sociologique sur la globalisation du religieux* – no similar account exists in Anglophone literature and there have been few attempts to engage in criticism of the tradition in a comprehensive manner. One existing critique comes from Cuong Tu Nguyen and A.W. Barber, who claim in "Vietnamese Buddhism in North America" that "he [Thích Nhất Hạnh] oversees several retreat centers in America and Europe where his Western and Vietnamese disciples engage in the practice of 'New Age'-style Zen and rituals created by him that do not have any affinity with or any foundation in traditional Vietnamese Buddhist practices."[23] This critique is very short and it is difficult to work with such an assertion. Thus, Liogier's analysis, on the basis of its uniqueness as a serious and detailed critical account, deserves some special mention here. Liogier looks at, in detail, a number of writings and central tenets of the Order of Interbeing (the Five Mindfulness Trainings,[24] nondogmatism,[25] etc), in an attempt to classify Thích Nhất Hạnh's form of Buddhism in relation to

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[21] Jeffrey Eaton, "From Nowhere to Now-Here: Reflections on Buddhism and Psychotherapy," *Into the Mountain Stream: Buddhist Experience and Analysis*, ed. Paul Cooper (New York: Jason Aronson, 2007), 29, 39.
[22] Dainin Katagiri, *Each Moment is the Universe: Zen and the way of being time* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2007), 135, 185.
[23] Cuong Tu Nguyen and A.W. Barber, "Vietnamese Buddhism in America: Tradition and Acculturation," *The Faces of Buddhism in America,* ed. Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 131.
[24] Raphaël Liogier, *Le Bouddhisme mondialisé: une perspective sociologique sur la globalisation du religieux* (Paris: Ellipses, 2004), 244, 350-353, see also 347 for the 14 Mindfulness Trainings.
[25] Ibid., 359, 363.

those of other modern reform Buddhists such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He regards Thích Nhất Hạnh as a modern humanist Buddhist, whose universalist teachings emphasize a radical form of social protest – protest that encompasses self-immolation, political reform, and the powerful utopian vision of a 'return to village life'.[26] Liogier argues that Thích Nhất Hạnh is a representative of a modern push for Asian political and economic reform and that, therefore, his Mindfulness Trainings should be understood not only as religious points but also as political statements in relation to his utopian ideal;[27] Liogier intimates that 'non-judgmentalism' may be more dogmatic than it appears, and that teachings on nonadversality seek to place blame on those not in positions of political power.[28] This summary only begins to touch on some of Liogier's points and how his critical perspective brings different questions to the study of the tradition than those posed by most sympathetic analyses of Thích Nhất Hạnh.

1.2.1. Thomas F. Yarnall, "Engaged Buddhism: New and Improved?"

While there exist few methodological or theoretical critiques in the fields where Thích Nhất Hạnh is employed as a source, Thomas F. Yarnall, in his article "Engaged Buddhism: New and Improved?", provides an illuminating source review mirroring many of the issues that I will discuss concerning Orientalist problems in accounts of modern forms of Buddhism. Yarnall attempts first to broadly classify narratives about the emergence of engaged Buddhism – a term itself attributed to Thích Nhất Hạnh – into 'traditionist' and 'modernist' accounts, and then engages in a considerable critique of modernist accounts using Lopez's *Curators of the Buddha*. His critique deserves to be related in some detail here, as it in many ways foregrounds my own analysis, even though I will show that Yarnall does not take his questions and their implications far enough in evaluating scholarship on modern Buddhism.

Yarnall begins by classifying accounts of engaged Buddhism, from both scholars and engaged Buddhists themselves (which he notes as often being one

[26] Liogier, *Le Bouddhisme mondialisé*, 299, 310-312, see also 356.
[27] Ibid., 346, 364, 356-357, see also 359.
[28] Ibid., 346, 356, 362-364.

and the same[29]), into more-or-less exclusively defined categories of 'traditionist' and 'modernist' narratives. In his words:

> One group of scholars maintains that Buddhists have never accepted a dualistic split between "spiritual" and "social" domains. To engage in the spiritual life necessarily includes (though it cannot be reduced to) social engagement. Thus, for them, since the time of Sakyamuni the Buddhadharma has *always* had a more-or-less fully articulated socio-political dimension in addition to its (supposedly "other-worldly") spiritual/soteriological dimension. Modern forms of Buddhism (engaged Buddhism or otherwise) are essentially contiguous with traditional forms in spite of any superficially apparent differences. Due to this emphasis upon continuity with Buddhism's traditional past, I will refer to members of this group as "*traditionists*."[30]

He follows this with a description of the position of modernists:

> A second group takes a very different approach and arrives at a decidedly different conclusion. While this group admits that there have been doctrines and practices with socio-political relevance *latent* in Buddhism since its inception, it insists that these latencies have always remained relatively untapped, that they have not been (or often *could* not have been) fully realized until Buddhism's encounter with various Western elements unique to the modern era. Modern engaged Buddhism may share some essential features with traditional forms of Buddhism, but it also contains enough substantive differences to warrant calling it a relatively "new" form of Buddhism unique to the modern era. Thus, due to their emphasis upon discontinuity with the past, I will refer to members of this group as "*modernists*."[31]

Roughly, then, traditionist accounts are those that posit *continuity* with "Buddhism's traditional past", while modernist accounts centrally focus upon *discontinuity* and argue that Buddhism has been "tapped" – in regards to social activism in particular – only in its encounter with modernity and Western culture. Yarnall places particular scholars and Buddhists, for example Thích Nhất Hạnh, Patricia Hunt-Perry and Lyn Fine, and the Dalai Lama into the first category,[32] and into the latter others such as Christopher Queen and Ken Jones.[33]

After describing both positions in some detail, Yarnall engages in a thorough critique of the modernist position. Most potently, he criticizes the

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[29] Yarnall, "New and Improved?", 287.
[30] Ibid., 286.
[31] Ibid., 286-287.
[32] Ibid., 289.
[33] Ibid., 295.

modernist position as based in a three-part Orientalist stance of "recognition, appropriation, and distancing" – that is, modernist accounts, to varying degrees, engage in first a patronizing 'distillation' of ancient Buddhism by looking for 'useful' elements, second in an 'extraction' of these elements from their social and historical contexts in Asian culture, and third in an attempt to distance this supposedly 'useful' modern Buddhism from older, problematic forms of Asian Buddhism.[34]

Modernists, Yarnall notes, seem disappointed yet obsessed by the 'fact' that early Buddhism was not socially engaged; they "…insist that "early" Buddhists in particular (including Sakyamuni himself) were completely socially disinterested."[35] Yarnall problematizes this claim in a number of ways, not least by pointing to the traditionist accounts and the various ways they find continuity with tradition. In the end, he comes to the conclusion that there is a neocolonial and Orientalist bias at work in many modernist accounts, visible in the way that they seek to appropriate a true, authentically Western Buddhism distinct from 'immature' or 'undeveloped' forms of Asian Buddhism. A paragraph that he borrows from Luis O. Gómez's "Oriental Wisdom and the Cure of Souls" and reworks to fit his thesis aptly summarizes his critique of the modernist position:

> Modernists create their own neo-colonial economy during their repeated ventures into translations of Buddhist texts. They judge the raw materials of Buddhism to be valuable, but unusable and even dangerous (or irrelevant) to the modern Westerner in their unrefined form. They therefore (subtly) remove them from their cultural and historical contexts and then manufacture theories from them for modern Westerners (especially 'engaged Buddhists'), to be used to remedy deficiencies in their own identities and socio-political circumstances. … In their writings they also export Buddhist symbols and 'history' … back to Asia, attempting to explain (in the sense of leveling) to Asian Buddhists the true nature (or a more pertinent use) of their own symbols … and socio-political history. … The socially transformative power potentially *latent* in Asian Buddhism can only transform society when activated by and mediated through the Western modernists' socio-political theories, with the Western modernist serving as the intermediary between East and West,

[34] Yarnall, "New and Improved?", 306.
[35] Ibid., 311.

both as strategist and social activist.[36]

Yarnall's critique is useful and powerful, and it is important even merely in its attempt to bring some methodological awareness to the field of engaged Buddhism. His critique has been taken up since its publication with some gusto,[37] and has perhaps lent justification to scholars in attempting to find concrete evidence in Buddhist history for either the traditionist or modernist narrative. However, I feel that his analysis falls short in a number of very important areas.

First, Yarnall's attempt to avoid truth claims himself concerning the *actual* traditionist or modernist nature of engaged Buddhism is considerably contradicted by the sympathetic position he takes in the essay towards traditionist writers.[38] He critiques modernist claims on the basis of Orientalism, but does not turn his formulation of "recognition, appropriation, and distancing" towards accounts that tie engaged Buddhism to the Buddha's life or an 'essential' way of being Buddhist; he focuses, instead, on the way that modernist positions seek to undermine such accounts through the use of deconstructionist methodologies. By focusing the voice of his own critiques squarely on the modernist position, he – intentionally or not – thereby implies that the traditionist claim is more methodologically sound (in that it does not rely on Orientalist techniques); this betrays a lack of awareness of how such problematic methods might also be used in accounts seeking to legitimize a tradition on its ostensibly *traditional* basis. This lack of awareness implies that there may be deeper problems with his categories, which are not as mutually exclusive as he seems to believe them to be; in this essay, I will show how two accounts of modern Buddhism exhibit the continuity and discontinuity of *both* traditionist and modernist narratives. The difficulty of using such categorizations, as well as Yarnall's largely

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[36] Yarnall, "New and Improved?", 306. Originally (differently worded) in Luis O. Gómez, "Oriental Wisdom and the Cure of Souls: Jung and the Indian East", in Lopez, *Curators of the Buddha*, 288.

[37] See, for one, Jack Carman, "Scriptural Continuity Between Traditional and Engaged Buddhism", (master's thesis, California State University, 2010), http://csus-dspace.calstate.edu/.

[38] For his truth claim notes, see Yarnall, "New and Improved?", 288. He states that such truth claims are important, but not his primary objective. See his alignment with Robert Thurman and his claim that "it is traditional to *be* original in Buddhism." (Ibid., 336) I believe Yarnall, in his distaste for the modernist view, does seek to strengthen his 'traditionist' writers' positions and to place himself in line with their accounts.

unproblematized assumption that a normative definition of the nature of Buddhism is something *possible and necessary* for scholars to uncover and disseminate,[39] will be addressed throughout this thesis.

1.3. The Scholar-Practitioner

Another, perhaps even greater, problem in Yarnall's essay is his lack of serious discussion of the identities and obligations of the scholars and Buddhists to whom his categorizations apply. He uses the accounts of Buddhists and scholars alike without investigation as to the different cultural obligations these writers may hold. While he does mention the way that certain writers formulate a Western Buddhism expressly for Westerners, he does not consider at length the 'scholar-practitioner', whose authority and obligations are absolutely central in understanding the generation of accounts of modern Buddhism and in separating critiques of scholastic narratives from critiques of religious traditions. Is it the place of scholars to critique the legitimacy of how Buddhists construct their own narratives about Buddhism, as opposed to critiquing scholastic accounts? To what extent are these two separate? Yarnall touches on such questions a number of times,[40] and seems aware that modernist authors are religiously threatened by the notion of continuity with Buddhism, but he ultimately fails to observe how such issues can implicate scholars in problems concerning the academic project of defining and evaluating Buddhism in essentialist-normative ways.

The prevalence of analyses written by scholars involved in the Buddhist tradition, in Yarnall's review as well as in the general study of the Order of Interbeing, requires an awareness of this phenomenon of the 'scholar-practitioner' discussed by Charles S. Prebish, Thomas A. Tweed, and Donald S. Lopez Jr, amongst others.[41] This is a term used by Prebish to describe Buddhist Studies

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[39] Yarnall, "New and Improved?", 288-289, 331-340. He believes that Buddhists/scholars must continue research in order to ultimately reach a definition of Buddhism as historically socially engaged or not. As I will argue, I believe this project has flaws as regards scholars' role as evaluators of Buddhist traditions.

[40] Ibid., 288-289, 295, 336.

[41] See Cabezón, "Buddhist Studies," 243.

scholars who also 'practice' or hold deep religious sympathies for Buddhism.[42] Prebish has estimated how many scholar-practitioners are working academically in the United States – one estimate has the number at about 25% of Buddhist Studies scholars, with a potentially large number of 'silent' scholars who do not publicly identify but may hold sympathetic views towards Buddhist practices and philosophies.[43] Prebish relates that, until the 1960s, scholars of Buddhism and Buddhist texts tended to belong to another faith (mainly Christianity), but that this began to change in a significant way as Buddhist Studies emerged as a field in its own right. In the past few decades, Prebish notes that it has become obvious that many scholars identify with the tradition on a personal level as well as academically, and that many hold leadership positions in American Buddhist communities.[44] The convergence between academia and Buddhism in the West is reflected on a large institutional scale by institutions like Naropa University and on a small scale in the fact that many Buddhist Studies scholars state their Buddhist credentials on the back of their books.[45] Even though this trend is apparent at conferences and in classrooms, it seems to be only a minor topic of discussion. Scholar-practitioners have one foot in the academy and another in Buddhist practice: they self-declare as Buddhists or serve as Dharma teachers for a *saṅgha*, while remaining involved in the academic community and the secular dissemination of Buddhism in Western culture: a dissemination historically centered on translation, distance, text study, and scholarship.[46]

Thomas A. Tweed, in his article "Who Is A Buddhist? Night-Stand

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[42] Charles S. Prebish, "The Academic Study of Buddhism: A Silent Sangha," *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, ed. Duncan Ryûken Williams and Christopher Queen (Abingdon: RoutledgeCurzon, 1999), 183, 189, 206-207.
[43] Ibid., 189.
[44] Ibid., 183-185, 205-209.
[45] Ibid., 190-197, 208. See also Charles S. Prebish, "Studying the Spread of Buddhism in the West: The Emergence of Western Buddhism as a New Subdiscipline within Buddhist Studies," *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 66-84.
[46] See Prebish, "Studying the Spread," 69, 79; for a longer history, see Lori Pierce, "Buddhist Modernism in English-Language Buddhist Periodicals," *Issei Buddhism in the Americas*, ed. Duncan Ryûken Williams and Tomoe Moriya (University of Illinois, 2010), 87-109; see also Martin Baumann, "Protective Amulets and Awareness Techniques, or How to Make Sense of Buddhism in the West," in Prebish and Baumann, *Westward Dharma*, 51-55, 59; finally Martin Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe: Past, Present, Prospects," in Prebish and Baumann, *Westward Dharma*, 86-87.

Buddhists and Other Creatures," argues that such a confluence of obligations and identities may be the source of biases underlying academic attempts to define modern Buddhism.[47] Tweed explains that Religious Studies has tended to focus on "essentialist-normative definitions of religious identity, those that construct a core or essence of right practice or belief and measure all historical expression against it."[48] This leads to the possibility of scholars making judgments about which types of Buddhism are authentic and which are merely appropriations; and those historical and contemporary expressions that are considered inauthentic are "suspect, and (mostly) excluded from our stories about Western Buddhist history."[49] Tweed offers up a possible solution of self-declaration as the ideal mode of defining religion. However, he seems to believe that some scholars will not agree with him, not due to academic argument but because of obligations held towards Buddhist communities:

> I realize that some readers still might have other grounds for rejecting the strategy I propose, since personal religious commitments and role-specific obligations can shape our responses on this issue. For practitioners, and especially for religious leaders, it might make sense to draw boundaries, to set limits on acceptable belief and practice. In one sense, religious leaders have a role-specific obligation to disallow certain practices and contest certain beliefs. Some followers might insist, for example, that *authentic* Buddhists do not condone violence or affirm theism. Yet scholars, and practitioners who are working as scholars, do not have the same obligations to establish right practice or right belief. Scholars' duty, I suggest, is to understand as much as possible about religion and culture …[50]

For Tweed, there is a potential conflict in being both a researcher of Buddhism

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[47] This is also a question touched on by Prebish, "A Silent Sangha", 190-191, partly through Cabezón, "Buddhist Studies," 243, who voices a caricature that "…Buddhists are *never* good buddhologists," due to their lack of supposed objectivity. Prebish outlines this as a potential issue alongside another essay touching on the scholar-practitioner (Luis Gómez, "Unspoken Paradigms: Meanderings through the Metaphors of a Field," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist* Studies 18, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 183-230), but refrains from addressing it in his paper.

[48] Thomas A. Tweed, "Who is A Buddhist? Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers, Adherents, and the Study of Religion," in Prebish and Baumann, *Westward Dharma,* 24. Previously published in Williams and Queen, *American Buddhism*, 71-90. Page citations in this essay will be from the version in *Westward Dharma*.

[49] Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?", 24. Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe," 100-101, also notes that a tendency for scholars to focus on 'convert' Buddhism may mirror this possible exclusion: "to what extent will folk or popular Buddhist practices, such as palm-reading or protective acts against malevolent spirits, be questioned and declared inappropriate in a modern, secular context?"

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

and the leader of a Buddhist community. He claims that two "role-specific obligations" rest upon religious leaders working as scholars, namely that of the scholastic community and that of the religious community. In effect, such scholars find themselves at once obliged to "establish right practice or right belief" and to understand and present Buddhist diversity. Tweed suggests that sometimes scholars may give priority to their obligations as religious leaders to establish orthodoxy, and that this may be less than useful in academic attempts to understand Buddhism and Buddhists around the world.

Tweed touches on an interesting question here about the scholar-practitioner, but stops short of giving any concrete examples of how potential obligations have manifested this way in specific works. He also does not complicate the issue sufficiently insofar as the scholastic community *itself*, according to Prebish's studies, *is* such a mixed community of practitioners and scholars. In any case, the line – if there indeed is any – between religious and scholastic works by scholar-practitioners, between the academic and religious community, and between the object of study (Buddhism) and its adherents (Buddhists) is very unclear. Tweed's statements also raise questions concerning the possibility that scholars may be disseminating a sympathetic perspective to the academic community and students of Buddhism when it comes to certain traditions, at the expense of other forms of Buddhism considered 'unorthodox'. This directly affects Yarnall's critique by adding the question of how scholar-practitioners may seek to, via particular narratives, legitimize modern Buddhisms. Is the scholar-practitioner, in some ways, the subject of the gaze of the West as the 'authentic source' of Eastern religious practice and wisdom? Prebish suggests,

> In the absence of the traditional scholar-monks so prevalent in Asia, it may well be that the scholar-practitioners of today's American Buddhism will fulfill the role of quasi-monastics, or at least treasure-troves of Buddhist literacy and information, functioning as guides through whom one's understanding of the Dharma may be sharpened.[51]

A few final notes should be made on this point concerning the potential authority of scholars – self-declared practitioners or not – who hold positions of

[51] Prebish, "Studying the Spread," 78-79. Also see Bruce Matthews, "Buddhism in Canada," in Prebish and Baumann, *Westward Dharma*, 132-133.

prestige within academic institutions involved in the dissemination of knowledge 'about the East'. Donald Lopez has touched on a number of these questions in his discussions of the field of Buddhist Studies in *Prisoners of Shangri-La*. In "The Eye," Lopez relates that after revealing the ostensibly 'fake' autobiographies of Lobsang Rampa to his students (which they had previously read and taken as fact), his students turned to him – the certified professor – for *true* information about Tibet.[52] Lopez discusses the concept of *authority* in this regard and how it can be closely linked to class and official institutions.[53] In "The Field", he explores how Jeffrey Hopkins' programs at the University of Virginia in the early 1970s often incorporated direct translations from Tibetan lamas, and states that many graduate students were attendants at meditation sessions on weekends.[54] In other cases, American teachers who were trained in Asian monasteries but worked in Western academic institutions offered courses on Buddhism, "where the dual role of scholar and adept only served to boost enrollments."[55] Lopez explains that there seems to be a hazy line between where 'popular interest' in Tibetan Buddhism ends and scholarship begins, and that this may indeed account for the field's popularity.[56] He states that

> …in a strange way, the traditional role of the monk, as dispenser of Buddhist wisdom and interpreter of texts, has been arrogated to the academic, those students of…Tibetan lamas who have received the sanction to teach, not necessarily by virtue of the symbolic capital derived from traditional transmission (although this was also often there), but by virtue of symbolic capital derived from their possession of a doctorate in Buddhist Studies.[57]

Lopez's discussions, taken alongside Tweed and Prebish, raise questions concerning how the cultural authority of the scholar of Buddhism functions in relation to the ostensibly *authentic* dissemination of Buddhism to Western culture.

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[52] Donald S. Lopez Jr, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 104.
[53] Ibid., 108-109.
[54] Ibid., 165-169. "…the notion of belonging to a tradition of scholarship that had been the model in Europe, a tradition that extended back to the great Orientalists of the nineteenth century, was replaced by a far more ancient model, in which the master was not *der Doktor-vater* but the lama, whose tradition, it is said, can be traced back to the Buddha himself."
[55] Ibid., 171.
[56] Ibid., 178.
[57] Ibid., 171.

To what extent is the scholar (practitioner, 'silent sympathizer', or otherwise) implicated as a *Buddhist* authority, and how might this be expressed in how certain scholars write about and evaluate modern and engaged Buddhism?

1.4. Sallie B. King and David Loy

Keeping in mind these questions, I have chosen to analyze closely Sallie B. King's *Socially Engaged Buddhism* and David Loy's *The Great Awakening*. Dr Sallie B. King is a professor of Philosophy and Religion at James Madison University, and is touted on the back cover of *Socially Engaged Buddhism* as "one of North America's foremost experts on the subject";[58] she has written numerous times on Thích Nhất Hạnh and extensively on ethics in modern Buddhism. In a review of her "Being Benevolence: the social ethics of engaged Buddhism," she is noted as "a Quaker peace activist, an advocate of interfaith dialogue, and a frequent participant, specifically, in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue movement."[59] Her biography from the *Buddhist Ethics Network* also notes that "she and her husband co-lead a vipassana Buddhist meditation group."[60] King identifies herself as a Quaker,[61] although her involvement in leading meditation seems to suggest that she is indeed sympathetic towards Buddhist practice and holds some type of authority in this regard. Her unclear identity as a sympathetic scholar-practitioner endowed with the cultural power of the professor is optimal for an exploration of the ways in which scholarly authority may interact with religious authority in modern Buddhist Studies. Furthermore, her extensive work on Thích Nhất Hạnh makes *Socially Engaged Buddhism* ideal for my study. It was published by University of Hawai'i Press in 2009, and claims to be a "state-of-the-art"[62] account of the engaged Buddhist movement.

David Loy's website states that he is a "professor, writer, and Zen teacher

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[58] Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), back cover.
[59] James Deitrick, review of "Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism," by Sallie B. King, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no.1 (March 2007): 169.
[60] "Sallie King," Buddhist Ethics Network, accessed October 5 2012, http://buddhistethics.net/index.php/network-members/itemlist/user/118-sallieking.
[61] See Sallie B. King, "A Quaker's Response to Christian Fundamentalism," *Quaker Universalist Fellowship*, accessed October 5 2012, http://universalistfriends.org/.
[62] Henry Rosemont Jr, editor's preface to *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, by Sallie B. King, xii.

in the Sanbo Kyodan tradition of Japanese Zen Buddhism",[63] who currently leads meditation retreats and also lectures on Buddhism and modernity. Ordained in 1988, he has written a great deal on modern Buddhism and ethics, and his work has been published in *Tricycle*, *Contemporary Buddhism*, and *World Fellowship of Buddhists Review*, amongst many others. He received his Ph.D from the National University of Singapore and taught as an International Studies professor at Bunkyo University in Japan from 1990 until 2005, and since then has held numerous chairs around the world up to the present day: he is now in residence at Naropa University in Colorado. Though he has written little concerning Thích Nhất Hạnh specifically as in the case of Sallie B. King, he is well-known for his work on Buddhist ethics and regularly employs Thích Nhất Hạnh as a source. In light of his involvement in the Buddhist tradition and his wide readership, I feel he is a meaningful subject for the questions of how scholar-practitioners may be implicated in the dissemination of Buddhism. As a Zen monk, Loy is much more clearly involved in a Buddhist tradition and its practices than King, and can perhaps be regarded as a scholar-practitioner to a different degree; these two figures will thus together allow some exploration of the blurry boundaries discussed above. Loy's 2003 work *The Great Awakening*, in which he attempts to formulate a modern Buddhist social theory of ethics, represents a scholastic account that arguably enters into a more public or popular arena; it is not published by an explicitly academic press (Wisdom Publications), although its separate chapters have been published in a variety of journals and books. I will not analyze each article, but I believe my analysis has implications that go beyond the particular sections I critique. This book, while definitely *not* an account explicitly about the origins of engaged Buddhism, very closely parallels the methodologies used and questions asked by those writing such accounts. It is also recommended by King in her "For Further Reading" list.[64]

Though these authors cannot, and should not, be considered to be representative of all scholar-practitioners, or of all writers on engaged Buddhism

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[63] "David R. Loy," DavidLoy.org, accessed October 5 2012, http://www.davidloy.org/.
[64] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 186.

or Thích Nhất Hạnh, I hope that my critiques will encourage questions about the scholar-practitioner and about the ways in which Orientalism can manifest in accounts of modern Buddhist movements popular in the West. In the works I will analyze, Thích Nhất Hạnh and his teachings, as well as activism, liberalism, and/or modern Buddhist ethics generally are lent *scholastic as well as 'Buddhist'* authority through Orientalist methods that appropriate the authority and power associated with the long existence of the Buddhist religion, its scriptural sources, and its traditional institutional forms. I argue that much of the reason why scholars like King or Loy engage in such a project is tied to the identity of the scholar-practitioner, and that both authors feel it possible and necessary to evaluate Buddhist traditions on the basis of what they consider to be essential Buddhist beliefs in the modern world.[65]

1.5. Organization

This thesis, as briefly stated above, is organized into three main sections reflecting what Iwamura regards as the 'main characters' in the tale of the Oriental Monk: the 'Asian Sage', the 'Anglo Pupil', and the 'Asian Masses'. I have preceded these sections with a 'Source Introduction' in order to adequately contextualize and to convey the central arguments of the two works I will be critiquing. In this second section (following this Introduction), I will seek to outline the main themes of Sallie B. King's *Socially Engaged Buddhism* and David Loy's *The Great Awakening*, with an eye to giving an overview of the tone and style of these authors' arguments and notes about how these works should be classified in light of Thomas Yarnall's categories of traditionist and modernist narratives of engaged Buddhism.

The third section, the Asian Sage, will deal with the problems of how Thích Nhất Hạnh is presented in these works. He is always afforded a position of noncontroversial authenticity, and is continually decontextualized and made into a

[65] I do not wish to imply that the scholar-practitioner is an inherently problematic category; there are many useful accounts as well as questionable accounts from those within and without Buddhist traditions. The issue simply needs to be taken more seriously, as Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?", 24, suggests.

solitary figure of Eastern wisdom. He is virtualized, in text, into a religious icon, ever ready to enter the scene with a quip to support the author's main point and to awe the audience with his power and meaningfulness.

The Anglo Pupil deals with the virtual recipient of the message of this Asian sage – the implied or explicit 'us', as an educated, affluent, liberal Western audience – and the type of Buddhism that the authors, as 'our' guides, define and appropriate for us. This Buddhism is based primarily upon values that we can understand, and that we are told are historically positive and generally mature in addition to being fundamentally *Buddhist*. Accordingly, the texts of Buddhism, as well as Buddhist traditions, are used as expressions of 'our' values when and where they can be; Buddhist sources that complicate our vision are subject to criticism and rejection on the basis of the values that these authors, as our guides, essentialize as *authentically Buddhist*.

The Asian Masses looks to dig more deeply into this point about who is criticized and ultimately rejected as inheritors of the Buddhist tradition in favour of 'our' ideals. Ill-defined Asian Buddhisms that seem to run contrary to 'our' values (which have been given the aura of *Buddhistness*[66]) are marginalized, silenced, or denigrated in order to establish the hegemonic vision of our guides, King and Loy. Asian Buddhists are variously regarded as backward, violent, passive, or incapable of meaningful reform without the leadership of the Asian sage or the Anglo pupil; having corrupted the Buddha's message with their pernicious cultural habits, they leave 'us' as the only possible protectors of Buddhism today.

In the Conclusion, I will attempt to address the problems raised in this Introduction – that is, how should we, as scholars, define modern Buddhism in light of these critiques? How can we study Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Order of Interbeing more carefully? How are both traditionist and modernist accounts flawed and, in the academic arena, potentially driven by Orientalist agendas? What are some of the issues that need to be examined in the study of the scholar-

[66] I will employ my term '*Buddhistness*' throughout this thesis; the suffix 'ness' is meant to *ironically* signify *a perceived quality or state of 'being essentially Buddhist'*.

practitioner and his or her roles and obligations? I do not seek to definitively answer these in a graduate thesis, but I do provide some direction for ways in which scholars can continue to explore such questions.

1.6. Apologia

I must state at the outset that I do not seek to make any truth claims in this thesis about the *actual* 'modernist' or 'traditionist' roots of engaged Buddhism, about 'core' modern Buddhist social theory, or about the '*Buddhistness*' of the reforms of modern Buddhists such as Thích Nhất Hạnh. I hope that I will be more successful in this resistance to truth claims than Yarnall; I do not seek to reify his classifications but rather to complicate them. Finding answers to questions about the *actual* roots of engaged Buddhism is not the goal of this thesis, and indeed I wish to question the legitimacy of scholars to engage in such a project uncritically. These truth claims are, perhaps inevitably, bound up in questions about how modern Buddhists regard their own lineages, and also in ideas concerning the ability of Western ideas to 'pollute' Eastern religion or to 'activate' qualities in Buddhism. This thesis remains critical concerning the notion that a 'core' Buddhism can be determined by selecting stories about the life of the Buddha or by examining particular Buddhist texts, and I am not interested here in pursuing a conclusion as to the *real* roots of engaged Buddhism. Instead, I focus on how accounts which blur the boundaries of Yarnall's categorizations, represented in different ways by Sallie B. King and David Loy, and their subsequent truth claims *function as methodological frameworks for the scholar-practitioner to present Asian figures such as Thích Nhất Hạnh in particular ways meant to educate the Anglo pupil*. I hope this will raise questions about scholars' ability to engage in projects that seek to authenticate and legitimize – or delegitimize – Buddhist reform movements and modern Buddhist ethics more generally on the basis of their ostensible expression of the *Buddhistness* of a 'core Buddhism'.

2. Source Introduction

The works I will examine, Sallie B. King's *Socially Engaged Buddhism* and David Loy's *The Great Awakening: a Buddhist social theory*, both exhibit characteristics Yarnall centrally associates with traditionist *and* modernist accounts of engaged Buddhism. Both strive to associate a variety of practices, views and philosophies with a timeless sense of *Buddhistness* and the 'traditional' beliefs of Buddhists. Yet, both also posit these views as particularly modern – these types of Buddhism have emerged in the Asian encounter with the West and, without them, Buddhism risks becoming irrelevant in the modern world. King's and Loy's accounts locate activist reform in particular as something *essential* to Buddhism, in opposition to the notion that engaged Buddhist ethics are *primarily* modern or Western and only secondarily Buddhist. While these accounts mix elements of the traditionist and modernist approaches, I consider them, in Yarnall's schema, to fall more into the traditionist camp. In order to nuance both the differences and similarities between them and ultimately to complicate Yarnall's categories, King's and Loy's particular approaches will be clarified here by examining each author's arguments, tone, and style.

2.1. Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*

I will begin with a recounting and introductory analysis of King's Introduction to *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, where she gives a history of engaged Buddhism, an account of its central figures, and details the purpose of her book. She starts by posing the central question of engaged Buddhism's emergence in the modern world:

> In the twentieth century, a politically and socially active form of Buddhism called Engaged Buddhism came into being and quickly became a large and powerful movement throughout Buddhist Asia; toward the end of that century, it also became very influential among Western Buddhists. In the Buddhist-majority countries of Asia, Engaged Buddhism became a vehicle capable of giving voice to the people's political aspirations and bringing down national governments. It became a path of psychological and practical liberation to oppressed peoples and of economic development to impoverished peoples. The reader may be surprised to hear of Buddhists engaging in this way with the problems of the world. It is true that the West has a considerably greater history of this kind of

> activism than Buddhist Asia.[67] Nonetheless, Engaged Buddhism is a thoroughly Buddhist phenomenon.[68]

In this opening paragraph, King establishes a number of points. First, she notes that engaged Buddhism is something that has emerged in the twentieth century; second, that it seeks liberation for oppressed peoples; and third, that it is a 'thoroughly Buddhist phenomenon' despite appearing somewhat Western in character. She continues:

> What is Engaged Buddhism, and why did it emerge so dramatically in the twentieth century? Engaged Buddhism is a contemporary form of Buddhism that engages actively yet nonviolently with the social, economic, political, social [sic], and ecological problems of society. At its best, this engagement is not separate from Buddhist spirituality, but is very much an expression of it.
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> Engaged Buddhism is not a centralized movement. It did not begin with the vision of a single charismatic leader and spread from there. Consequently, it is not defined by geography but is found wherever there are Buddhists with sufficient political freedom to engage with social and political issues as they see fit. It also is not defined by sect; Engaged Buddhism is neither a new Buddhist sect nor does it belong to one of the established sects. Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana, and nonsectarian Buddhists all may be involved with Engaged Buddhism, though not all Buddhists of any of these forms are Engaged Buddhists. Engaged Buddhism is defined and unified by the intention of Buddhists of whatever sect to apply the values and teachings of Buddhism to the problems of society in a nonviolent way, motivated by concern for the welfare of others and as an expression of their own Buddhist practices. With this kind of profile, there are no absolute lines defining who is and who is not an Engaged Buddhist. Some individuals and groups clearly belong at the core of this movement, such as Thich Nhat Hanh and Sarvodaya Shramadana, and others are borderline, such as groups and individuals that conscientiously put loving-kindness at the center of their practice but avoid societal or institutional engagement. We will focus in this book on groups and individuals that are at the core of the movement.[69]

King is engaging in what Yarnall may call a traditionist account of engaged Buddhism and its practice today: while the era of engaged Buddhism begins temporally in the twentieth century (when the term emerged), it is not defined by this time period but rather by, "at its best", its ability to express

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[67] This claim, often made by King, is not substantiated by any citations.
[68] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 1.
[69] Ibid., 1-2.

"Buddhist spirituality" in nonviolent and yet "active" ways. She relates that engaged Buddhism can be part of Buddhist life anywhere, even if not all Buddhists are engaged. She provides rather vague definitions via nonviolence and compassion, but one can gather that King will need to explore exactly what is meant by "Buddhist spirituality", and how engaged Buddhism and its core figures express a basic *Buddhistness*.

This traditionist classification of King should be nuanced, because despite the way that engaged Buddhism is related as a movement not confined primarily by modernity or history, King *is* forced to locate it in relation to the struggles of twentieth century Asia. While, again, the central point remains that engaged Buddhism is first a *Buddhist* phenomenon, King does regard it as a *modern* phenomenon as well: it is from modern horrors, she argues, that Buddhism has been forced to 'engage' with the world in the twentieth century in particular.

> It should be clear that if Buddhism had nothing to say about and did nothing in response to crises, challenges, and problems of this magnitude [e.g., World War II, genocides, poverty, repressive governments, deforestation, social inequality, rapid modernization, Westernization, and globalization], it would have become so irrelevant to the lives of the people that it would have had little excuse for existing, other than perhaps to patch up people's psychological and spiritual wounds and to send them back out into the fray. It simply was necessary for it to respond somehow. Fortunately a generation of creative, charismatic, and courageous leaders emerged throughout Buddhist Asia in the latter half of the twentieth century, responding to these crises in ways that were new and yet resonant with tradition.[70]

This quotation expresses well King's sympathy for engaged Buddhism as a movement that is relevant and fortunate, with "creative, charismatic, and courageous" Asian leaders. It also illuminates more clearly the modernist position, which Yarnall states always emphasizes a certain modern 'break' with premodern times;[71] it is modern crises that have caused the emergence (and activation) of these charismatic, courageous leaders in the Buddhist world. Without engaged Buddhism, King argues, Buddhism would have become irrelevant in Asia. While the traumas of the modern era, which surpass previous

[70] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 3.
[71] Yarnall, "New and Improved?", 300.

traumas in both their grand scale and their great horror, are said to be necessary for the emergence of engaged Buddhism, they are not how we as readers should primarily approach this tradition. This substantiates King's definition of engaged Buddhism as first "resonant with tradition" and second as a response to the difficulties of modernity; yet, both of these contexts are central. Engaged Buddhism should be seen as the *Buddhist response of Buddhism to modern crises*. King is aware of a certain lack of specificity in this definition as she continues to narrow her scope by excluding certain types of Buddhism that may *seem* like engaged Buddhisms:

> Not every activist engagement of Buddhism with social and political issues can be considered Engaged Buddhism, however. Certainly the chauvinist Buddhist nationalism of contemporary Sri Lanka is not Engaged Buddhism inasmuch as its stance is based upon opposition and ill will toward the other – in this case, non-Buddhist Sri Lankan minorities – a stance that easily escalates into acts of violence, as has frequently occurred in recent decades. Engaged Buddhism is by definition nonviolent. It is also by definition an effort to express the *ideals* of Buddhism – including loving-kindness or universal goodwill toward all – in practical action, and on this point as well, nationalistic and chauvinistic Buddhism cannot be considered to be Engaged Buddhism; it is indeed the antithesis of it.[72]

King elaborates on these points later in the book, and I will return to this problem of Buddhisms that King must define as the "antithesis" to engaged Buddhism in my third section, the Asian Masses. At this point I would simply like to point out and clarify King's definition of engaged Buddhism in these first three pages of her book: it is a nonviolent and activist movement located in the twentieth century but based fundamentally in traditional Buddhist "*ideals*", defined as loving-kindness and goodwill towards all. It is a movement that aims to help those who are oppressed and which can occur in any country, as long as there is "sufficient political freedom" for Buddhists to engage "as they see fit". Yet, "chauvinistic" Buddhism, violent Buddhism, and "nationalistic" Buddhism cannot be included in this definition to any degree, even if these Buddhisms appears to be similar to engaged Buddhism in their general desire to respond to modern crises.

After these definitions, King goes on to introduce a number of key

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[72] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 3.

engaged Buddhists: the Dalai Lama, Thích Nhất Hạnh, Sarvodaya Shramadana, Maha Ghosananda, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Cheng Yen.[73] She gives a brief history of each and the ways in which they have engaged with political issues. I will return in the next section, the Asian Sage, to her discussion of Thích Nhất Hạnh, but at this point will continue with how she defines engaged Buddhism and her study in general terms. Next, King locates her argument:

> In the West, some Buddhist scholars argue that since engagement with the problems of the world is a Western habit, Engaged Buddhism, which developed in the twentieth century just when Westernization was overwhelming Asia, is simply Westernized Buddhism and hence distorted Buddhism. In this way, Engaged Buddhism is sometimes criticized by both Asians and Westerners.[74]

Though King is in danger here of presenting a straw man argument because of her lack of citations in regards to the specific scholars or Buddhists who may have stated this, it is nevertheless important to note that she orients her book in contrast to the view that engaged Buddhism is a Western distortion and is therefore inauthentic. She also seems to posit herself in opposition to the claim Yarnall attributes to modernists that Buddhism is an 'other-worldly' tradition.[75] These are her main positions: as stated in the Editor's Preface, King's book "describes – and defends – with admirable cogency, clarity, and passion the metaphysical beliefs, moral claims, and instructions for spiritual practice advanced by engaged Buddhists… wherever they happen to be."[76] She seeks to "defend" engaged Buddhism by opposing the apparent claim that engaged Buddhism is inauthentic, and the structure of her book – starting with Buddhist 'Philosophy and Ethics' and proceeding then to a variety of "concrete"[77] problems such as 'War and Peace', 'Economics', and 'Ecology' – reflects the way in which she seeks to convince the reader that engaged Buddhism is, in its very essence, a *Buddhist* phenomenon in its *engagement* with worldly matters.

At this point, King comes once again to the issue of defining engaged

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[73] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 3-7.
[74] Ibid., 8.
[75] Ibid. King notes that "to engage with the world" is seen by "conservative" Buddhists as problematic. See Yarnall, "New and Improved?", 311.
[76] Rosemont, editor's preface to *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, by King, xii.
[77] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 11.

Buddhism. She points to various Asian figures – Thích Nhất Hạnh, the Buddha, and A.T. Ariyaratne – in this further elaboration on her previous points:

> In response to the question "Why engagement?" Thich Nhat Hanh has a simple answer: Buddhism has always been engaged. All of Buddhism is engaged because all of it addresses human suffering. That is true. Siddhartha Gautama does not fully become the Buddha when he experiences enlightenment sitting beneath the Bo tree; the wisdom gained beneath the Bo tree is only the first of the two defining characteristics of a Buddha. Gautama fully becomes the Buddha when he turns back toward humankind within samsara and begins to teach, demonstrating his compassion – the second defining characteristic of a Buddha – specifically his compassion for sentient beings suffering within samsara. A Buddha is distinguished in tradition from a *pratyekabuddha*, a "solitary" Buddha who, like Gautama, is enlightened on his own but, unlike Gautama, does not teach humankind. A *pratyekabuddha*, while recognized by Buddhism as a spiritual possibility, is on a different path from that followed by the founder of Buddhism. Therefore, inasmuch as Buddhism is founded not only in Gautama's enlightenment but also in his decision to teach, it is fair to say that is has always been engaged, always focused on the problem of *duḥka* (Pali, *dukkha*, loosely translated as "suffering") and the overcoming of *duḥka*.[78]

King first acknowledges, with her full authority as a professor and "foremost [expert] on the subject",[79] that Thích Nhất Hạnh's statement "Buddhism has always been engaged" is incontrovertibly correct ("That is true."). She points to the example of Gautama as proof of this, stating the two defining characteristics of a Buddha, although this formulation (as the first mark being enlightenment and the second mark being compassion) is without any citation. She specifically emphasizes the importance of the second, compassion, as a "turning back toward[s] humankind" – something that is not engaged in by *pratyekabuddhas*. At heart, King asserts, Buddhism is fundamentally about reducing suffering, since that is what the Buddha taught.

In a theme that will be repeated throughout the book, King thus points to the Buddha – in this case accounts of his life – as the ultimate authoritative source of determining *Buddhistness*, or what is fundamentally Buddhist. This method is not without its problems, many of which will be alluded to throughout this thesis;

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[78] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 8-9.
[79] Ibid., back cover.

perhaps the most obvious of these problems is the difficulty in accessing the Buddha's life due to differing sources, traditions, and texts, and in determining which stories are the most important for Buddhists.[80] In any case, King chooses not to address such methodological problems, instead unquestioningly relying on *this* Buddha as the *most* authentic source of Buddhist belief, values, and practices.

She continues on a paragraph later in order to clarify the rather confusing assertion that "all of Buddhism is engaged":

> For historical accuracy, we must qualify these statements that Buddhism has always been engaged, never disengaged. The matter is more complex. While it is true that in Southeast Asia one could find a Buddhist temple in every village, there have always been both village and forest-dwelling bhikkhus within traditional Buddhism. The village bhikkhu was engaged with the villagers as teacher, doctor, adviser. However, there was also the hermit, the forest-dwelling bhikhhu who intentionally withdrew from society and village life – at least for a time, maybe for a lifetime – in order to focus on intensive meditation practice, with the goal of attaining enlightenment and nirvana. In other regions of Asia, some bhikkhus, and sometimes laymen, also took up the more eremitic option, seeking out caves or building huts in the mountains for the same purpose of intentionally cutting themselves off from society in order to focus exclusively on practice. Clearly Buddhism can and does accommodate those who spirituality leads them to withdraw from society, though this has always remained a minority option, a very important point to bear in mind. The Dalai Lama notes that very few people possess the vocation of the forest (cave, mountain) dweller; it is right, he says, for only a handful. Very few people will flourish if they take themselves away from human society. The village-dwelling monastics, as well as the vast majority of laypeople, are pulled by their very practice and the loving-kindness and compassion that it engenders to help in whatever way they can. For them, Engaged Buddhism, which asks only that loving-kindness and compassion be expressed in a concrete way, is a natural fit.[81]

This paragraph, meant to further clarify the previous distinctions made by King – that engaged Buddhism is a modern response to modern crises, that it is nonviolent, that it expresses loving-kindness (described as an essential Buddhist trait) – has a number of problems. First of all, King does not cite any sources in

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[80] Other issues in this respect are addressed by modernist writers concerning the 'constructedness' of these claims; while I do not wish to support the modernist narrative wholesale here, I do believe that this constructedness, when approached without the negative connotation of 'inauthenticity', may be an important part of understanding how traditions are created – or reformed – by Buddhists themselves as in the case of the Order of Interbeing.

[81] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism,* 10-11.

her description of the differences between village- and forest-dwelling *bhikkhus*, their relative numbers throughout history, or their roles in Buddhist societies. She does cite the Dalai Lama in her argument that this is a minority – "a very important point to keep in mind" – and conveys to the reader that non-engaged Buddhists, understood as those who withdraw from society altogether, are an accepted but minor eccentricity of normal Buddhist life and practice. It is village-dwelling *bhikkhus* who are presented as normative, and who are broadly characterized as open to engaged Buddhism insofar as their practice is itself based upon what King has described as essential Buddhist values of loving-kindness and compassion. Village-dwelling *bhikkhus* are naturally attracted to the idea of "concrete" action; King thereby suggests that engaged Buddhism is not merely a modern phenomenon but one naturally tied to the socially and politically engaged lives of the majority of Buddhist *bhikkhus* and laypeople throughout history. It is *not* "simply"[82] a Western phenomenon:

> ...most of the Engaged Buddhist leaders are in regular touch with the Western world and travel in the West frequently. Western ways of thinking do turn up in Engaged Buddhism, such as in the ideas of structural violence and institutionalized poverty. This does not mean, however, that Engaged Buddhism is Westernized Buddhism in the sense that it is the product of Western influences.[83]
>
> ….Two important points must be understood with respect to Western influences on Engaged Buddhism. The first is that the Engaged Buddhist leaders have not been passive recipients of Western ideas and practices. They have embraced Western ideas that they have found useful, such as human rights, and largely left alone those that they have not found compatible with their Buddhist worldview, such as the idea of political justice. They also sometimes challenge Western ideas and practices, such as the anger in anti-war protests during the Vietnam War or what they perceive as excessive individualism in Western societies.
>
> The second point is that Engaged Buddhism has not been distorted by Western influence...[84]

Again, King positions herself against the argument that engaged Buddhism has been, in some way, distorted or polluted by Western thought or concepts. She implicitly accepts the notion that a Westernized Buddhism *would*

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[82] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 8.
[83] Ibid., 11.
[84] Ibid., 11-12.

be a distorted Buddhism if such a thing could be proven, and therefore endeavours to show that Engaged Buddhism does not fit this characterization: it is not Western but Asian.[85] While its leaders have been educated in the West, they remain *first* Eastern Buddhists, and actively engage with Western ideas in order to find useful concepts (importantly, King does not source any of her assertions that "structural violence", "institutionalized poverty", and so on are fundamentally Western notions). For King, engaged Buddhism is not merely *believed by engaged Buddhists* to be based on traditional Buddhism – it *is* based on traditional Buddhism. She carries on to affirm this and to clarify the purpose of her book in her final two paragraphs:

> I hope this book will demonstrate how thoroughly *Buddhist* Engaged Buddhism is. Everything the Engaged Buddhists say and do can be, and is, justified on the basis of traditional Buddhist views and values. ...work for national or international peace is presented as inseparable from the cultivation of inner peace. Work to eliminate poverty is seen as interdependent with efforts to cultivate spirituality and protect the environment. To engage in social work requires profound adjustment in the sense of "self" and "other". Environmental work weakens the feeling of separation between oneself and the natural world.
>
> It is then a primarily *Buddhist* intellectual and spiritual world that the Engaged Buddhists inhabit. It is also, however, a *modern* world. All religions change over time; the Asian Engaged Buddhists are important modernizers of Buddhism, adapting tradition to contemporary challenges, as has been done in every religion around the world time and again. The Engaged Buddhist world is, finally, a *globalized* world. We live in a time in which the world is shrinking, as news and ideas instantly circle the globe electronically; people, products, and pollution travel with small attention to national boundaries; and cultures and societies become ever more tightly knit together. In such a triple world, the Engaged Buddhists skillfully balance their roles as transmitters of traditions and values, transformers of tradition, and negotiators of tradition in a world in which the old boundaries are falling down.[86]

King does not deny that engaged Buddhists are figures inextricably tied to

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[85] In this, she opposes the "charge" that engaged Buddhism is "Westernized", even though it "Western ways of thinking" are an important part of defining the issues she associates with engaged Buddhists. As regards Yarnall's discussion of the modernist point that engaged Buddhism is 'activated' by the West (Yarnall, "New and Improved?", 302), King holds an unclear position. For more, see King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 11-12.

[86] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism,* 12.

the West,[87] to globalization and to modernization. First and foremost, however, it is a *Buddhist* world that 'they' "inhabit" – a world King associates with certain "views and values", such as inner peace, cultivating spirituality, protecting the environment, and weakening the idea of "self" and "other". By the end of this introduction, King has made it clear to the reader that not only is engaged Buddhism modern, engaged, activist, nonviolent, compassionate, and practical; it is, in *every way*, fundamentally tied to King's presentation of core Buddhist spirituality, practices, values and tradition. It is *not* Western, nor exclusively a product of modernity (though it is in modern times that "the old boundaries are falling down"): it is *Buddhist,* infused with *Buddhistness* at every turn and gesture, at every word and action.

I have sought in this brief account of King's introduction to give some sense of her tone and argument, in her own words, so that my analysis that follows can be more clearly apprehended. In general, King's argument should be approached as a traditionist account of engaged Buddhism and its attendant values. King is forced to define engaged Buddhism in relatively vague terms such as 'all Buddhism is engaged' by citing Asian sources, or to explain that engaged Buddhism is a 'concrete' realization of what she terms "the *ideals* of Buddhism",[88] which are extrapolated from the life of the Buddha and from Buddhist philosophical tenets. It is also clear that King finds it necessary to distance certain forms of Buddhism that seem similar to engaged Buddhism, such as "chauvinist" Sri Lankan Buddhism, in order to make it clear to the reader that such forms are not only non-engaged, but infused primarily with *non-Buddhistness* on account of their style of practice.

Socially Engaged Buddhism must, in addition to its mainly traditionist standpoint, also be counted as modernist in its assertion of the utterly different circumstances of the modern world and engaged Buddhism's interaction with (though not pollution by) Western thought. These arguments are central to the scholar-practitioner's attempt to relate a particular style of Buddhism to the Anglo

[87] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 11.
[88] Ibid., 3.

pupil, and require the marginalization of Asian religions, as the other sections of this thesis will prove.

2.2. David Loy, *The Great Awakening*

I will now undertake a similar introduction to David Loy's *The Great Awakening: a Buddhist social theory*, a collection of essays that in this volume Loy has strung together in order to present some ideas and arguments for a modern Buddhist social theory. His first chapter ('Buddhist Social Theory?', the only one unpublished elsewhere) serves as an introduction for *The Great Awakening,* and follows a quotation from Gary Snyder's *Buddhist Anarchism*:

> The mercy of the West has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void. We need both.[89]

This sets the stage for what will be Loy's central argument: the necessity of re-evaluating and re-interpreting Eastern wisdom using Western knowledge for the sake of saving religion in the modern world. He begins:

> Buddhism today faces the same challenge that confronts and may yet destroy every traditional religion. Our modern world is so different from the India of Shakyamuni Buddha 2,500 years ago – and, for that matter, from most of Asia until recently – that educated Buddhists cannot avoid the cognitive dissonance between their religious beliefs, which originated in an Iron Age worldview, and the Information Age technologies most of us use daily. Although the Buddha has often and traditionally been regarded as omniscient, there is no good reason to think (and many good reasons to doubt) that Shakyamuni knew anything about the cellular structure of organisms, the genetic code of life, the microbial cause of most diseases […] computers, or the internet.
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> ….As far as we know, the Buddha was illiterate, literacy being rare in the India of his time. His teachings were orally preserved (and no doubt altered, perhaps considerably[90]) until the first century BCE. Shakyamuni therefore could not have known about the extraordinary psychological and social effects of literacy, much less the equally significant consequences of the printing press. He was also unfamiliar with nation-states, corporate capitalism, universities […] sociology, anthropology, and comparative religion.

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[89] David Loy, *The Great Awakening: a Buddhist social theory* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2003), x.

[90] It is important to note Loy's recognition here of the difficulty of approaching Buddha's teachings.

> It is no use pretending otherwise: these developments have so transformed our world that we cannot evade the question of how relevant the Buddha's teachings can be for us today.[91]

In these opening paragraphs, Loy begins to make his case for the absolute and unavoidable necessity of reforming Buddhism for the modern world. "Traditional" religion is no longer enough: it is assailed on all sides, whether from technology, secularism, or skepticism. It is not, he argues, merely that today is different; today is *radically* different from the "Iron Age" – and most of historical Asia.[92] This argument can be related to King's notion that the twentieth century in Asia, and indeed the modern era in general, has been so extreme compared to any previous time in history that a special response has been (and for Loy, is) absolutely necessary in order to keep Buddhism relevant to the lives of Buddhists – or, in Loy's case, "educated Buddhists". This focus on a modern 'break' with the past shows how Loy can first be approached along Yarnall's modernist lines.

Loy's 'us', which plays a central role in my analysis, makes an appearance immediately, and it is not entirely clear whether this 'we' is supposed to represent the postmodern West, a scholastic community, or an "educated" Buddhist community. It seems to signify that 'we' are modern people who share common modern problems. Because, Loy argues, the modern world – especially the notions of secularism and postmodernism – has caused such a large departure from 'tradition', religion *for us* today has a very real risk of becoming irrelevant.

> That educated Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews experience much the same cognitive dissonance as Buddhists can be no consolation to any of them in this corrosive modern world where the value of premodern religious perspectives is questioned when it is not dismissed out of hand.
>
> The worst is yet to come, however….Postmodernism has had extraordinary individual and social effects that may rival the impact of the printing press – consequences we are just beginning to recognize. Over the last thirty years the miniaturization made possible by the silicon chip has transformed most technologies. An equivalent transformation in the intellectual realm is the postmodern insight into the constructed nature of our truths and therefore our "realities." Our previous innocence about such

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[91] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 1-2.

[92] This is a very large assertion to seek to nuance in this thesis, and therefore I can only question it on account of the lack of sources given concerning the views of premodern peoples worldwide by Loy. I would lean more towards Yarnall, "New and Improved?", 337: "our situation is unique, but it is no *more* unique than anyone else's in the past!"

> matters cannot be regained, now that we have begun to lose it. Ways of thinking can be repressed, but as Freud realized, what is repressed does not disappear. It returns to haunt us until we acknowledge it and learn to deal with it.
>
> No social activity is more vulnerable to this realization than religion. The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard has defined postmodernism as incredulity toward all meta-narratives, and no narratives are more "meta-" (the Greek word for more comprehensive) than religious ones. The postmodern revolution may signify the beginning of the end for traditional religious beliefs, practices, and institutions.[93]

In previous times, according to Loy, people *truly* believed in meta-narratives; today, on the other hand, with the advent of postmodernism, 'we' have become skeptical for the first time.[94] The reader is told that they are privilege to a special era unlike any in human history, when for the first time the world is questioned; and furthermore, such questioning is impossible to ignore, and will "return to haunt us" if we try to "repress" it. The educated West, embodied by the French philosopher Lyotard, the German psychologist Freud, and by the American Loy himself, have encountered and are therefore capable of defining this skepticism and its attendant problems. It is clear that Loy regards "premodern" or "traditional" religious perspectives as relatively irrelevant today, incapable of holding water or meaning beyond that of a "sacred canopy":

> This [beginning of the end] includes Buddhism, of course, insofar as the Buddhist message too has been domesticated into a reassuring worldview – a "sacred canopy" – that provides psychic and social stability. Today all such protective canopies are threatened by the fundamental insight that they are human creations.
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> ….Throughout most of history, the canopy provided by religions has been essential for grounding us: for teaching us what this world actually is, and therefore what is really important about it, and therefore how we are to live in it. It is terrifying to learn that this canopy is a fiction we have constructed and then objectified (by "forgetting" that we have made it) in

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[93] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 2-3. This claim of religious 'disenchantment', again unsubstantiated, can be challenged via Thomas J. Csordas, "Modalities of Transnational Transcendence," *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization*, ed. Thomas Csordas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 1.

[94] In this sense, I remain a postmodernist insofar as I question the validity of Loy's historical meta-narrative. It seems difficult to prove conclusively that no premodern person anywhere in the world ever questioned the total correspondence to reality of their religious or social meta-narratives. For just one complication, see Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

> order to dwell comfortably beneath it….[Learning that this canopy is a fiction] signifies the end of humanity's collective childhood. It forces us to grow up, or engage in increasingly desperate attempts to suppress what becomes ever more difficult to ignore. [95]

It is important here to note how this postulation regarding the credulity of all historical peoples allows Loy to regard postmodernism, emerging from the educated West, as a more 'mature' perspective than any premodern or 'traditional' way of practicing religion. Humans, "throughout most of history" – and in parts of the world today yet unaffected by Western postmodernism – were and are simply not as aware of reality as postmodern people, and are still like children in Loy's eyes. They may have some simple wisdom, but as they grow up and learn to appreciate Western insights, their old ways are bound to die out. In this situation, how can religion – a feature of humanity's credulous childhood – possibly be saved?

> But is religion only a protective, reassuring canopy? Even if reassurance has been its main social function, religion has served and continues to serve another role, now becoming more obvious and more important. Religions are vehicles for self-transformation. Not only do they reassure us, they provide us with principles and precepts and practices that can change us or show us how to change ourselves. Buddhism, of course, is a good example. The original teachings of Shakyamuni are concerned almost solely with such a process: the path he discovered (or rediscovered) that led to his "awakening" (the literal meaning of *Buddha* is "the awakened one"). [96]

Despite the fact that Loy alluded earlier to the near-impossibility of knowing what the Buddha taught due to source problems, here he ventures to assert that the Buddha "almost solely" taught a path of self-transformation. In this, Loy provides 'us' with the escape from the terror of postmodernism, and a potential model for all religions to stay relevant in this mature and inevitable postmodern world. Buddhism is perfect for this, because despite the fact that all premodern people were credulous, Buddha was different: he was aware of today's educated knowledge of the constructedness of reality. The postmodern awareness of constructedness is, therefore, *traditionally Buddhist*.

Loy describes how a process of transformation and corruption – from an

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[95] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 3.
[96] Ibid.

original message of self-transformation to a "literalized" doctrine of salvation from without – has "unfortunate[ly]" occurred in Christianity, with similar processes having occurred in "Samhkya-Yoga, Vedanta, and even Buddhism" (he refers here to Mahayana and particularly to Pure Land Buddhism).[97]

> Psychologically, the early equivalent of a sacred canopy is the security provided by our parents, so it is not surprising that we continue to yearn for the protection of a cosmic father or the maternal love of an all-embracing mother. But as a meta-narrative to rely upon and reside within, this kind of canopy is less and less tenable in a postmodern world.[98]

Again, Loy emphasizes the childishness and immaturity of premodern perspectives, represented even in today's world by those who still "cling to"[99] salvation-style practice in Christianity or Pure Land Buddhism. "We continue to yearn" – as do (uneducated?) members of the religions Loy mentions – for salvation as children for our mothers, but to be mature and reasonable we must reject this and go beyond "humanity's collective childhood". Luckily, religion *can* be reformed for mature modern humans, and Buddhism is well-suited to this:

> In contrast, the early Buddhist teachings focus almost exclusively on the path of self-transformation, with a minimum of dogma or metaphysics – in other words, with a rather flimsy canopy, at best, to shelter beneath. These original teachings not only deny a creator God and the salvific value of rituals such as sacrifice, they also emphasize the constructed nature of both the self and the world. For Buddhism there are no self-existing things, since everything, including you and me, interpenetrates (interpermeates) everything else, arising and passing away according to causes and conditions. This interconnectedness – not just an intellectual insight but an experience – was an essential aspect of the Buddha's awakening, and *it is congruent with the essential postmodern realization*.[100]

Although the educated West's postmodernism is absolutely new, Buddha was a unique historical exception to all premodern peoples' ignorance of reality's constructedness, and foregrounds our inevitable maturation in his distant future. It is in this sense that I have understood Loy's account as primarily traditionist in its approach to modern Buddhism – Loy does locate our time as the *most* historically

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[97] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 4.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 14, 27.
[100] Ibid., 5.

unique, and posits that it is only modernity that has re-activated Buddha's lost insight of constructedness, but his central point is that this 'essential' insight *is traditional*. Buddhism only needs to shed its extraneous elements; that is, in Loy's conception, Buddhism need only become *truly* traditional again (traditional as 'based upon Buddha's teachings').

By looking at this with *Orientalism*'s questions of West and East, one sees how Loy here adopts and incorporates the East – in this case Buddha – into a Western narrative of intellectual and cultural dominance, disparaging the supposedly useless and ignorant societies of Asia (which have "elaborated [Buddhism into] another sacred canopy"[101]); the "essential postmodern realization" has been buried over centuries, and can only be recovered by those who can properly read the ancient texts, texts whose cultures are "conveniently dead and thus not present to contest European knowledge…".[102] Loy seems to have forgotten entirely his previous declaration concerning the difficult nature of ascertaining Buddha's original message, and now finds himself able to accurately relate to the reader the very "essential aspect[s]"[103] of the Buddha's awakening and teachings. Buddha, in this light, appears like a postmodern Western intellectual, but one who lived and died millennia ago.

> These resonances between postmodern theory and Buddhist teachings provide the basis for a comparison that is more than merely interesting. Today the postmodern realization about the constructed nature of our canopies, sacred and otherwise, contributes to global crises that we are far from resolving. Indeed, Nietzsche's prescient prediction of a coming age of nihilism suggests that the world's destabilization may be far from over.[104]

Loy's modernist trope of complete and radical difference between the premodern and postmodern era should, by this time, be eminently clear, as well as its role in assuring the reader that today we must, in all haste, seek to redefine and

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[101] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 5.
[102] This analysis mirrors that of Yarnall; it is drawn from Lopez, "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet", 252, 259, and speaks to the Orientalist need to treat Eastern wisdom and ancient Buddhism as an ancient object needing purification from thousands of years of Asian culture. "…For the modern Western scholar of Tibetan Buddhism is heir to the legacy of Orientalism described by Said, a legacy marked by a nostalgic longing and a revulsion.…" (Ibid., 252.)
[103] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 5.
[104] Ibid., 5.

reevaluate religious tradition in order to 'save it' from destruction – perhaps even a "coming age of nihilism". 'We' must seek to resolve global crises by re-activating the long lost truths of self-transformation. We must use both Western and Eastern views to create the new world; therefore, Buddha, who appeared Western and modern, is shown to be even more useful than Western traditions because of his historical and geographical foreignness:

> …Buddha's similar discovery [of constructedness], in a very different time and place, offers us another perspective on that realization. This more religious perspective implies different possibilities. To dismiss that other perspective and therefore those other possibilities, without considering them, is arrogant and may be costly. Ecologists tell us that many exotic species are disappearing…who knows what possible medical therapies – a drug for cancer? – die with them? Might the same be true for exotic religio-philosophical teachings?[105]

Loy's fear of being "arrogant" is not directed so much towards 'the East' and Eastern religion as it is towards the East he has presented to us through *his* Buddha. His disappearing East is useful, yet it is necessary to separate out the childish sacred canopy from the mature path of self-transformation (Buddha's teaching), because so often "Buddhism is presented as another belief system, another sacred canopy under which we can find shelter."[106] He states that:

> Shakyamuni Buddha had nothing to do with funerals, yet in Japan (where I live), most people identify Buddhism with funerals and memorial services – that is the only time most Japanese care to visit a temple. The main social (and economic) function of Buddhist priests is performing these expensive[107] ceremonies. In other words, the primary role of Buddhism in Japan is to reassure people and give them the rituals they need to cope with the death of loved ones – an important function, to be sure, but a far cry from the path to liberation taught by Shakyamuni.
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> In contrast, the practices in Zen monasteries, such as *zazen* meditation and focusing on koans, works against such a reappropriation by emphasizing a letting-go of mental phenomena and promoting the direct, unmediated realization of our emptiness (*shunyata*). Shakyamuni Buddha used the metaphor of a raft that we can use to ferry ourselves across the river of

[105] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 6.
[106] Ibid.
[107] In this quick gibe at Japanese Buddhist priests, Loy seems to imply that one of the central meanings of such a ceremony, aside from its childish social function, is its ability to bring in plenty of money. Perhaps this is true, but I would encourage the reader to question exactly what motive leads Loy to explicitly state that such ceremonies are "expensive", especially in contrast to his forthcoming description of the function of more mature and truly Buddhist Zen priests.

> samsara: rather than carrying that raft on our backs everywhere, we need to know when to let it go.[108]

Loy disparages Japanese Buddhism as practiced by Japanese people (aside from Zen monks, presumably most of all those of his own Sanbo Kyodan order) in this passage, and I will not deal with this issue here but in my third section on the Asian masses. At this time, I seek only to convey the tone of Loy's argument, which explains to the reader exactly how 'we' can separate out modern religion from traditional religion, which is inevitably growing more and more useless in the modern world in its function as a "sacred canopy". Japan, "where I live" (and therefore for which "I" have authority to speak without the requirement of citations), is merely one example; ancient India, which originally corrupted the Buddha's radical teachings, is another.[109]

'We' must follow the example of the Buddha – much as in the writings of King in regards to how she determines engaged Buddhism's traditional *Buddhistness* – and discard what is not useful: in this case, the "sacred canopy" of most of Asian religious practice. Loy continues in this vein, explaining that while 'we' should not throw out the entire Pali Canon, we should still be willing to use Buddha's "[emphasis] that our faith should not be blind; we really understand something only when we know it for ourselves…"[110] He particularly references karma and rebirth as problematic notions needing redefinition, something that I will return to in the next sections. He also views the notion of an afterlife as problematic and as needing serious re-evaluation in light of modern scientific perspectives.[111] Buddhism must be brought in line with "the postmodern insight [of constructedness]."[112] This discrimination and re-evaluation is necessary "if a contemporary Buddhism is to mature…"[113]

Loy's 'Buddhist Social Theory?' does not end at this point, but due to the length of this thesis I am not able to engage in a longer exposition of the

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[108] Loy, *The Great Awakening,* 6.
[109] Ibid., 4.
[110] Ibid., 7. Even this throwing out of Buddhism's 'useless' elements is seen as essentially Buddhist.
[111] Ibid., 7-8, 15, 21.
[112] Ibid., 8.
[113] Ibid., 8.

remainder of the chapter. I hope that at this point his central arguments and tone have been represented fairly. Loy, in clarifying his own aim, states that:

> The purpose of this introductory chapter is to clarify the nature of the possible interaction between (post)modernity and Buddhism, and the purpose of this book is to offer some examples of the contribution that Buddhism can make to a new understanding of our new situation.[114]

Loy's argument is centered on the idea of 'our' need to reform Buddhism, or re-evaluate it, because of the new, inevitable, and corrosive effects of postmodernity and the knowledge of constructedness. Yet it is also important to use that *essential Buddhism* to re-evaluate 'our' perspectives. Loy believes that it is not only possible to access precisely 'what the Buddha taught', but that it is also possible (and necessary) to apply these teachings in our radically different postmodern era. Buddhism is useful to we, the West, who have created the mature modern world: "Since the modern world is, for better and worse, mostly a product of the West, there may be considerable value in bringing in the perspective of a mature non-Western tradition."[115] Loy's modern yet *essentially* traditional Buddhism is fundamentally meaningful – for us.

2.3. Comparison and Conclusion

How do Loy's arguments relate to King's account of engaged Buddhism, and her understanding and presentation of Buddhism as a whole? Loy is much more interested in "extrapolating"[116] a Buddhist social ethics from Buddhist teachings, whereas King is interested in the teachings and practices of engaged Buddhists. Loy does align himself and his interpretation of Buddhism – a modern, reform interpretation – much more closely with engaged Buddhists than others, as is clear from his depiction of both engaged Buddhists and 'traditional' Buddhism later in his introductory chapter.[117] This is not totally exclusive – he also praises Japanese Zen Buddhism – and therefore it is clear that his fundamental focus is not along the lines of a given tradition but is rather centered on the importance of

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[114] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 9.
[115] Ibid., 18.
[116] Ibid., 86.
[117] Ibid., 16-18.

preserving what he considers to be "the essentials of Buddhism".[118]

Despite differences in their approaches, both authors share a great deal: for one, both argue for the notion that 'essential Buddhism' is something that we can grasp, and that it is located in the teachings of the Buddha as represented by the Pali texts and by certain values (loving-kindness, critical evaluation via personal experience), philosophies (interdependence, not-self), and practices (reform in light of modernity). This shows that, first of all, both accounts seem to fall into Yarnall's traditionist category, in that they are interested in associating an original or 'traditional' Buddhism with various types of modern reform.[119] On the point of the need for reform, the importance of modernity and its radical difference from premodern times is heavily emphasized, thereby incorporating the modernist narrative as well. While King states that Buddhism has had engaged philosophy throughout its history, it is only amidst the modern crises of Asia that it has been able to emerge; and for Loy, the postmodern world demands reform and religious re-evaluation. Yet, for both, the central concern remains how reform is, or can be, accomplished using *traditional* "views and values"[120]. Both authors concern themselves with what usefulness Buddhism can have for the Western world (and, by implication, the modern world in general). Both lack a great deal of specific sources, use terms like "a Buddhist perspective"[121] in attempting to generalize Buddhist belief, and make broad statements about Buddhist and Asian history; they rely on their cultural positions as professors and decorated academics in making such assertions. In this, both authors speak from a stance of authority concerning Buddhism: either as Buddhists or as scholars – it is never quite clear which – they teach 'us' about what is really true and essential in the Buddhist teachings.

It is worthwhile here to reiterate the difficulties posed by these accounts to Yarnall's categories of narratives of engaged Buddhism. While Loy deals with

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[118] Ibid., 12. The problematic implications of such a perspective, seeking to "protect" ancient Eastern wisdom from the harshness of modernity, hardly need to be elucidated generally here: see Lopez, "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet", 251-253.
[119] Social activism is not seen by King or Loy as something 'latent' requiring Western 'activation' – the essential Buddhism they locate is regarded as fully present in the Buddha's teachings.
[120] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 12.
[121] Ibid., 30. Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 4, 6.

modern Buddhist ethics and not engaged Buddhism *per se*, it continually points to the *origins* of a modern Buddhist ethics. That these accounts incorporate central elements of both the traditionist and modernist narratives – *continuity* and *discontinuity* – shows that Yarnall's distinctions have been synthesized in these cases or that his categories are not nuanced enough. While their modernist claims open King and Loy to Yarnall's critiques, I will not seek primarily to do this; my critiques center on the methods of how 'our' Buddhism is defined via '*tradition'*. This should, I hope, bring into question the very viability of the project of academically evaluating modern Buddhism as *Eastern, Western,* or *essentially Buddhist*.

Although Loy and King differ greatly in their arguments, they are not at odds with each other: King gives *The Great Awakening* as a recommended study,[122] and as the next sections will illustrate, King and Loy often run in parallel. Their differences and similarities are the reasons why I have selected King and Loy as my central sources in this study, but it should not be assumed that they are the only studies that consider the creation of modern Buddhism or engaged Buddhism in this fashion; that is, as a necessary and especially relevant reinterpretation of essential Buddhist messages as defined by texts and certain teachings of and stories about the Buddha. I will now turn to my analysis of the Asian Sage in King and Loy, embodied in but one case in the person of Thích Nhất Hạnh.

[122] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 186.

3. THE ASIAN SAGE

While my brief look at King's and Loy's arguments provides general information about their works, I would like now to narrow my analysis further concerning the Asian Sage, as described by Jane Naomi Iwamura in her 2011 work *Virtual Orientalism.*

3.1. Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*

First, I will examine King's book. While Thích Nhất Hạnh is not the only Asian Sage to make an appearance in *Socially Engaged Buddhism* – others include the Dalai Lama and Aung San Suu Kyi – I will only deal with Thích Nhất Hạnh in detail. King consistently separates Thích Nhất Hạnh from his community and wider context, emphasizes his legitimacy as a voice for authentic traditionally Buddhist social activism, and virtualizes him as an Eastern source of general wisdom that we, as readers, need not treat critically.

3.1.1. Authentically Buddhist Activism

In her introduction, when contextualizing particular engaged Buddhist leaders, King gives the readers the basic historical background she considers necessary for approaching the figure of Thích Nhất Hạnh. She states that:

> Thich Nhat Hanh is the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk and poet who was the most important ideological leader of the Vietnamese "Struggle Movement," which strove to bring an end to the war in Vietnam. Trained in Theravada as well as Zen, Thich Nhat Hanh coined the term "engaged Buddhism," using it to refer to the kind of Buddhism that he wanted to see develop: one that would translate the wisdom and compassion that strive to develop into concrete action on behalf of all sentient beings (that is, all beings with awareness, principally humans and animals[123]). He cofounded the School of Youth for Social Service to train young Buddhists to serve the needs of the Vietnamese people, particularly in the countryside. During the war, he worked for peace by advocating a "Third Way", siding

[123] As a minor aside, this point may not be borne out particularly well by Thích Nhất Hạnh's writings and teachings. His First Mindfulness Training, Reverence for Life (written first in 1968), does not seem to emphasize humans and animals in particular: "Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of Interbeing and compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, *plants, and minerals*." (emphasis added) "The Five Mindfulness Trainings," PlumVillage.org, last modified August 16 2009, http://www.plumvillage.org/mindfulness-trainings/3-the-five-mindfulness-trainings.html.

> not with the North, not with the South, not against anyone, but with the people and with life. Since the war, he has lived in exile in France, unable to return to Vietnam for a visit since 2005. Nhat Hanh is one of the most important leaders creating and articulating Buddhist spiritual social activism, speaking to a global audience of Buddhists and non-Buddhists and frequently leading workshops all over the world for meditators, activists, families, veterans, artists, and therapists.[124]

While this is a narrow historical overview of Thích Nhất Hạnh, insofar as it does not address his religious struggles in Vietnam prior to the Vietnam War[125] nor touch on the Order of Interbeing he has established and headed (alongside Chan Khong) since 1968,[126] this might be expected as necessary in such a short introduction. These points are perhaps sacrificed in favour of others that King considers more relevant. These include the fact that Thích Nhất Hạnh was "trained in Theravada as well as Zen", although she does not mention the rather complex lineage history of Vietnamese Lâm Tế Thiền[127] or what this training encompassed; that he "worked for peace" siding "with the people and with life" during the Vietnam War; and that up until and including the present day, he continues to give talks around the world.

King gives a significantly longer account of Vietnamese War Buddhist activism in relation to the development of engaged Buddhism on pages 76-83. In this, Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Vietnamese Struggle movement play a central role in King's definition of Buddhist activism: the Struggle "maintained strict nonviolence"[128], was popular, and was effective in overthrowing an oppressive

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[124] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 4.
[125] See James Deitrick, "Thich Nhat Hanh," *Encyclopedia of Buddhism,* ed. Damien Keown and Charles S. Prebish (New York: Routledge, 2007), 545-546; Andrea Miller, "Peace in Every Step: Thich Nhat Hanh's Life of Courage and Compassion," *Shambhala Sun*, July 2010*,* 36-41; Donald Rothberg, "Responding to the Cries of the World: Socially Engaged Buddhism in North America", in Prebish and Tanaka, *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, 273-278.
[126] For just one of many sources concerning the centrality of the Order of Interbeing in accounts of Thích Nhất Hạnh's life, see Patricia Hunt-Perry and Lyn Fine, "All Buddhism is Engaged: Thich Nhat Hanh and the Order of Interbeing," *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, ed. Christopher Queen (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 35-66. *Notably*, see Sallie B. King, "Transformative nonviolence: the social ethics of George Fox and Thich Nhat Hanh," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 18 (1998): 3-36, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1390434, where she discusses certain practices of the Order of Interbeing in considerable detail.
[127] See Thích Thiện Ân, *Buddhism and Zen in Vietnam*, 4-5, 22-24, 171; see also various chapters in Nguyễn Tài Thư, ed., *The History of Buddhism in Vietnam* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008).
[128] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 77.

regime. Thích Nhất Hạnh makes a few appearances, often as a spokesman concerning the Buddhist Struggle Movement: "our enemies, he said, are hatred, inhumanity, anger, and ideology but not man."[129] King relates that this is difficult for Western activists to understand, but that it is an essential part of how Thích Nhất Hạnh practices peaceful Buddhism. Repeatedly, Thích Nhất Hạnh in this historical narrative is tightly controlled as a figure of noncontroversy, who speaks for the Vietnamese movement and Vietnamese Buddhists in general.[130]

This is indicative of the way in which he appears in the book more widely: Thích Nhất Hạnh enters the text in anecdotal ways, in order to expound fundamental principles to a foreign audience. The role of spokesman for Vietnamese Buddhism, which Thích Nhất Hạnh historically fulfilled in his tours of the United States in the 1960s, is delivered throughout King's work, where Thích Nhất Hạnh often appears as the voice of engaged Buddhist reform, philosophy, and ethics. This is shown in King's extrapolation of the Order of Interbeing's Five Mindfulness Trainings – mentioned without any discussion of the Order of Interbeing – as an attempt to express "the *ideals* of Buddhism":[131]

> Thich Nhat Hanh has restated the traditional five lay precepts in such a way as to make it clear that refraining from wrong acts is not sufficient for Engaged Buddhist ethics. One must actively *do* things in order to express one's compassion and loving-kindness for other beings….Not only must one not take life, but one must take action to try to prevent others from taking life. That means one should accept a share of responsibility for what one's society is doing, particularly in democratic societies….avoiding the wrongdoing of stealing is not enough; one must also positively strive to become more and more generous, more giving. In addition, one must engage in social action to try to prevent others, whether corporations or governments, from profiting from suffering. Thus, for example, when a corporation underpays workers or requires them to work in unsafe conditions, it is stealing, and practitioners should look for creative ways to intervene.[132]

This passage indicates an instance in which Thích Nhất Hạnh's words and

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[129] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 77. She also speaks of one of Thích Nhất Hạnh's poems becoming a popular song.
[130] Complicating this position of noncontroversial authority, it has been noted elsewhere, including in Ken Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism: A Call to Action* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 192-194, that the movement had no clear leaders; Thích Nhất Hạnh is vaguely noted as an "increasingly prominent voice".
[131] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 26.
[132] Ibid.

teachings are presented or extrapolated in an explicitly *activist* way. These extrapolations, of course, support King's earlier definition of engaged Buddhism as fundamentally activist, and she draws out from the Five Mindfulness Trainings her own strong implications, including the need for Buddhists to intervene in unfair corporate practices. In addition to her history of Thích Nhất Hạnh – which locates him almost exclusively within the context of Vietnam War protest – this serves to heavily emphasize the more radically engaged dimension of his teachings, while muting other, less 'activist' interpretations in his community today.[133] Thích Nhất Hạnh repeatedly appears advocating an ideal kind of Buddhist social and political action:

> Thich Nhat Hanh explained [nonadversarial] thinking in his book *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, which was written during the war years for his students at the School of Youth for Social Service, a kind of incubator for Engaged Buddhism. The book was written as a manual showing the connection between meditation and social action….Like the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh is able to see the suffering on all sides, to see all people as equally desiring and deserving happiness. He knew that the soldiers on both sides were brought to the battlefield by the massive karmic forces of ideology, nationalism, the Cold War, fear, and ignorance and that even the leaders of both sides were controlled by these forces.[134]

Here, Thích Nhất Hạnh is not only an activist engaged Buddhist but is clearly a positive figure: he can "see the suffering on all sides" in a way that those under the forces of "ideology, nationalism, the Cold War, fear, and ignorance" cannot. Whereas previously his views merely served to illustrate the views of engaged Buddhists, in this case his views are, "like the Dalai Lama", associated with a more pristine and more mature morality than non-engaged Buddhists.[135]

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[133] To be discussed shortly.

[134] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 77.

[135] In one case, after recounting Thích Nhất Hạnh's views on nonadversality and linking them to the interdependency of self and other taught by the Dalai Lama, King states that "Clearly it takes considerably more spiritual maturity than that of the ethical egoist to understand and integrate the perspective voiced here [of non-adversality] by the Dalai Lama." (Ibid., 30-31) Those, like the sages, further along the 'developmental path of Buddhist ethics', have more mature views than "the ethical egoist", whoever that may be. A similar pristinely ethical Thích Nhất Hạnh appears in one instance in David Cooper and Simon James, *Buddhism, Virtue, and Environment* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 136, and also in Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism*, 132.

3.1.2. Absence of the Order of Interbeing

Throughout the book, Thích Nhất Hạnh remains isolated either in this Vietnam War activism or in a general role as a 'teacher' – but a teacher without his own community. In a "state-of-the-art"[136] account of engaged Buddhism, it is surprising that the Order of Interbeing, which has grown into a large and international organization today, goes almost entirely unmentioned.[137] King explicitly cites Thích Nhất Hạnh as one of engaged Buddhism's central figures, and yet it is as if his community does not exist. Why is this community excluded from King's discussion of Thích Nhất Hạnh?

King states in her Introduction that she wishes to focus "exclusively on groups or individuals that are at the core of this movement [Engaged Buddhism]".[138] I argue that the answer lies here: in the fact that the community is *not* necessarily "at the core", at least not in the sense propounded as 'engaged' by King – the Order of Interbeing today does not engage in large-scale or organized political protests, disaster relief projects, or attempts to stymie oppressive corporations, despite King's ideas concerning the Five Mindfulness Trainings and their activist implications. Order of Interbeing members are noted by some scholars as holding activist views and as taking part in a wide variety of social, political, and ecological projects – but these are often understood as individually-based activist efforts (or as the actions of distinct *saṅgha*s), and this contrasts with other forms of engaged Buddhism which institutionalize various social, political, or ecological projects (such as Tzu Chi Buddhism), and with the history of the Order of Interbeing in Vietnam and early in exile.[139] Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Order do 'engage' by building Buddhist communities and may encourage activist

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[136] Rosemont, editor's preface to *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, by Sallie B. King, xii.
[137] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 60, is the one time that the term "Tiep Hien order" appears, in quick passing as she attributes the Mindfulness Trainings to this group (which remains completely unexplained): the term 'Order of Interbeing' does not appear at all.
[138] Ibid., 2.
[139] Liogier*, Le Bouddhisme mondialisé*, 206: In exile, "il va retourner à une vie plus contemplative…"; Ford, *Zen Master Who?*, 92, states the Order became more focused on community-building in the West; Jones*, The New Social Face of Buddhism*, 194, voices a critique that Order members are not organized enough in their activism; see also Stephen Batchelor, "Nhat Hanh," *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1994).

engagement by individual members.[140] I believe it is because this complexity complicates King's vision of staunch Vietnam War activism as indicative of engaged Buddhism that the Order of Interbeing is marginalized and unfairly excluded from King's presentation of Thích Nhất Hạnh.

Thích Nhất Hạnh is also freed from his context in order, I posit, to isolate him from religious controversies concerning his Buddhist reforms and the creation of his Order of Interbeing in Vietnam. Numerous accounts note[141] that Thích Nhất Hạnh faced considerable difficulty in implementing the wide array of modern reforms he advocated during the 1950s and 1960s. His views were by no means his alone, either: since the 1920s, an exploding Buddhist print culture in Vietnam had served as a forum for (usually young) Buddhists to explore various ways in which Buddhism in Vietnam, which encompassed many lineages and traditions, could be unified into a modern whole.[142] This also coincided with the goal of developing Buddhism as a force capable of generating a Vietnamese nationalist identity concurrent with the exit of France as a colonial ruler.

While this historical elucidation is by no means comprehensive, it should serve to illuminate some part of why Thích Nhất Hạnh's context – either as a controversial Vietnamese Buddhist or as the head of the Order of Interbeing – may prove problematic for King's argument for a totally non-nationalist, highly activist engaged Buddhism. By excluding arguments in Vietnam regarding Thích Nhất Hạnh's reforms, King avoids the need to address the views of the Buddhist monks who opposed such modernizations; Thích Nhất Hạnh is naturalized as the voice of modern Vietnamese Buddhism, despite the inconvenient fact that he was exiled from the country in the late 1960s and has only been allowed back on a number of brief occasions, with considerable religious and political

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[140] See Hunt-Perry and Fine, "All Buddhism is Engaged," 54-59, for various engaged projects by Order of Interbeing *saṅgha*s. This point needs further clarification in terms of how the Order perceives its own engagement.

[141] See Miller, "Peace In Every Step", 38-41; see also Phạm, "Nhat Hanh's Peace Activities," *Vietnamese Engaged Buddhism.*

[142] Shawn Frederick McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 170-182. See also Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, *Indochina: an Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954,* trans. Ly Lan Dill-Klein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 242-247.

controversy.[143] Considering King's emphasis on the activism of engaged Buddhists, it is strange that she does not mention the struggles of the Order of Interbeing in today's Vietnam. I argue that this is not included largely because such a mention would require a further discussion of *why* the Order is so controversial not only politically but religiously despite its apparent basis on 'traditional Buddhism', and why it is that Thích Nhất Hạnh has remained in exile for the majority of his life. As it stands, King's lack of controversial or complicated contextualization of Thích Nhất Hạnh *transmits to the reader* a sense of authenticity: this Sage is an activist Buddhist modernizer freed from religious problems in his Asian country of origin.

3.1.3. Iconic Anecdotes

Such a representation of Thích Nhất Hạnh, divorced from his community, allows King to employ him as a source whenever she needs an Asian Buddhist voice to substantiate her characterization of engaged Buddhist, and sometimes simply *Buddhist*, 'views and values'. As previously shown, this first includes the importance of activism, which requires the marginalization of the Order of Interbeing and its lack of activism in the form that King attributes to engaged Buddhists like Tzu Chi, Aung San Suu Kyi, and others. In a variety of different cases, this isolated and decontextualized Thích Nhất Hạnh illuminates different key points for King linked to activism and Buddhist philosophy more generally:

> For Nhat Hanh, healing the wounds of war and preventing the next war are also based upon "being peace". As is well known, many Vietnam veterans suffered psychological wounds that have lingered for decades. Nhat Hanh is very aware of this and regards it as an urgent matter to be redressed, not only for the sake of the veterans themselves, but for the sake of society as well. After a war, he says, remaining bombs must be defused…. To help with the defusion Nhat Hanh has offered many retreats specifically for

[143] In 2005, his return brought media attention, but has not been analyzed by scholars. See, for one source, Tricycle's sympathetic article that stresses the religious controversy he evoked from the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam: Jared Roscoe, "Buddhism, Under Vietnam's Thumb," *Tricycle Buddhist Review Web Exclusive,* September 12, 2008*,* http://www.tricycle.com/web-exclusive/buddhism-under-vietnams-thumb. Order of Interbeing-related monks also faced some persecution in 2009, see Thích Nhất Hạnh's statements on the matter: Ben Stocking, "Zen Master: Vietnam paid mobs to evict followers," *Associated Press*, January 11, 2010, http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2010/01/11/zen_master_vietnam_paid_mobs_to_evict_followers/.

> Vietnam War veterans.
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> It might seem strange that a Vietnamese should offer healing retreats for American veterans, but it is consistent with Nhat Hanh's teaching about the way to deal with suffering. Never turn away from suffering, he says, but face it, be with it, in a state of mindfulness. Veteran Claude Thomas, who was carrying profound psychological wounds from the war, speaks of his shock when he first encountered Nhat Hanh at a retreat. He says that he never knew the Vietnamese in any way other than as the enemy. Seeing Nhat Hanh, he suddenly realized that he was not his enemy. And he just started to cry.[144]
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> This author [King] once heard Thich Nhat Hanh begin a public speech by addressing the Theravada bhikkhus, who were seated in the front row. He said that by allowing the bhikkhuni order to die out, they had not taken good care of what the Buddha had given them. This was a powerful argument for a conservative order, the Theravada, which prides itself in handing down Buddhism as the Buddha taught it.[145]
>
> The concept of interdependence is the most important source in the Buddha's teachings of the often cited compatibility between Buddhism and an ecological perspective….Things are immediately implicit in each other. Thich Nhat Hanh teaches this by holding up a sheet of paper and asking his students whether they can see in it the cloud, sun, and soil. In other words, the paper comes from the tree, and the tree could not exist without the rain from the cloud, the warmth from the sun, and the minerals from the soil. Through Right Understanding one immediately sees cloud, sun, and soil upon viewing a sheet of paper.
>
> The possibility of there being no tree and no sheet of paper brings up a second crucially important teaching of the Buddha for an ecological perspective. If we were concerned only that there might be no sheet of paper, we would be concerned only with the instrumental value of the tree…[146]

Thích Nhất Hạnh variously is shown to exhibit the qualities King attributes to engaged Buddhism as a whole: he is the very embodiment of loving-kindness, Right Understanding, feminism, ecological concerns, and 'loving the enemy' – he is perceived almost as a second Buddha, with "powerful" teachings for Buddhists and Westerners alike. He causes a struggling veteran to open up and cry simply upon seeing him; as the virtual sage, he enters the texts only in order to make an impact on the reader's beliefs by relating a 'relevant' version of Buddha's

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[144] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 82.
[145] Ibid., 168-169.
[146] Ibid., 118-119.

essential teachings.[147] King reprints his entire poem "Call Me By My True Names" in order to show the way in which engaged Buddhist ethics is nonjudgmental; after relating the poem, King states that:

> Clearly Nhat Hanh believes that our character is shaped to a significant degree by the conditions in which we are born and raised. Social science, of course, supports him in this, but Nhat Hanh's view here is largely based upon the Buddhist views of causation, interdependence, and *anatman* or no-self…[148]

King feels it necessary to relate that Thích Nhất Hạnh is supported by social science, as if to make clear to the reader that his rationality is not only Western, but essentially *Buddhist*. As King's example of an engaged Buddhist, Thích Nhất Hạnh requires no criticism and his words are always presented as objectively correct, even if they appear "shocking"[149] in their radical truthfulness.

> His close relation with the Buddha is evident even in the introduction:
>
> In response to the question "Why engagement?" Thich Nhat Hanh has a simple answer: Buddhism has always been engaged. All of Buddhism is engaged because all of it addresses human suffering. *That is true*. Siddharta Gautama does not fully become the Buddha when he experiences enlightenment sitting beneath the Bo tree; the wisdom gained beneath the Bo tree is only the first of the two defining characteristics of a Buddha.[150] (emphasis added)

With these depictions, how are we as readers to approach the figure of Thích Nhất Hạnh? He is unquestionably Buddhist, unquestionably meaningful for 'us', unquestionably the voice of tradition, and unquestionably reasonable. In contrast to "conservative" monks like the Theravadin order he criticizes, he is given some space to speak, even if he is regularly divorced from his community and history. He seems to occupy a space between speaking for engaged Buddhist beliefs and speaking for 'truthful' beliefs in general – is he merely one Buddhist, or is he as authentic as the Buddha himself in approaching the fundamentals of Buddhism and how we as readers should understand it?

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[147] As in the case of his explication of Interbeing above. See Thích Nhất Hạnh and ecology, King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 122-123.
[148] See ibid., 28, for King's commentary on "Call Me By My True Names".
[149] Ibid., 27.
[150] Ibid., 8.

3.1.4. The Virtual Asian Teacher

In light of Iwamura's 'virtual' analysis, there is a further point to be made on King's presentation of Thích Nhất Hạnh. He tends to exist only in anecdotes and in short, convenient phrases – he is related in one instance through King's eyes, seeing him give a teaching to conservative *bhikkhus*; in another he makes a Westerner cry; while in another he teaches us as readers the meaning of interdependence by holding up a paper and giving a short philosophical discourse on its meaning. While I do feel that King fairly represents Thích Nhất Hạnh's views in all of these cases, I take issue with the way that she, through the uncritical use of such anecdotes and poems, continually portrays Thích Nhất Hạnh in an iconic, almost mystical way. His words are treated as though they were from the Pali texts; he is linked up with social science as further proof of his views; he provides the voice of modernized 'tradition' and disappears again with minimal historical or religious background.

In these examples from King, Thích Nhất Hạnh is thus decontextualized and, though his views are related to 'us' (readers) as fundamentally authentic, he is still held afar: he is timeless, foreign (Asian), pure, anecdotal, and mystical. His Asian ethnicity in particular is important, as it racially substantiates King's argument for a fundamentally *non-Western* engaged Buddhism; however, his particular Asian heritage (Vietnamese) and his community are hardly important in light of the fact that engaged Buddhism is said to not depend on particular cultures or styles of Buddhism. King reworks him for 'us': as Iwamura relates of the Oriental Monk, "a mass audience is less concerned with the distinctiveness of the figure or the religious tradition he represents than with the desires the iconic figure meets and the operations he performs."[151] Thích Nhất Hạnh teaches the reader about Buddhism and in this he is held at a distance, distance generated between the authentic Asian creator of engaged Buddhism – Thích Nhất Hạnh – and 'us', the readers, who attempt to access his understanding and become similarly wise and compassionate. In her Conclusion, King notes the importance that Westerners take heed of this ideal, peaceful Asian engaged Buddhism

[151] Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 161-162.

represented by figures like Thích Nhất Hạnh:

> Let us conclude this volume by briefly reviewing what is *Buddhist* about Engaged Buddhism. In other words, Engaged Buddhism is a form of spiritual social activism, but what makes it *Buddhist* social activism? This is important to note not because being Buddhist makes these ideas and approaches to social activism better or worse than the Western counterparts, but only because they are different from them. Because they are different, when we encounter them, they may stimulate our own thinking in creative directions. Let us consider them in this light.
>
> 1. The signature contribution of Engaged Buddhism to global thinking about spiritual social activism is the idea expressed so well by Thich Nhat Hanh as "being peace": the idea that in order to make peace, the peacemaker needs to be peace. The peacemaker should intentionally and in sustained fashion cultivate inner peace and then go about making peace in a peaceful manner – without anger or antagonism, seeking only the good of all. Here Engaged Buddhism challenges us to consider whether "righteous" anger is ever necessary or desirable when engaging a conflict situation, as we often assume.[152]

The identity of King's "us" – in this case, an activist Westerner with "righteous anger" – will be addressed in greater detail in my next section, the Anglo Pupil. Yet it is important to note here how Thích Nhất Hạnh is employed as a voice that is ultimately used to critique what are regarded as Western views.[153] Thích Nhất Hạnh speaks from a position of Eastern difference to us, and this, combined with his other characteristics as wise, mystical, anecdotal, isolated, and pure (free of controversy), serves to transform him into Iwamura's Oriental Monk, ever ready with a quip of Eastern wisdom as the script requires. Thích Nhất Hạnh is never inconvenient, because the inconvenient parts of his story are muted entirely.

3.2. David Loy, *The Great Awakening*

In David Loy's *The Great Awakening*, Thích Nhất Hạnh plays only a very minor role in providing a voice of Buddhist authority and wisdom, and in giving a sense of legitimacy to Loy's views. Yet, he does appear, and it is often in this

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[152] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 176.

[153] This use of the Asian sage appears in a number of other accounts employing Thích Nhất Hạnh, such as Jones, *The Social Face of Buddhism*, 104. In Peter Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 181, Thích Nhất Hạnh appears largely to complicate the "Western concept of 'nature'" with his "classical Buddhist perspective".

fashion, where he is positioned as a voice of Eastern wisdom for Western readers.

3.2.1. Authentically Buddhist Activism

Thích Nhất Hạnh's unquestionable authority can be seen late in the first chapter, when Loy discusses the legitimacy of an engaged, activist Buddhism that seeks to purge institutional suffering from society. In a fashion similar to King, Loy praises engaged Buddhism as a fruit emerging from both Western and Eastern learning, and fundamentally based on compassion: he briefly seeks to present to the reader what makes this social engagement *Buddhist*. His association of Thích Nhất Hạnh with the Buddha is very telling:

> What, if anything, is new about socially engaged Buddhism today? According to the Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, all Buddhism is (or should be) socially engaged. Shakyamuni himself never abandoned society. According to the Pali sutras he often gave advice to laypeople on their social responsibilities. Kings consulted with him, and on several occasions he intervened to stop battles, albeit not always successfully.[154]

This passage, much as in its parallel above in King, relates engaged Buddhism as something inherent to Buddhism and connected with the general 'engagement' of, it seems, the community monk in contrast to the monk who "[abandons] society." The Buddha is the former, and so is Thích Nhất Hạnh. This is not precisely the same reason given in King for social engagement, but it parallels King's village- and forest-dwelling monk distinction, and also relies on proving that the Buddha, as the original authentic Buddhist, was socially engaged.

Thích Nhất Hạnh in Loy is provided with even *less* context than in King. He is introduced simply as "the Vietnamese Buddhist teacher", and it seems that absolutely no discussion of his lineage, his historical controversy, his reforms or his community is necessary in order to orient him in the discussion. He thus appears in a completely authentic manner, as though draped with the robes of ancient Buddhism, substitutable with the very words and deeds of the Buddha himself. He sidles into Loy's argument, lends his legitimacy as an ethnically Asian Buddhist, and disappears again.

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[154] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 17.

It is interesting, given his uncritical insertion as a voice of authentic Buddhist tradition, that Thích Nhất Hạnh's words have been modified by Loy. The insertion of the "(or should be)" – which I have not been able to find in any of Thích Nhất Hạnh's statements and which Loy does not cite – reveals Loy's underlying purpose. Thích Nhất Hạnh first lends legitimacy to the notion that Buddhism is, at its core, socially engaged in a political sense; second, he, through misquotation, voices Loy's opinion – to be elaborated upon in my third section, the Asian Masses – that Buddhism which is *not* engaged is, in some ways, not ideal Buddhism. Thích Nhất Hạnh's understanding of his own quotation is considerably more nuanced than Loy's, and does not, by any measure, need the notion of engagement to be communicated in terms of social and political activism in order for it to be relevant to Buddhism.[155] This misquotation, by putting words in the authentic Monk's mouth, serves Loy's general purpose of underscoring the *Buddhistness* of actively reforming Buddhism today.

3.2.2. Iconic Anecdotes of the Asian Teacher

Thích Nhất Hạnh appears briefly thrice more in *The Great Awakening*, before making a more substantial appearance. It is useful to bear in mind that these occasions represent three different essays from Loy, two of which (excluding the introduction) have been published separately and are collated together only in *The Great Awakening.* His brief mentions are telling of his role as the Asian Sage, and seem to run parallel with King:

> This [understanding of duality] suggests a second principle – the commitment to nonviolence – that for Buddhism is vital, for several reasons. Emphasis on transience implies another nonduality, that between means and ends. Peace is not only the goal, it must also be the way; or as Thich Nhat Hanh and Mahaghosananda have put it, peace is every step. We ourselves must be the peace we want to create. A model here is Gandhi, who with some justice may be considered a twentieth-century

[155] Thích Nhất Hạnh's views concerning social activism and Buddhist engagement, and his own development of engaged Buddhism, are nuanced in his interview with John Malkin, "In Engaged Buddhism, Peace Begins With You", *Shambhala Sun*, July 2003, http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=1579. He has long criticized political activism for its tendency to cause division and anger – King*, Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 176, notes this when discussing the importance of "being peace" in activist situations.

Buddha.[156]

Gandhi, Mahaghosananda, and Thích Nhất Hạnh all serve the same purpose here – to illuminate, as in King, a fundamental principle of essential Buddhism: nonviolence. The bringing together of these figures and Gandhi's 'justified' inclusion as a "twentieth-century Buddha" requires no discussion for Loy, because Loy is not fundamentally concerned with representing these Asian figures on their own – they merely stand in as a further proof of why Buddhism is essentially non-violent. There is no question of being critical of such views or such 'authentic' figures. One is substitutable with the other, because all of them represent the same Oriental Monk, who enters the argument quietly, provides insight and the 'traditional' voice, and deferentially exits.[157]

Thích Nhất Hạnh is useful in a later case because his fourth Mindfulness Training, which declares "no abuse of delusion-producing substances", provides a basis for Loy's extrapolation concerning the necessity of making the Buddhist precepts into something more applicable to the modern world.[158] This is again an opportunity for Thích Nhất Hạnh to represent the useful voice of Eastern wisdom speaking to the Western audience: Loy explains that "many of us are addicted to" such things as televisions, stereos, and computers[159] – and the Asian Sage, with his moral compass, helps us see how Buddhism can still be relevant in this strange technological world.

He is quoted again during Loy's discussion of why economic theory should be readjusted in light of its inability to generate happiness. "From a Buddhist perspective," Loy states, "economic activity involving injury to life or the erosion of moral ideals is unacceptable…";[160] Thích Nhất Hạnh then steps in to assure the reader that Buddhism provides an alternative:

> According to the Vietnamese teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhism is "a clever way to enjoy your life". Confusing the quality of one's life with a

[156] Loy, *The Great Awakening,* 35.
[157] "...the recognition of any Eastern spiritual guide, real or fictional, is predicated on his conformity to general features that are paradigmatically encapsulated in the icon of the Oriental monk…" Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism,* 6.
[158] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 38.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid., 58-59. This essay was originally published as "Buddhism and Poverty", *Kyoto Journal* 41 (Summer 1999), and later in *Contemporary Buddhism* 2, no.1 (2001).

> quantitative "standard of living" is, in contrast, a foolish way. Many of the Third World peoples we have been so eager to "develop" seem to be more aware of this difference than we are.[161]

In both of the above cases, Thích Nhất Hạnh requires little context, and is scripted into the argument in an iconic fashion in order to provide some short, feel-good wisdom that the reader has no need to question or critique. 'We' are distanced from Thích Nhất Hạnh, and he is associated with a more ancient, yet mystically relevant wisdom of which we in the West are ignorant.[162] Thus we should listen to him… but we need not learn much more about him.

The final case in which Thích Nhất Hạnh appears in *The Great Awakening* is in Loy's description of interdependence for the reader:

> There are different accounts of what Buddha experienced when he became enlightened, but they agree that he realized the nondual interdependence of things….As the Dalai Lama puts it, "When we consider the matter, we start to see that we cannot finally separate out any phenomena from the context of any other phenomena." The Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh has expressed this more poetically:
>
> "If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow, and without trees we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either….
>
> If we look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. If the sunshine is not there, the tree cannot grow. In fact, nothing can grow. Even we cannot grow without sunshine. And so, we know that the sunshine is also in this sheet of paper. The paper and the sunshine inter-are. And if we continue to look, we can see the logger who cut the tree and brought it to the mill to be transformed into paper. And we see the wheat. We know that the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, and therefore the wheat that became his bread is also in this sheet of paper. And the logger's father and mother are in it too."
>
> He goes on to show that "as thin as this sheet of paper is, it contains everything in the universe in it." Such interdependence challenges our usual sense of separation from the world. The Cartesian sense that I am "in here," inside my head behind my eyes, and the world is "out there,"

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[161] Loy, *The Great Awakening,* 58-59.

[162] This despite the fact that Thích Nhất Hạnh has not only spent considerable time in Western educational institutions, but has lived in the West for half of his life (in exile). This 'Third World' of Loy's has little to do with any actual time or place, and is an imaginary space from which he constructs 'non-Western wisdom'.

alienates us from the world we are in…[163]

Thích Nhất Hạnh can, through Loy's guiding narrative, actually explain to us the very enlightenment experienced by the *Buddha himself*. Thích Nhất Hạnh enters as a "Vietnamese Zen *master*" (emphasis added), as if to make absolutely clear to the reader that this is a truly authentic Buddhist source. His context, aside from a classification as Vietnamese Zen and an equivalency with the Dalai Lama, is not necessary for Loy. Thích Nhất Hạnh exists only for the reader's imagination. His quotation serves as a stand-alone and self-evidently authentic and convincing description of *paticcasamuppāda* – and furthermore, it is a description that in itself challenges 'our' traditional Western (Cartesian) notions of duality and the self. Thích Nhất Hạnh evaporates from the argument the instant his quotation is finished, and never reappears: he has been scripted, given lines to speak, and once he is finished he exits in a puff of smoke.

It is interesting to note that this is last example is precisely the same example that King quotes in her explanation of interdependence. Perhaps King merely followed Loy's lead; in any case, it seems clear that both authors feel that Thích Nhất Hạnh's descriptions of Interbeing perfectly describe the basic Buddhist doctrine of *paticcasamuppāda*, and that therefore he should be quoted in its definition.[164] Neither author misrepresents his views or his teachings in this regard, but it remains clear that he plays the role of the Asian sage in both cases – he is substitutable with other sages, mystical, anecdotal, and most of all *authentic*.

3.3. Comparison and Conclusion

In the above accounts, Thích Nhất Hạnh is often presented as 'our' teacher, or is substitutable with the Buddha, the Dalai Lama, and even Gandhi (in

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[163] Loy, *The Great Awakening,* 85. Originally published as "Pave the Planet or Wear Shoes?", *Subverting Greed: Religious Conscience and the Global Economy*, ed. Paul F. Knitter and Chandra Muzaffar (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002).

[164] In this fashion, he is always quoted with reverence, and as these accounts show, the same points tend to be repeated. These are not the only works that do so – see, for instance, Cooper and James, *Buddhism, Virtue, and Environment,* 136. As Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism,* 160, notes, "…this fascination [with the Oriental Monk] is marked by an unusual type of amnesia – an amnesia that allows its subjects to experience their fascination each time anew."

Loy), as an authentically *Buddhist* source.[165] There can be no question as to the validity and authenticity of his teachings when he is introduced simply as a "Vietnamese Buddhist monk" prior to relating some anecdote or teaching – these accounts do not give serious voice to the controversy of his teachings, choosing instead to naturalize his reforms and beliefs as fundamentally understandable and meaningful. He represents a 'true' Buddhism as originally expressed by Gautama and ancient scripture. He is iconic and wise, and his words are always separated from his community and wider context in order to emphasize the importance of a given point, whether it is social activism, ecology, feminism, liberalism, democracy or nonviolence. The Order of Interbeing, which he has spent the past fifty years of his life building alongside Chan Khong and hundreds, even thousands of others in his community, is far less relevant for these authors than the meaning that Thích Nhất Hạnh's words have for 'us'; indeed, his words are far more relevant than his life at all. He is relegated to a convenient, isolated existence for King and Loy: he is hardly a living Buddhist, except insofar as he happens to have lived in the twentieth century, and, for King, amidst the struggles and fallout of the Vietnam War.

This depiction is reminiscent of Iwamura's Oriental Monk in a number of ways and runs in a few obvious parallels with Said's *Orientalism*. Thích Nhất Hạnh is a Sage, entering the scene when wisdom is needed, clothed in the foreignness of pure Oriental religion and regarded with awe. He is used in a way that constructs the type of Buddhism that 'we' should understand as *truly* Buddhist. Iwamura states that:

> Iconic performances must be reliable, answer Western spiritual needs and desires, and mask the ideological interests and geopolitical concerns that invisibly drive its cultural imperialist enterprise.[166]

Thích Nhất Hạnh encapsulates all of these elements. He makes the same points repeatedly, coming across as pure, relatively free of context, and comprehensible; he is ethnically Asian, 'the Vietnamese Zen monk', and is therefore clearly authentic; the authors treat him sympathetically and glorify him instead of overtly

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[165] Again, these figures are imaginary – their particular contexts are largely irrelevant for 'us'. Note that King, differing from Loy, does not script Gandhi as an explicitly Buddhist sage.
[166] Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism,* 161.

denigrating him, thereby masking their obsession with appropriating his racial identity (revealed in their regular attempts to put words in his mouth or to extrapolate his teachings for him). He exists, in short, to be the perfect subject for these authors to defend and ultimately appropriate in re-presenting Asian religion to the Anglo pupil.

4. The Anglo Pupil

Thích Nhất Hạnh as the Oriental Monk plays the role of a teacher or a wise Eastern sage in *Socially Engaged Buddhism* and *The Great Awakening*: he can be observed entering quietly to share some key wisdom, thereby providing 'us' with an authentic Buddhist voice – only to disappear without needing to be complicated by contextualization. The icon of the Monk, despite this apparent teaching role, is always mediated and scripted by the author. Thích Nhất Hạnh's words seem to require little criticism, and he is used to provide an authentic Asian basis for defining and describing Buddhist 'views and values'; yet, at the same time, how he is presented consistently obscures or distorts his community and teachings when they might problematize the author's ideal vision of Buddhism. What is this vision? And to whom do King and Loy seek to communicate it?

4.1. 'Our' Scholar-Practitioner Guides

Given the extent to which Thích Nhất Hạnh becomes an iconic model for communicating certain ideals of engaged Buddhism to the reader, he should not be regarded directly as 'our' teacher in these accounts. It seems much more accurate to speak of the author as a teacher or more precisely as a *guide* to the world of ancient Buddhism and modern Buddhism. The author is part of 'us' and also stands in awe of the Oriental Monk, but centrally plays the part of the director in a script, determining when and where the Monk should speak, and what words he should say. While the use of 'us' as a pronoun makes the 'I' of the author less prominent – drawing the focus to us as a common Western community encountering the ancient wisdom of Buddhism – readers should not forget that the director/author remains the hermeneutic guide. He or she is not subsumed by this 'us' into a neutral position of objectivity: the situation is quite the opposite, in that he or she always remains in a position of great textual and interpretive power, not only giving 'us' certain characteristics, but also presenting arguments about and visions of Buddhism through various Monks.

The author's role here brings up a theme discussed in the Introduction, that of the scholar-practitioner, who may hold dual obligations towards academic

and religious communities. While the scholar is our guide in these accounts insofar as Buddhist tradition, philosophy, and ethics are related 'to us', it is clear that these scholars do seem to engage with some sort of "role-specific obligation"[167] in attempting to provide a sense of correct Buddhist practice for Buddhist practitioners. They regularly seek to determine what *Buddhistness* consists of, explicitly with the purpose of showing how this Buddhism is relevant for the audience. This role of the teacher-guide should be seen in light of the scholar-practitioner – a category that is not in itself problematic, but nevertheless requires awareness and discussion in light of Prebish's and Tweed's arguments.

> Loy, for one, seems to implicate himself as an interpreter of Buddhism:
>
> > We cannot escape this task of reconstructing Buddhism to make it meaningful for us and our culture, so that it best addresses the ways that we experience and understand our most oppressive forms of *dukkha*. In that fashion, making a new Buddhism that works for us is itself a traditional, indeed inescapable task that Buddhism requires of us Western Buddhists… There is no alternative to reconstructing Buddhism in the West. The question is whether we will do it poorly, because largely unconsciously, or better, because [we are] more conscious of what we are doing. It is becoming clear that our Buddhism must be and will be socially engaged – not as a replacement of earlier teachings, but as a supplement to and development of them.[168]

Loy sees himself as a capable and qualified reformer of Buddhist teachings, with a "conscious" vision for how that Buddhism should look – socially engaged, Western,[169] and oriented towards "our most oppressive" forms of *duḥkha.* In order to stay traditional *and* relevant, Western Buddhists must reinterpret Buddhism for the modern world. Loy is, then, at once a decorated scholar of Eastern Buddhism and a 'Dharma teacher' interested in reform and reconstruction. It is possible to theorize that Loy and other "conscious" scholar-practitioners may have an effect on the dissemination of Western Buddhism, especially in light of the history of

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

[168] Christopher Queen, "Introduction: From altruism to activism," in Queen, Prebish, and Keown, *Action Dharma*, 31; originally from an online conference April 9 2000.

[169] Who are "Western Buddhists"? I believe he implicitly refers to 'convert' and not 'ethnic' Buddhists, and his comments are meant not for Asian American practitioners of Asian faiths so much as for members of 'modern' Western Buddhist traditions. There are many accounts that complicate 'ethnic' and 'convert' – for just one, see Victor Sōgen Hori, "How Do We Study Buddhism in Canada?", *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada*, ed. John S. Harding, Victor Sōgen Hori, and Alexander Soucy (Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 12-38.

how 'convert' Buddhisms have been shaped by academic discourse.[170]

4.2. The Western, Liberal, Activist 'We'

Iwamura's conception of the Anglo pupil within the schema of the Oriental Monk helps to bring out the obligations of the scholar-practitioner in relation to the 'we' that up until now has been so evident in Loy's and King's works. The Anglo Pupil, 'us', explicitly defined in various places as Western,[171] educated, activist, liberal, etc, is not necessarily identified as a specific Anglophone student, but rather stands in as a Western recipient of the iconic Oriental Monk's ancient Eastern wisdom. 'We' appear like Caine in *Kung Fu*, as ethnically 'Western', Anglophone recipients of the wisdom of robed Shaolin monks: we must protect Eastern insight and also bring it into active presence in the Western world.[172] I would like to highlight that the Anglo Pupil is not the Western audience *as such*, but is rather the *virtual image* of the Western audience, the 'virtual community', both academic and Buddhist, as constructed by the author. The Anglo pupil – 'us' as guide and readers – is a spiritual self-image of the West that is presented as both capable of receiving Eastern wisdom and of reinterpreting it in corrosive modern times.

Certain characteristics are bestowed upon 'us' in David Loy's *The Great Awakening*. Loy regularly identifies 'us' as relatively wealthy, powerful, peaceful, spiritually dissatisfied, and educated members of a global civil society interested in solving the inequities of capitalism today.[173] The words of the Oriental Monk, or Buddhist wisdom, are directed towards 'us' as capable reformers. It is obvious, Loy tells us, that we must reinterpret Buddhism for the modern world, or not only

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[170] See, as cited in the Introduction, Prebish, "Studying the Spread," 69-79; Pierce, "Buddhist Modernism," 87-109; Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe," 86-87. For an interesting note on secular Western academics and Buddhism, see Kōshō Yamamoto, *Buddhism in Europe: report of a journey to the West*, *in 1966, of an eastern Buddhist*, (Ube: Karinbunko, 1967), 1-3, 24-26.

[171] One recalls that the wisdom of Buddhism is in both accounts central for 'us in the West'.

[172] Although Kwai Chang Caine is ostensibly half-Chinese, he was played by the white American David Carradine in an attempt to make the TV series more accessible for an American audience. Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 137.

[173] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 15, 19, notes wealth and power as part of 'our' identity.

it but also all childlike manifestations of it[174] will go extinct as Buddhism enters a new era (postmodernity) and new culture (the West). As affluent, educated members at the forefront of the postmodern Western world, 'we' are best placed to do this, as we are familiar with postmodern crises and have the power to enact solutions. These abilities of 'us' appear in a few different statements from Loy:

> Even more radical then than now, the original Buddhist teachings, not surprisingly, eventually became elaborated into another sacred canopy, focused on a transcendental liberation from this world. What is more surprising is that early Buddhism should have had such deconstructive insights and that they have been preserved in recognizable form for two and a half millennia. In order to clarify the possibilities contemporary Buddhism offers us, both individually and socially, it is necessary for us to begin the process of discriminating between the essentials of its message and the incidentals of its Iron Age origins…[175]
>
> Buddhism needs the contribution of Western modernity – such as democracy, feminism, and the separation of church and state – to challenge its institutional complacency and to liberate its own teachings from such traditional social constraints.[176]
>
> If Buddhism has always been socially engaged, perhaps the only new thing is that our more democratic forms of governance allow more direct efforts to challenge the state and reform its policies.[177]

We, as educated Anglo pupils, *can* rediscover 'essential' or core Buddhism and can even *improve* it by discerning the "incidentals" of its message. Both King and Loy stress the importance of the necessity that Buddhism be reformed and reinterpreted in light of modernity; Buddhism simply cannot survive in the same form as previously seen in the history of Asia. Anglo pupils are truly *modern* people, and as such, bring new values, like 'our' democracy and feminism, to the table – values that need not be questioned in their implementation into Asian religion. It is, above all, Loy's responsibility as the scholar-practitioner to guide 'us' and Buddhists in reforming *consciously* – that is, with these particular goals of "Western modernity" in mind. 'We' are not merely readers, but liberal, engaged Westerners implicated in redefining Buddhism in the postmodern era.

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[174] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, gives disparaging examples of Pure Land Buddhism (4) and popular Japanese Buddhism (6), amongst others.
[175] Ibid., 5.
[176] Ibid., 8.
[177] Ibid., 17.

David Loy's Anglo pupil is interested and capable of engaging in activist reform of the global economic system: 'we' are a positive image, and although we are stuck in a corrupt economic system (greedy capitalism), or have become spiritually disenchanted because of the destruction of our 'sacred canopies', with the correct Buddhist reorientation we may still be able to solve the great problems of the world. King echoes this in her Conclusion, when she calls for "us in the West" to include Buddhist ideas in our pursuit of a more evolved justice system, sense of social activism, or ecological awareness.[178] The idea is that we *can* improve these issues by our engagement: therefore the task is urgent.

In King, a direct description of 'us' as affluent, disenchanted, etc, as appears in Loy, does not often take place. King refers explicitly to us a number of times (most directly in her Conclusion), and this 'we' tends to assume the qualities of a liberal Western activist. Otherwise, 'we' are implicitly present in King's assumptions that she shares certain fundamental values with the reader, most especially when she dismisses chauvinism, antifeminism, violence, or passivity in various forms of Buddhism as obviously negative ethical positions.[179] 'We' are not like the corrupt, institutionalized patriarchs of Asia, we do not hold their antifeminist positions, and we certainly see the value in rejecting violence. She explains that forms of Buddhism which exhibit these characteristics – mostly 'traditional' Buddhisms in Asia – are not only problematic from 'our' standpoint, but do not even fully adhere to Śākyamuni's 'core' message (and therefore do not fully adhere to essential Buddhism).

4.3. Constructing *Buddhistness* as Values

How Loy and King determine their conceptions of essential Buddhist thought and values speaks further to 'our' identity as recipients of this Buddhism and to 'our' method of defining religion and Buddhism in essentialist-normative ways. Through their selective use of Buddhist figures, texts, history, and

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[178] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 176-178. She implies that we are activists for certain causes: see 173-174 (feminism), 98-101 (against poverty), and chapters 'Ecology' and 'Human Rights and Criminal Justice'.

[179] Ibid., 3, 59, 173-174, 98-101, 140, 162. This is also expressed in the editor's preface, viii, ix.

philosophy, King and Loy seek to align certain values, such as feminism, ecology, etc, with a sense of *Buddhistness*. In this section, I will endeavour to show that these values are 'extracted' only nominally from Buddhist sources, and may not necessarily represent 'core' Buddhism as much as the ideals of the Anglo pupils imagined by King and Loy. I do not aim to construct a substitute idea of *Buddhistness*; I wish only to complicate how Loy and King present their conceptions of essential religion, in order to draw out the Buddhism that they present to the Anglo pupil.

For King and Loy – although it is a methodology they treat non-critically – anecdotes, sayings, and stories from the life of the Buddha and from various ancient texts are judged as the most fundamental sources of Buddhist teachings and authority. Buddhism is simplified and essentialized in a very particular way by Loy:

> Buddhism is not primarily a philosophy, nor even (by some criteria) a religion. It is a path we follow to end our dukkha. The most important thing, therefore, is to present the teachings in a form that encourages people to follow that path and enables them to do so….This practical approach to addressing dukkha may be traced back to Shakyamuni himself…[180]

This is drawn from Buddha's statement, central also in King, that "I teach only *dukkha* and the utter quenching of *dukkha*."[181] This motto of reducing suffering is admittedly very vague for 'us', and hardly provides enough guidance. How do we reduce suffering? What types of *duḥkha* are the most important to reduce? Notably, the question of Buddhist enlightenment is out of the picture in regards to the total cessation of suffering (*nibbāna*); the important thing is 'concrete' suffering, in the form of violence, ecology, capitalism, etc.[182]

King and Loy glean ideals from Buddhist or engaged Buddhist sources with which we can respond to these types of suffering, and seek to infuse these values with *Buddhistness:*

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[180] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 23.
[181] Ibid., 53; King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 18, 84.
[182] Deitrick, "Mistaking the Boat for the Shore," 252-269, discusses the way in which engaged Buddhisms seem to miss this point of escape from *samsāra* – a point that that he, for his part, understands as the essential characteristic of *Buddhistness*.

> Courtship, marriage, divorce, and birth control are secular matters scarcely addressed in the Buddhist teachings. That all of us have the same Buddha-nature implies not only the liberation and empowerment of women but opposition to all gender-based discrimination, including gay, lesbian, and transsexual rights. The widespread use of sexual imagery in advertising today, and more obviously the burgeoning international sex trades, can be considered violations of this [the fourth] precept.[183]
>
> …I awaken from my own lack – from my dukkha, from my futile preoccupation with trying to make myself real – into a world full of being similarly empty but suffering….A liberated person naturally wants to help the world, because he or she does not feel separate from it.[184]
>
> …Buddhist teachings do not imply any particular or detailed vision of the new political and economic relationships that will remedy our institutionalized dukkha. Certain principles are more or less obvious – for example, nonviolence, a basic level of social welfare, emphasis on education...[185]
>
> Engaged Buddhism is a religious path that is liberal yet demanding and challenging. It makes great demands upon the individual, who is challenged to measure up to ever high spiritual standards of insight, wisdom, personal morality, loving-kindness, and compassion, as well as socially engaged standards of putting one's insights and values into practice energetically, selflessly, and courageously….Engaged Buddhism is far from lax in that it will not compromise on the values of the Dharma, but it is this very adherence to the Dharma that allows it, and even requires it, to be open to other sources and expressions of truth. Engaged Buddhism, therefore, is not at war with science….not at war with academia….nor…at war with other religions….[this is] the very point at which Engaged Buddhism is rigorous and undeviating: its devotion is to the Dharma.[186]
>
> Sarvodaya....opposes the usual economic assumption of continuous growth….It [sic] is convinced such growth is simply unsustainable…the Earth and its resources are finite, they have a limit that we simply have to respect. Moreover, the idea of continual growth is based upon the practice of trying to fulfill all of humankind's desires and leads inevitably to the instigation and promotion of still more desires….Such efforts are completely antithetical to Buddhism's views as expressed by the Four

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[183] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 38.
[184] Ibid., 31.
[185] Ibid., 34.
[186] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism,* 65-66. See also, importantly, King's foundational explication in 'Philosophy and Ethics' of the Buddha's teachings, with which she approaches the idea of exactly what is meant by the *dhamma* and its implications of selflessness, etc. This sets up her later expositions of values.

Noble Truths and the teaching of the Middle Path.[187]

These are just a few of the points that are made about what a modern Buddhism that is comprehensible to 'us' must include in order to have *Buddhistness*. Traditions, if they are to be truly Buddhist, must be evaluated in regards to their adherence to these liberal democratic ideals of feminism, equality, ecology, religious dialogue, etc, as well as a critical attitude towards capitalism; these ethical positions are presented to 'us' as indicative of the Buddha's basic message. Even in cases where, as in King, the views of engaged Buddhists are illustrated, such views are associated directly with "the Dharma" – that is, with essential Buddhism.

4.4. Extracting *Buddhistness* from Buddhism

For King and Loy, certain values drawn from texts and stories define Buddhism, much more than any living Buddhist does. Yet, in the same way that Thích Nhất Hạnh is scripted to speak only when his voice supports the views of our scholar-practitioner guide, Buddhist texts and traditions only appear in a sympathetic light if they are convenient for value extraction. These are not merely defenses or extrapolations of essentially Buddhist positions: the Anglo pupils' values come *first*, and are only later justified and strengthened by convenient Buddhist sources. King and Loy, by using this method, also communicate to the Anglo pupil how we, as qualified academics or as Buddhist readers, should construct or rate *Buddhistness*.

The need for muting certain sources is illustrated well by King's and Loy's assertions that the fact that Buddha said that "our faith should not be blind"[188], and that he "never asked anyone to believe anything on his authority"[189]; these statements mean that 'we' should be critical towards Buddhist sources that contradict our values. Loy and King present different arguments for

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[187] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism,* 105-106. This quotation, which in its larger context is meant to illustrate the value of A.T. Ariyaratne's development organizations, is a good example of the way in which King mixes together her own views, or perhaps liberal views, alongside the views of engaged Buddhists, and thereby presents to the reader that engaged Buddhism is equivalent to essential Buddhism as the Buddha taught it.

[188] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 7

[189] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 17.

the reinterpretation of karma and rebirth in this fashion:

> Shakyamuni himself emphasized that our faith should not be blind; we really understand something only when we know it for ourselves, from our own experience. Karma and rebirth were common beliefs in Shakyamuni's day, just as the belief in an imminent messiah was common in Jesus' Israel. How literal should our understanding of karma and rebirth be now, given what we now know (or believe we know) about the physical world and human psychology?[190]
>
> As we have seen, the Buddha did state that the conditions of one's birth, including the relative beauty and soundness of one's body, are the karmic fruit of one's past deeds. In Buddhist countries people traditionally saw the presence of disabilities as evidence of bad karma from former lives. Though Buddhist teachers have emphasized that disability should call forth out compassion and our readiness to help, popular understanding based on the idea of karma has provided a rationalization for people to turn their backs on the disabled….With regard to the question of karma, some disabled people simply ignore traditional teachings, finding them irrelevant… Others accept the idea that something they did in a past life caused them to be born disabled… They may feel that if they made some bad choices and acted in harmful ways in a past life, in this life they the opportunity to do better. The fact that the Buddha himself discouraged people from pondering their past lives is known in the community of disabled people working with Buddhism, validating the decision of many to simply focus on this life and handle it well.[191]

'We', whether modern Buddhists or Westerners, are not simply interested in adopting Buddha's words wholesale; rather, we must evaluate Buddha and 'traditional' Buddhism alike in light of what our guides have determined as being central to Buddhism. The Anglo pupil's values and beliefs, 'our' values and beliefs, are, therefore, more fundamentally infused with *Buddhistness* than even the Buddha or Buddhist practices themselves (from which they were apparently drawn previously). At times, we must be willing to look away from problematic statements in core Buddhist texts in order to give voice to particular ways of being 'postmodern',[192] particular types of liberal ideology, and particular ethical values.

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[190] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 7.

[191] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 164; this paragraph is placed within the framework that karma today needs "extensive discussion" in order to bring a more compassionate perspective into play. "The Buddha himself" remains the source of authority, as long as *he helps us become more tolerant and accepting*. King offers no citations for the "Buddhist teachers", the views of those in Buddhist countries, or for the views of disabled people "working with Buddhism." Loy's criticism on rebirth and karma, *The Great Awakening*, 7, are treated in the next chapter in detail.

[192] See Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 7.

Despite this willingness to ignore teachings that are problematic for liberal values, other cases where so-called essential teachings have been ignored, such as the much-touted *Buddhistness* of nonviolence, cause major distress for King and Loy. As I will show in more detail in the next section, they condemn such interpretations as misrepresentative of Buddhism, and as more indicative of cultural corruption than of true Buddhist belief. This helps to make it very clear that it is not so much *Buddhist texts and tradition* that are essential, but rather certain *ideals* only secondarily connected to particular texts or anecdotes.

In this fashion, any text or tradition that does not embody our knowledge and values becomes subject to criticism and classification, while certain Buddhisms, which are said to have become distinct from forms described as institutional, irrelevant, or oppressive, are glorified as truly Buddhist.[193] It becomes necessary for both Loy and King, as scholar-practitioners teaching *us* how to be Buddhist correctly in the modern world, to instill in the reader a sense of religious orthodoxy and historical relevance in regards to the *Buddhistness* of our values. A duty is thereby bestowed upon the Anglo pupil, who receives the true wisdom of the Oriental Monk and the Buddhist texts, and who must reinterpret Asian religion in order to protect its 'essence'.

4.5. 'Our' Necessary Ideals

For the Anglo pupil, then, reform is absolutely necessary in the modern era, and it requires innovative, creative individuals in order to manifest the 'views and values' of essential Buddhism. This necessity is how King characterizes the emergence of engaged Buddhism in general.[194] Loy states something similar in his work when he notes the impossibility of immature premodern Buddhism surviving in the postmodern world.[195] These notions of 'relevance' in the modern era are directed towards *us*, as educated and affluent members of a modern global

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[193] For example, engaged Buddhism or also, for Loy, certain Japanese Zen traditions. Again, these forms are only Buddhist insofar as they exhibit these values; I believe the Order of Interbeing is muted for its lack of organized activism, and in the next section, Loy finds it necessary to distance himself from Zen's violent history.
[194] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 3, 12.
[195] Loy, *The Great Awakening,* 2-3.

society who should evaluate traditions on the basis of their ability to respond to crises in a liberal fashion. Modern Buddhism is not merely another form of Buddhism, but rather as a category it contains the movements that have *kept Buddhism 'relevant' in modern times*. Buddhism is re-presented to the Anglo Pupil as something that requires evolution beyond the mere 'sacred canopy' that it has been for so many years, and which satisfied religious appetites until today.

This *idealization* of 'our' Buddhism communicates to the audience that within it we find 'our' values, while uses of the Oriental Monk and ancient Buddhist texts are meant to show that these values are not merely 'new' or 'Westernized'. King's account, which attempts to focus on Asian figures, glorifies the emergence of engaged Buddhists as part of a universal struggle against suffering. In just one instance, by portraying the Vietnamese Struggle movement as a movement of the oppressed (Buddhists) against oppressors (ideologies/governments) and by identifying sympathetically with engaged Buddhism, the movement becomes the ideal vehicle for the Anglo pupil's struggle – "a noble cause with which to align oneself".[196] 'Our' values are brought to bear on universal problems, such as global economic crises, war, famine, ecological disaster, etc, and this makes it ever more evident for 'us', the Anglo pupil, that this style of Buddhism is the one that remains truly relevant today.

The interpretations of King or Loy become mixed up with the interpretations of engaged Buddhists whom they cite, and their desires to 'defend' or 'extrapolate' engaged or modern Buddhism become instead glorifications of the particular ideals they consider the most important today: activism, feminism, ecology, compassion for the disabled, knowledge of 'constructedness', and more. Both authors, speaking as scholars to an academic community *and* as Buddhists to a Buddhist community, praise the innovative, pluralistic, and creative nature of modern Buddhism, as long as it is, again, fundamentally based on *these ideals*. This Buddhism is meant for 'us', and its *Buddhistness* is *ours*; it is designed to be

[196] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 76-83. This analysis is paralleled in Iwamura's analysis of the Dalai Lama and the Free Tibet movement against China; Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 164, states that the Oriental Monk in this case "portrays a marginalized people who are fighting against a global power… for their very physical, cultural, and spiritual survival – a noble cause with which to align oneself." This portrayal, of course, masks ideological and cultural interests.

relevant to the Anglo pupil's imagined values. This is how Loy seeks to reform Buddhism for Western Buddhists, even while ostensibly focusing on *Buddhistness* as his foundation. 'We' are told to approach Eastern wisdom, reflect upon it, and take it on board in our construction of a more ethical world. By ignoring methodological questions of how Buddhism is constructed and defined differently around the world, King and Loy both imbue stories of the Buddha's life and the ancient Pali canon with a sense of authenticity over and above any particular Buddhist communities; yet, it is clear that even this canon is ultimately subject to the critical eye of liberal ideology focused on promoting liberal values. If Buddhism has deviated from this path, as in the case of violent forms of Buddhism, it must be regarded as a perversion, a corruption, or at least as a misunderstanding of Śākyamuni's basic and fundamental injunction to reduce suffering. In the next section, I will draw this out further in order to show how 'they', the Asian masses, are marginalized in order to make way for this vision. After all, if 'we' are the new guardians of the texts and have determined a value system that is pure and authentic, can 'they' really speak for Buddhism at all?

5. The Asian Masses

An analysis of the Oriental Monk rests, in its third part, upon how the re-presentation of Asian religion and society to the Anglo pupil marginalizes Asian belief and communities, who are represented in Iwamura by the term 'the Asian masses'. The image of the Anglo pupil – 'us' as both guide and readers – is used by King and Loy to bring Eastern wisdom and Asian culture into 'our' liberal Western modernity, but in a safe and familiar way. The dangerous, irrational East serves as the background against which, in this way, 'we' define ourselves: the Asian masses and their cultures must make way for the formation of our religious identity.

5.1. 'Their' Voices, Creating Distance

A definition cannot exist in isolation: the image of 'our' Buddhism is not complete without its counterpart 'them', the Asian masses. In order to define their conception of our useful, engaged Buddhist values, Loy and King must, however briefly, outline how our 'relevant' Buddhism is distinct. Though "all of Buddhism is engaged Buddhism",[197] some Buddhisms are better than others – and though King attempts to draw a distinction between village- and forest-dwelling monks, it is difficult to ignore that the vast majority of Buddhist institutions in Asian countries are *not* those of engaged Buddhists, but also not simply secluded forest-dwellers. Since 'our' Buddhism is defined more as *Buddhistness* than as any particular country, sect, time or figure, *all* 'non-engaged Buddhists',[198] whoever they may be, must be discounted on the basis of this same *Buddhistness*.

In general in these volumes, 'their' voices, those of the rarely-defined non-engaged Buddhists, are only very occasionally heard. The authors tend to speak for 'them', or present their beliefs in such a way that the primary objective is to discount them as inauthentic and even as ridiculous.

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[197] King, Socially Engaged Buddhism, 8-9; see Loy, The Great Awakening, 17.

[198] To refer to this amorphous 'them', I will use the terms 'non-engaged' and 'their' Buddhism interchangeably. Insofar as modern, usually engaged Buddhism is identified with 'us', 'their' Buddhism is non-engaged. Loy and King do, however, seem to have slightly different conceptions of exactly how to define less authentic forms of Buddhism in opposition to 'our' Buddhism, as Loy does not focus explicitly on legitimizing engaged Buddhism in his volume.

5.1.1. David Loy, *The Great Awakening*

One case where 'their' voices do appear is in Loy's chapter "Zen and the Art of War", where he attempts to explain why violent forms of Buddhism in imperial Japan are not *Buddhist* so much as results of historical circumstance and cultural perversion. Loy, after claiming that Buddhism has reduced violence historically, states that many religions that are essentially peaceful, such as Christianity, have been "perverted" by violence.[199] Violence is thus established at the outset as a perversion not merely of Buddhism, but of religion in general. He describes the "samurai appropriation of Zen" as a "cautionary tale" that should be remembered in our generation of a Buddhist social theory.[200]

Loy, using the writings of D.T. Suzuki and Robert Bellah, characterizes Japanese society as centrally concerned with "goal-oriented behavior"[201] – something that, in the long run, took precedence amongst Japanese Buddhists over adherence to true Buddhism. Loy asks:

> This raises again the old question, How much of Zen is Buddhist and how much Japanese? Is Zen anti-intellectualism an aspect of Buddhist enlightenment, of the Japanese version of enlightenment, or of the Japanese understanding of enlightenment?
>
> Raising such questions about the differences between Pali Buddhism (the ancient Buddhism of India based exclusively on the Pali texts) and Japanese Buddhism brings us back to the most important issue, the relationship between Zen and the samurai spirit.[202]

Loy posits the existence of a pure textual Buddhism – one that 'we' can conveniently still access today – and goes on to state that its apparent successor, Mahāyāna Buddhism, has tended to be more open historically to violence than other *yāna*s.[203] Throughout the chapter, Loy seeks to question Japanese Buddhists based on Śākyamuni's example, pointing always to stories of the Buddha or Western academic sources as the ultimate source of how to access pure

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[199] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 143, concerning Buddhism: "An example is Tibet, which became less violent when Buddhism became widely adopted"; this claim Loy does not substantiate with any evidence.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid., 145.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid.

Buddhistness. This again speaks to the way in which the Anglo pupil is taught how to construct essentialist-normative definitions of Buddhism and Buddhist belief, in order to, as Tweed states of such definitions, "measure all historical expression against it."[204] Loy relates that though Buddhism is essentially pacifist, Japan had special circumstances, because

> Historically, Japan has been very good at adapting to foreign influences, and Buddhism is famously adaptable. This adaptability has been a double-edged sword, not only enabling Buddhism to permeate other cultures by reshaping their religious institutions to its own ends, but also allowing Buddhism to be co-opted…[205]

Into this framework of co-option and appropriation, then, based on the idea that Śākyamuni Buddha did not "[curry] favor"[206] with secular authority and that violent Buddhism can only be a perversion, the standpoint of numerous Japanese Buddhists is related. First Loy questions a passage from D.T. Suzuki concerning selfless killing, and then attempts to understand why Suzuki might have "[fallen] into this trap"[207] of associating Buddhism and violence:

> Suzuki's teacher Shaku Soen, a progressive, university-educated *roshi* who portrayed Buddhism as a "world religion" at the Chicago World Parliament of Religions, actively supported the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) and justified it in terms embarrassing to read today:
>
> "War is not necessarily horrible, provided that it is fought for a just and honorable cause, that it is fought for the upholding of humanity and civilization. Many material human bodies may be destroyed, many humane hearts be broken, but from a broader point of view these sacrifices are so many phoenixes consumed in the sacred fire of spirituality, which will arise from the smoldering ashes reanimated, ennobled, and glorified."
>
> Thus have all wars been justified by their apologists. When Tolstoy wrote to Soen asking him to cooperate in appealing for peace, Soen refused and visited the war front to encourage the troops…[208]

Loy relates a passage from Soen linking violence with Buddhist enlightenment, then moves on:

> Harada Sogaku (1870-1961), the abbot of Hosshin-ji, made the identification between Zen and war complete and explicit: "Forgetting [the

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[204] Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?", 24.
[205] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 146.
[206] Ibid., 147.
[207] Ibid., 151.
[208] Ibid.

> difference between] self and others in every situation, you should always become completely one with your work. [When ordered to] march – tramp, tramp; [when ordered to] fire – bang, bang; this is the clearest expression of the highest Bodhi-wisdom, the unity of Zen and war."
>
> What is most discomforting about these words is not that Soen and Harada support war but that they invoke Buddhism to justify and promote it….In Harada's case, the nonduality of self and other is used in a way that flatly contradicts the basic spirit of Shakyamuni's teachings.[209]

Loy's assumption that such statements are "embarrassing" and "discomforting" make it clear that he in his role as a Zen Buddhist monk is forced to identify with these thinkers, and is therefore threatened by such interpretations of Buddhist ethics.[210] He must distance himself – and the possibility that 'we' would believe these perversions – in order to salvage his construction of nonviolent Buddhist ethics from inconvenient Japanese history. Loy's claim to "the basic spirit of Shakyamuni's teachings" serves to dismiss these Buddhists out of hand. He uses numerous Western academic sources, as well as stories from the Buddha's life, to substantiate his view that Buddhism is fundamentally pacifist; this is admirable in light of his lack of sources elsewhere, but I would argue that it points again towards the absolute necessity of proving to the reader that *true* Buddhist ethics is only perverted by these Japanese thinkers. Japanese Buddhists like these cannot, and do not, define Buddhism – but American academics can and do.

5.1.2. Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*

While Loy gives no sympathetic frame to interpretations of violence by Japanese Buddhists, at least in these sections such views are voiced by Buddhists themselves: in other cases where 'their' Buddhism is illustrated, it is always through the voice of 'our' guide, as in this passage from King's introduction:

> Here we open up what is controversial about Engaged Buddhism among more traditional and conservative Buddhists in Asia, many of whom argue [that the Buddha teaches that we should practice nonattachment from worldly things]. Perhaps all of their lives they have thought of the bhikku (monks) as "fields of merit," the means by which laypeople earn merit, or good karma. This view is based upon the idea that giving is a meritorious act and therefore earns the giver good karma. The purer the recipient of

[209] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 152.
[210] Perhaps especially by "progressive" and "educated" Soen, who seems so much like one of 'us'.

> the gift, it is believed, the more merit one's gift earns. Since the bhikkhus practice a considerably more exacting self-discipline than laypeople, the bhikkhu is widely believed to be the purest, or best, object of giving for the purpose of earning merit. Many laypeople, especially in Southeast Asia, want their bhikkhus to stay in the temples, where they will be "pure" and thus more fit as recipients of their *dana* (giving). They can be rather dismayed when they see their bhikkhus out helping to dig a road with Sarvodaya Shramadana or carrying a briefcase off to a meeting with a government official.[211]

King distances herself from these ideas of purity by assuring the reader that this is just a belief ("it is believed", in opposition to cases in which Buddhist beliefs actually *are*, not merely believed to be[212]). She inserts quotation marks around "pure" in the same style – that is, to transmit to the reader the sense that this is an inexplicable, foreign, and even superstitious view. It is not necessary for King to give any "conservative" Buddhists a voice in stating their concerns, and nor is it important for the laypeople to speak: the only reason that King shares this point about purity is so that 'we' realize that such a view is outdated and ridiculous. After all, what rational person would be "rather dismayed" by seeing a *bhikkhu* digging a road with such a good monk as Sarvodaya because of quote-unquote "purity"? After this characterization, King moves on to other matters, having dealt with the "controversy" and Asian views – without the need for Asian voices at all.

5.2. Karma and Rebirth

As in the last example from King, effort is rarely made in these volumes to be sympathetic to 'their' forms of Buddhism or their adherents or to give serious voice to 'traditional' beliefs. This is especially apparent when it comes to the issues of karma and rebirth. Loy is centrally concerned with the idea that 'we' must be willing to throw out beliefs that are inconsistent with postmodernity, and accordingly does not promote only *one* way to interpret karma, but does assert that traditional interpretations *cannot* be enough for mature postmodern people.[213]

> …contemporary Buddhism remains a paradoxical mixture of the

[211] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 8. No citations are provided in attributing these views to 'conservative' Buddhists.
[212] Such as, for instance, in cases where it is "true" that all Buddhism is engaged, or that engaged Buddhism is based on essential Buddhism. Ibid., 1, 12.
[213] Loy, *The Great Awakening,* 6-8.

> premodern (e.g., rituals) and the postmodern (an understanding of constructedness), whose liberative potentials are often obscured…. Should Buddhists accept as literal truth everything the Pali Canon says about karma and rebirth, simply because it is in the Pali Canon? One does not need to accept the literal truth of everything in the Bible to be a Christian….Whether or not the law of karma is a moral law of the universe…the Buddhist emphasis on no-self and intentional action points to a more subtle aspect of karma: that we construct ourselves by what we choose to do….According to this approach, people are "punished" or "rewarded" not for what they have done but for what they have become, and what we intentionally do is what makes us what we are….That does not mean this is the only way to interpret karma and samsara; my reflections are merely one example of the possibilities that must be addressed for the contemporary relevance of Buddhism to become more apparent. The challenge, of course, is discriminating between the baby and the bathwater, and that will not be easy. If a contemporary Buddhism is to mature, however, this task cannot be evaded.[214]

'Traditional' notions of karma and rebirth are regarded here as part of an immature, premodern, relatively useless legacy of Buddhist religion; today, 'we' must be willing to sacrifice these old beliefs for something more mature and postmodern (one suggestion comes from Loy, our guide); in fact, these issues "must be addressed" in order for Buddhism to *become relevant*. The "liberative potentials" of Buddhism obscured by ritual and so-called "literal" interpretations can be revealed through postmodern knowledge and reinterpretation via "the spirit of [Buddha's] teachings"[215]. We – mature people aware of Buddha's "essential realization" of "constructedness"[216] – should decide *for the modern world* how to lessen suffering, and in this have little need for what Loy deems outdated notions of karma or premodern ritual practices.

5.2.1. Reforming Asian Passivity

King voices concerns about karma and rebirth through her Asian sources in her section 'Trouble with Karma', in order to convey how 'traditional' beliefs in karma induce passivity. After noting how karma may cause "blaming the

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[214] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 7.
[215] Ibid., 152.
[216] Ibid., 5.

victim" in that people are believed to have "earned" their status at birth,[217] she states that:

> A second way in which karma is a problem for the Engaged Buddhists is with the *traditional interpretations that karma implies passivity*. Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the democracy struggle in Burma/Myanmar, states that one of the greatest difficulties her movement faces is that the Burmese people typically think that karma means fate – that is, their suffering at the hands of a brutal military dictatorship is the result of their past actions, so there is nothing they can do but bear it until that karma has been exhausted, at which point their suffering will end of itself….Aung San Suu Kyi and many other Buddhists *remain on solid scriptural ground* when they argue that the understanding of karma as passivity *is contrary to the teachings of the Buddha*. The Buddha emphasizes many times that any teaching that makes people believe that there is no point in making an effort to engage in spiritual practice is contrary to his teachings and indeed a pernicious teaching that no one should accept.[218] He taught, in fact, in order to encourage people to make an effort. He discouraged people from wondering about their karmic inheritance, saying that it was so unknowable that it would make their heads split if they worried about it excessively! Karma takes us only to the present moment; at this moment, *we* must make an effort, creating new causes and conditions that will shape our experience in the future.
>
> It is an uphill struggle in many Asian and *even Western contexts* to convince Buddhists that karma does not mean passivity, even though the Buddha clearly rejected this understanding and strongly emphasizes the importance of making an effort. Aung San Suu Kyi struggles to convey to traditionally minded Burmese that karma means action and is therefore the opposite of passivity, but she seems to make little progress in convincing such people to change their understanding of an idea *so deeply entrenched in the culture*.[219] (emphases added in both paragraphs)

King uses Aung San Suu Kyi as an authentic, legitimate Asian voice[220] to state how Burmese (standing in here for all "traditional interpretations" of Asian belief in karma) are victims of incorrect understandings about karma and its definition as "action".[221] 'They' are 'passive', and only because they do not really understand the true teachings of the Buddha. Engaged Buddhists, and thereafter 'we', are on

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[217] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 159-160.
[218] This equates spiritual practice with 'non-passivity' (in this case, political activism), and thereby asserts that *spiritual practice itself* is not really engaged in by 'typical' fate-resigned Burmese.
[219] Ibid., 161-162.
[220] Notably, this may add another dimension to Iwamura's typically male Oriental Monk, in that Aung San Suu Kyi is a female Sage.
[221] See Ibid., 13.

"solid scriptural ground", while "such people" as the Burmese hold passive views best understood as pernicious cultural habits. King distances these views from us, and states that *even in the West*, ostensibly the source of activist thinking, such problematic passivity still exists; therefore, if we are to be truly Buddhist, we must guard against this problem and express spirituality by resisting oppressive political regimes. She continues:

> These two troublesome issues concerning karma – its interpretation as blaming the victim and as implying passivity – are both difficult and important, not only for Engaged Buddhism but also for contemporary Buddhism in general, and require extensive discussion by both scholars and practitioners. Many Buddhists feel that even if a society accepts the idea that birth into unfortunate circumstances is a consequence of actions in past lives, the proper response by Buddhists should not be to blame or reject those born into poverty, disability, and the like. It is wrong to dwell upon what came before, not letting the person who is before us now move on but seeing him through the eyes of the past. In the present, the proper response should be compassion, support, and/or helpfulness, as appropriate. As for the passivity that many Buddhists have taken from the teaching of karma, it is simply a misunderstanding of the Buddha's teachings. The problem is that this misunderstanding is widespread and deeply entrenched in many Buddhists' minds. The only remedy for this problem is education.[222]

Who are these "many Buddhists" to whom King refers in her call for a new hegemonic interpretation of karma? In the first case, is this meant to illustrate only the view of King herself? In the second case, the views of Burmese Buddhists? Is this designator "many" meaningful at all, other than to convey to the reader what Buddhists really *should* believe? Does karma really require "extensive discussion" for most contemporary Buddhists in order to reform its meaning? The total absence of citations makes these claims difficult to verify. What is not difficult to verify, however, is King's need to distance notions of blame and passivity – due to their *non-Buddhistness* (simply an unfortunate facet of Asian culture) – from her readers' understandings of Śākyamuni's true Buddhism. In sudden poetic prose directed towards 'us' ("We should not dwell…"), King even assumes the role of a Sage, teaching that the correct way is compassion, "as appropriate."

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[222] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 164.

While King's comments *may* be useful insofar as they may help readers to understand the position of engaged Buddhists, King's sympathetic tone causes her to authoritatively, in her role as a scholar, validate the notion of traditional passivity (if indeed this is the engaged Buddhist view) without any criticism, and without openness to the diversity of Buddhist belief and practice. Traditional Buddhism is not something to be understood, but rather to be repaired – and 'we' must repair 'them' from without through education, since they are too passive to do it themselves. In comparison to the sympathy shown to engaged Buddhists like Thích Nhất Hạnh, it is remarkable how little room is given to the voices of 'traditional' Asian Buddhists.

Loy, in speaking of how 'we' can help reform Asian religion, states that:

> Buddhist religious structures in Asia have usually been, and for the most part remain, hierarchical, patriarchal, and complicit with state power. Although Buddhist teachings have sometimes been used to challenge state power, more often than not Buddhist institutions have been implicated in justifying and therefore helping to preserve oppressive social relationships. This sacred canopy can be quite a comfortable place for those with privileged positions in religious hierarchies allied with political hierarchies. This suggests that Buddhism needs the contribution of Western modernity – such as democracy, feminism, and the separation of church and state – to challenge its institutional complacency and to liberate its own teachings from such traditional social constraints.[223]

Here, we see that passivity equates to Asians accepting Asian culture; being active means that one attempts to bring Western values, which are infused with *Buddhistness,* into stagnant, oppressive Asian institutions. 'We' – Anglo pupils and modern Buddhists – must struggle against institutional interpretations, rife in Asia, which promote domination and oppression via misunderstood Buddhism. Even King's association of passivity with the colonial legacy[224] carries with it the implication that this 'passivity' is something that must be removed from Asian culture – that it is a sort of historical stain that must be cleansed in order for Asian religion to truly progress. In the end, this opens up a space where 'we', the West,

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[223] Loy, *The Great Awakening,* 8. Education is key: "…the primary concern of a culture of awakening would be education" (Ibid., 33).
[224] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 9-10.

can help to reverse 'our' colonial legacy by returning true, correctly understood Buddhist beliefs to the East.

5.3. Good Buddhism

This true Buddhism, the essential Buddhism of King and Loy, is regarded as a decidedly positive historical force. It is shown as having refuted the erroneous notion of Buddhism as 'other-worldly', as having liberated people from oppression, and as having sought peace in difficult times. It is not passive, but actively fights the evils of the world. Perhaps it has offended a few ridiculous conservative sensibilities about 'purity', but this is merely a facet of being "innovative"[225] – King and Loy emphasize that 'our' Buddhism does not, *in any way*, conflict with *Buddhistness*. Engaged Buddhism as defined by 'our' ideals is, in short, the tradition of those fighting for a *truly* better world on the basis of *true* Buddhism.

'Our' Buddhism, then, engages with serious, 'concrete' issues, and exists wherever Buddhist countries have 'advanced' to a Western level of freedom. This naturalizes engaged Buddhism as the inevitable evolution of Buddhist practice in the modern world, and associates it with a positive and essentially Buddhist 'core' of "traditional Buddhist philosophy, ethics, and spirituality".[226] King describes engaged Buddhism as fundamentally 'relevant' and "innovative", and throughout her book engaged Buddhists and their Buddhisms are consistently associated with positive words – they are "liberal and progressive", "by definition nonviolent", "love in action", "nonjudgmental", "spiritual", "mature", "heroic", "sustainable [and] spiritually balanced", they "act for the welfare of others", and are "useful" and "creative".[227]

Engaged Buddhism may very well be a positive historical force (depending on one's perspective), but the real issue here is made clear when one

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[225] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 6. "…engaged Buddhism can sometimes be controversial simply because it challenges tradition by working in innovative ways…"
[226] Ibid., 11.
[227] Ibid., 6 ("innovative"), 7 ("liberal and progressive"), 31 ("mature"), 49 ("love in action", "welfare of others"), 53 ("useful") 84 ("spiritually balanced"), 172 ("heroic"); see also 3, 6, 32, 35, 85, 105, 108, 151, 163.

seeks words that are associated with 'their' Buddhisms. In these cases, the positive connotations of engaged Buddhism find their negative counterpart; 'non-engaged' Buddhisms, as they are variously presented by King, are understood as "conservative and reactionary", "misunderstanding[s]", "nationalist", "passive", "aggressive and sometimes violent", "chauvinist", "fatalistic", and in extreme cases even the "antithesis to the teachings of the Buddha" and "based upon opposition and ill will toward the Other".[228] Sometimes these characterizations seem to come from engaged Buddhists, and sometimes from King. She does not explicitly declare that non-engaged Buddhisms are perverted, but her negative associations make it eminently clear which Buddhism, and which values, the Anglo pupil is supposed to identify with and support.

5.3.1. Asian Authenticity

The Oriental Monk is employed throughout these accounts as part of a racial methodology meant to show readers that 'our' Buddhism is Asian and therefore authentic: our Buddhism appears derived from the Buddha, and is embraced by idealized Eastern Buddhists like Thích Nhất Hạnh. Our Buddhism is, through this methodology, related as much more than merely a Western fantasy. The Oriental Monk belongs to 'us' as our iconic Asian saint, and functions as a 'good' ethnic; he embodies the distinction we must make between good Buddhists and the problematic beliefs and practices of the Asian masses. Thích Nhất Hạnh is made into the perfect example in this regard: he is an Asian who has broken free of Asian cultural patriarchy, superstition, and passivity, and who is mature enough to face the postmodern world in all of its brutal truth. Yet Thích Nhất Hạnh is doctored in order to make certain points about Buddhism; he is not given much of a context in these accounts, despite being quoted regularly. As long as the Oriental Monk highlights the Anglo pupil's ideals – activism, nonviolence, feminism, ecology – then he is given the authority of speaking for Buddhist belief and philosophy.

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[228] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 7 ("conservative and reactionary"), 25 ("violent", "chauvinistic", "nationalistic", "antithesis"), 162 (traditional karma as "fatalistic" and "passive"), 164 (traditional beliefs as "misunderstanding"); see also 3, 8, 59, 170.

This 'good' stereotype is meant to show that these authors are not racist or our Buddhism too Western: but then the Oriental Monk is a good, innovative Asian only when he adheres to the basic values established for the Anglo pupil.[229] 'Traditional' belief, when it is used to make a point about *Buddhistness*, resides in the texts and in Asian Oriental Monks, and is either seen as a direct, literal transmission of the Buddha or as a natural evolution that yet holds to a core 'Buddhist' message (of peace, compassion, etc) expressed elsewhere or implied in a general way by the "spirit of Shakyamuni's teachings".[230]

5.4. Evaluating Problematic Buddhism

This reverence of something defined as 'tradition' is only part of the story, as shown by the general adjectives King uses throughout her book. While 'traditional' beliefs above are revered as authentic when they can be used to substantiate King's and Loy's ideals, both authors reveal that 'traditional' cultures are disappointing in comparison. Our 'traditional' Buddhism is constructed from ancient texts, but 'traditional Buddhists' remain at a distance: these are the Asian masses that fall short of our guides' ideals. Though Buddhism has been distorted into mere "sacred canop[ies]" by Asian culture, the Anglo pupil is, luckily, still able to discern its essential messages.[231] The 'canopy', Loy writes, has psychologically fulfilled the role of a parent, but traditions must grow up and deal with the postmodern world. Only one conclusion is possible, and there is no other way: Asia *must* mature, and the West *must* help.[232]

The Asian masses are thus revealed in order to contrast Asian Buddhism with our 'positive' beliefs. Non-engaged Buddhisms are variously described as mistaken, conservative, violent, and/or superstitious. The values mirrored between

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[229] Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 118, comments on when the 'positive' Monk: "At the heart of this debate is a commentary about the insidiousness of the "good" stereotype and its power to disingenuously represent a racial politics that is not only sympathetic but also progressive."
[230] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 152.
[231] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 5: "Even more radical then than now, the original Buddhist teachings, not surprisingly, eventually became elaborated into another sacred canopy, focused on a transcendental liberation from this world. What is more surprising is that early Buddhism should have had such deconstructive insights and that they have been preserved in recognizable form for two and a half millennia."
[232] Ibid., 26.

the Anglo pupil and the Asian masses – rationality vs superstition, progress vs stagnation, etc – fit much older stereotypes of the Oriental 'Other'. 'We', explicitly defined as the West, gaze upon the East from afar and from a position of advanced knowledge: we can learn from Asia, but only from an Asia that most Asians (aside from the occasional Oriental Monk) do not inhabit. This ultimately allows Asian religious voices to be silenced *en masse* in pursuit of the Anglo pupil's ideal vision of Buddhism. The living traditions of Asia are of little interest to these authors, other than to create a sense of struggle, oppression, or error from which 'our' Buddhism shall emerge victorious.

'We' are *Buddha's guardians*: powerful, educated Westerners able to correctly interpret the ancient teachings with the aid of the Oriental Monk. 'They' are non-Western, backward, passive, poorly educated and powerless. They need 'our' help and our reforms, and because we ultimately refer not merely to Western ideals but also to 'good' Asians like the Oriental Monk Thích Nhất Hạnh, the *Buddhist* legitimacy of this position seems unassailable. The Anglo pupil is thereby constructed as a patronizing protector of Buddhism and of Buddhist values, who is invested with the authority to evaluate and criticize different forms of Buddhism in relation to how authentically they represent our 'orthodox' Buddhism (right belief).

5.4.1. Asian Misunderstanding

Asian institutions, bearing the label of tradition, seem to hold no resemblance to the authentically *traditional* Buddhism re-presented to 'us' by King and Loy. As a result, these institutions can only be understood as perversions: caught between the purity of ancient Buddhism and the purity of engaged Buddhism, they are lamented as meaningless in the modern era. Traditional Buddhisms, namely Buddhisms that are associated with the majority of the population in Asian countries (Burma, Japan), are consistently regarded as lower forms of Buddhism than engaged Buddhism: they are forms that do not quite live up to Śākyamuni's ideals. They are not *non-Buddhist*, insofar as the basic 'core' values of Buddhism are not directly contravened, but the presence of

mistaken beliefs (karma) and outdated practices and institutions (misogyny,[233] passivity, funeral rites) have caused these forms of Buddhism to stray from a completely correct understanding of the Buddha's message.

5.4.2. Asian Heresy

While 'traditional' Buddhism is regarded as not ideal, King and Loy also attack Buddhisms that they regard as fundamentally non-Buddhist (heretical) in their relation to the 'core'. Here 'we' discover those forms of Buddhism that are regarded as standing entirely outside of the sphere of Buddhism, with only a false veneer of the tradition to be found. These include, most notably, violent forms of Buddhism such as those in imperial Japan (in Loy)[234] or in Sri Lanka and Thailand (in King):

> These [to be free of violence in thought, word, and deed and to live, act, and speak gently, kindly, and benevolently] are the ideals. In practice, some Buddhist individuals and groups – including some contemporary activist individuals and groups – violate them with hateful, aggressive, and sometimes violent words and behaviour. For example, some Sri Lankans are chauvinistic and nationalistic about Buddhism and want to define non-Buddhist Sri Lankans as second-class citizens at best….Ultimately the implication of the doctrines of no-self and interdependence is that *there is no other*….In the present [Tamil and Sinhalese] inhale and exhale the same air, taking it into their bloodstreams… The reification of the Other into a static category sealed off from one's own is contrary to the teachings of the Buddha….Moreover, the Buddha taught – and later Buddhists extensively developed – the teaching that truth is to be found in experience, not in ideas, much less in ideologies. To cling to ideas of the Other that we have in fact constructed ourselves is also contrary to the teachings of the Buddha. Taking such ideologies as reality and using them to justify contempt of and aggression toward the Other is, again, the antithesis of the teachings of the Buddha….it is easy to take expressions of contempt and acts of violence as criteria for discerning what is *not* a valid expression of the Dharma. It should be very clear that groups and

[233] I have not had space in this thesis to deal adequately with how feminism is related in King, but see *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 166-167; "…it is greatly significant for women that the Buddha specifically stated that women have the same spiritual potential as men….[Rules less supportive of women] were probably instigated to protect the Buddhist order at a time when society demanded greater controls over women." Again, the Buddha is pure, and Asian society problematic.
[234] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 146-152.

> individuals who violate the norm of nonviolent words and deeds cannot be considered to be Engaged Buddhists.[235]

In this quotation, King appears at the very end to have limited her discussion purely to distinguishing between engaged Buddhism and forms of Buddhism that should not be considered as engaged. And yet, she defines Buddhism *itself* as *essentially* nonviolent, thereby requiring the reader to regard such traditions outside of the scope of authentic Buddhism, indeed as the "antithesis" of the Buddha's teachings – which she, as a scholar of Buddhism, can access and distribute to 'us' as well as 'them'. *We are now qualified, like the scholar King, to determine what is true Buddhism*. Her dogmatism concerning of the "*ideals* of Buddhism"[236] allows no discussion when it comes to violent forms of Buddhist belief or practice: they must be kept at distance, judged as alien corruptions of the Buddha's teachings, and considered heresies. Loy mirrors this opposition of orthodox Buddhism and heretical Buddhism in his discussion of the historical violence of Japanese Buddhism.

Because of the fact that the Sri Lankan and imperial Zen examples are *close* to our guides' favoured styles of Buddhism (engaged and modern Zen); insofar as they use what *they* claim to be 'Buddhist principles' and apply them to modern crises; insofar as they are Asian and therefore imbued with racial authenticity in the same way as the Oriental Monk – they must be that much more strictly condemned. These are not *true* engaged Buddhisms, and indeed are not even 'traditional' Buddhisms – they only falsely describe themselves as such. As scholar-practitioners, these authors have a responsibility to define correct beliefs; and in order to do this, they must reject outright historical manifestations of Buddhism that cause them discomfort, instead of seeking to understand seriously why and how Buddhism can be interpreted in different fashions. 'Our' Buddhism – peaceful, text-based, "love in action",[237] scientific and postmodern – is not only legitimate, but it is the *most authentic* form of Buddhism insofar as it is infused with the *most Buddhistness*. Violent traditions like those in Sri Lanka are

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[235] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 25-26.
[236] Ibid., 3.
[237] Ibid., 49.

fundamentally non-Buddhist and 'traditional' Asian institutions are problematic; but as Buddhists, academics, or Westerners generally we do not have to identify with any of them.

5.5. 'Our' Hegemonic Vision of True Buddhism

These arguments for 'our' orthodoxy betray, I believe, an insecurity on the part of King and Loy in regards to their favoured interpretations of Buddhism. This insecurity is best approached through the concept of hegemony: these works, even while ostensibly 'defending' or 'extrapolating' Buddhist ethics, invariably demonize, denigrate, or marginalize forms of Buddhism that stand outside of their ideal definitions in order to communicate to the reader a normative way of *being Buddhist* (of *Buddhistness*). Iwamura deals with this in her work, and cites Richard Dyer concerning hegemony in representations:

> [Hegemony is] the expression of the interests and world-views of a particular social group or class so expressed as to pass for the interest and world-view of the whole of society. Hegemony is something that a class, gender and/or race constantly has to work for – it is never permanently, statically established in a culture. It seems to me likely that the degree to which the suppression of contradictions in an art-work actually shows is a register of the hold of a particular hegemony at the moment of the film's production. Where there is a sense of strain at holding down contradiction, I would posit either the ruling groups' own lack of faith in their world-view (contradictions within dominant ideology) or the presence in other groups of a hard and disturbing challenge to the ruling groups' hegemony (contradictions to dominant ideology).[238]

King and Loy's common insistence on not merely acknowledging *but also sidelining* alternate interpretations of Buddhism speaks to what Dyer calls a "sense of strain"; while neither King nor Loy seem to lack faith in their own worldview, both do feel the need to deal with the "hard and disturbing challenge" posed by 'traditional' Buddhisms. By attempting to suppress such challenges – and by constantly generalizing their own views to appear as the "interest and world-view of the whole of society" – both authors effectively communicate their own hegemonic visions of Buddhism. These hegemonic visions are founded not

[238] Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 115; originally from Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: essays on representation* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 93-94.

on one interpretation of Buddhism *per se*, but rather on the methodologies through which both construct Buddhism from certain ideals located in the life of the Buddha, in Buddhist texts, and in Asian Ssages. It is important to note here on the one hand King's declaration that engaged Buddhism is not limited by sect, time, geography, or culture, and on the other Loy's assertion that everyone today must learn to face the postmodern world; these postulations situate a similarly unlimited hegemonic vision. These authors advance an argument for *universal* hegemony, that is, hegemony on the level of who can speak for Buddhism in the modern world. This hegemony that needs to be strengthened, legitimized, and finally imposed in order to bring its dissenting and contradictory elements – traditional and violent Buddhisms – into line.

5.5.1. Bringing 'Our' Buddhist Values to Asia

King and Loy point to education as the most vital solution to the grave problems in the world today, whether in Asia or the West. 'We' must fight to establish the ethical values that we seem to have discovered in Buddhism. One way is through education; another is political reform. Sallie B. King observes that engaged Buddhism is found in Asia "…wherever there are Buddhists with sufficient political freedom…" and in smaller numbers in the West (due to fewer Buddhists);[239] the West is perceived as *obviously* free and democratic, although Asia is still mired in authoritarianism.[240] Loy, going a step further, relates that he believes it is necessary for 'us' to push for religious and political systems in Asia:

> The entrenched poverty we may see in many "undeveloped" peoples may not be the most important thing about their lives and culture. If traditional societies have their own standards of deprivation and well-being, imposing a foreign one on them is a form of intellectual imperialism. Insofar as that imposition undermines their traditional religious values, it may also be considered a type of religious imperialism.
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> Although we cannot allow destitution to continue – something everyone can agree on – we should accept that the world is enriched (as well as sometimes damaged) by a plurality of approaches to human ill-being and

[239] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism,* 1, 7.
[240] See ibid., 3, where the West helps bring equality to India and Buddhist Asia. This is not to say that King does not criticize the West on other issues – but it is only Asia that remains open to criticisms on grounds of political freedom, women's rights, or democracy.

> well-being… How are we to determine the difference between tolerable and intolerable understandings? Reflecting on this brings us to the necessity for genuine democracy and, just as important, freedom of religious practice. These, rather than military or economic impositions, provide the best ways to make those decisions.[241]

Despite Loy's distaste for forms of imperialism, he is certain of the need to bring democracy and religious freedom to what he deems destitute or unfree cultures. This characterization gives no room for "undeveloped peoples" who may actually oppose religious pluralism, or who are uninterested in pursuing democratic political structures. Instead, genuine democracy, in whatever form 'we' like, is regarded as 'necessary' for human progress in our globalized world. Though King does not advocate this quasi-imperialist view, she does run parallel with Loy on the earlier point that education is required in order to bring about an implementation of Buddha's teachings; for her part, she seems to hope that a re-education will ultimately lead to more liberal approaches to feminism, ecology, poverty, and violent conflicts.[242] In these ways, both authors relate their desire to 'fix' non-Western views seen as backward and also as 'non-Buddhist'.

The urgency of such a project is made clear in both accounts. 'Traditional' Buddhism and its cultures are seen by both authors as in a state of increasing irrelevancy in light of the radical differences of modernity. 'They' have little to offer, aside from setting the stage upon which we shall play out our more progressive future. This discussion of decline is an important part not only of the argument for hegemony but also of the rhetoric of imperialism, and provides the imperialist with the justification to engage *now*, 'while we still can', before further horrors occur. Such an imposition even appears benevolent in the face of the onslaught of the terrible, destabilizing forces of modernity that 'we' have unleashed upon the world. Communities themselves, their differences, their beliefs, are more or less irrelevant (except as relics of a now-disappearing age, perhaps to be preserved in history books): we, the powerful, must save what we

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[241] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 68.

[242] See King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*; her example of Thailand, where engaged Buddhist education helped villagers economically (103) and, combined with ritual, protected the forest (130) and could help lift village girls from their oppressed conditions (169); in Sri Lanka, where it helped "spiritual development" (109-111) and countered defeatism (147).

can of the passive, unenlightened ethnics before modernity destroys their current state and leaves them helpless. *Everything* must be adapted in the face of modernity, and, luckily, ‘we’, embodied in Oriental Monks and the educated, affluent West, can act as guides for this complex modern world, thereby saving Buddhism and Asia from their otherwise inevitable path of religious and political backwardness.

6. Conclusion

This thesis is not merely about Sallie B. King, David Loy, or the works that I have examined here. The Oriental Monk critique, borrowed from Jane Naomi Iwamura and employed throughout this essay, demands a continuing investigation of how Orientalism and neocolonialism can find expression in uncritical methodologies of Buddhist Studies. Challenging Yarnall's categories of traditionist and modernist narratives, in addition to raising issues concerning the scholar-practitioner, also confronts the very viability of the project of evaluating the *Buddhistness* of various types of Buddhism.

6.1. Concerning Traditional Buddhism

Amidst the clamour in King's and Loy's works describing the inevitable decline or irrelevancy of certain forms of Buddhism, it seems clear that 'they' – 'traditional' Buddhists in Asian countries or non-engaged Buddhists, *per se* – make up the vast majority of Buddhists in the world; such traditions do not seem to be self-destructing calamitously or fading into the distance,[243] as one might suspect from reading these accounts. Traditional communities are, in contrast to what is considered 'engaged', quite large; in fact, *even in Western countries*, 'ethnic/immigrant' Buddhist communities are numerically *much* larger than 'Western/convert' Buddhisms, and are certainly larger than the explicitly 'engaged' Buddhisms in the West referenced by King.[244] This is perhaps countered by the influential and professional positions noted as common within 'convert' communities, and questions about these different communities are

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[243] This is a broad claim, but a cursory look at the CIA's World Factbook and the continuing adherence in many Asian countries to Buddhist institutions at least questions King and Loy. Some countries, such as Vietnam, are, to temper my claim, noted as some 81% 'non-religious'. "Vietnam," CIA World Factbook*,* last modified October 4, 2012, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html.

[244] For statistics, see Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe," 96; see also Peter Beyer, "Buddhism in Canada: A Statistical Overview from Canadian Censuses, 1981-2001," in Harding, Hori, and Soucy, *Wild Geese*, 111-133. For one example of the 'decline' of Asian American religious communities, see Jane Naomi Iwamura, "Critical Faith: Japanese Americans and the Birth of a New Civil Religion," in *Immigration and Religion in America: Comparative and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Richard Alba, Albert J. Raboteau, and Josh DeWind (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 138.

central in studying modern Buddhism in Western cultures.[245] When King speaks of "many Buddhists"[246] in her work, and Loy of "a Buddhist perspective"[247], it is unclear if either means to speak of 'Eastern', 'Western', 'ethnic', or 'convert' Buddhists in the world – or if both merely mean to lend the weight of 'many' and *Buddhistness* to their own views and generalizations of the Oriental Other.

With this lack of specificity, one wonders what 'traditional' Buddhists may think of these accounts, or, to phrase it differently: *what do these narratives communicate about academic views to 'traditional' communities concerning their beliefs*? In these scholastically decorated authors' arguments for an ideal Buddhism not confined by any geographical or cultural space in particular, they posit their interpretations as the universal standard for Buddhist belief in the modern world. King's and Loy's visions therefore do not only relate to Asia, but also to Asians in their own cultures. Despite the fact that 'traditional' communities appear to, in reality, compose the majority of Buddhists in both Asian and Western countries, they are obliterated as potential voices for the Buddhist tradition on a global stage. 'They' are Buddhists caught in cultural muck, who seem incapable of apprehending the value of their inherited tradition; 'we' should not take them too seriously.

6.2. The Scholar-Practitioner Revisited

This marginalization is not without precedent in the history of scholarship on Buddhism in the West.[248] Some scholars have noted that there appears to be an ongoing debate in the West about who speaks for modern Buddhism,[249] and it is

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[245] For complications and further information on these issues, see James W. Coleman, "The Emergence of a New Buddhism: Continuity and Change," *North American Buddhists in Social Context*, ed. Paul David Numrich, (Boston: Brill, 2008), 186, 197; Matthews, "Buddhism in Canada," 121-125, 130-133; Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe," 96-101; Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?", 17-22.

[246] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 124

[247] Loy, *The Great Awakening*, 9, 28, 43, 77, 125.

[248] See Richard H. Seager, "American Buddhism in the Making", in Prebish and Baumann, *Westward Dharma*, 106-109, concerning "old-line Buddhism". See also Kenneth Tanaka, "Issues of Ethnicity in the Buddhist Churches of America," in Williams and Queen, *American Buddhism*, 3-6, who notes the presence of "racial hostility" in the threat of Asian Buddhism, and that Asians have been consistently seen as non-spiritual.

[249] Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe", 97. Tanaka, "Issues of Ethnicity", 6.

in this vein that King's and Loy's scholar-practitioner arguments for hegemony should be situated. It is reasonable to examine how their accounts use *scholastic* authority to not only exclude but to *denigrate* the explicitly Asian Other in this debate about modern Buddhism. Are scholars always writing implicitly for Buddhist communities when writing about modern Buddhism?

Going deeper into how King and Loy pose their arguments, I must ask why the idea of engaged Buddhism being 'simply' a "Westernized Buddhism" is such a threat to King as a scholar;[250] and why Loy, as a professional educator, feels the need to dismiss 'immature' forms of religion, as if this increased the legitimacy of his own social extrapolations. José Cabezón states:

> In theological discourse the authorial subject speaks or writes from within a specific religious world view; that is, theological authors explicitly situate themselves within a specific tradition. In its standard form, Buddhist theology presupposes—or, alternatively, argues for—the validity of the doctrinal claims of Buddhism, the value and significance of its art and/or the efficacy of its practices; it also utilizes these as the essential raw materials of the discourse itself.[251]

Both Loy and King write from within an explicitly sympathetic Buddhist perspective, use the "raw materials" of philosophies and stories without complicating sources, and ultimately posit 'our' Buddhism as something ethically valid. Therefore, in light of the questions surrounding the scholar-practitioner, Loy and King are best framed not through traditionist or modernist categories, but rather via their methods that seek to establish Buddhist theological orthodoxy; that is, using their scholastic authority, both attempt to define the *most authentic* form of Buddhism in the world today, for *particular* communities ('us').

King's and Loy's constructions are inevitably communicated with force via their identities, accreditations, and cultural authority as scholars in the Western academy. Because of the lack of distinction between their scholastic and religious roles, they seem to call for *academic* as well as religious orthodoxy. Therefore, I locate this critique as an examination of some of the issues that can

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[250] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, 11-12.

[251] Cabezón, "Buddhist Studies", 258-259. Cabezón explores one critique that such theology should not be included in Buddhist Studies – but how to separate the two for the sake of a supposed 'objectivity' in a field characterized by scholar-practitioners and blurred lines between popular and scholastic discourse?

arise when the *dual roles* of the scholar-practitioner are taken on unconsciously in the generation of essentialist-normative definitions of Buddhist belief and practice. This does not implicate all scholar-practitioners in such a critique; many of the accounts I have cited throughout this thesis are written by scholar-practitioners, and indeed many of the most cogent works available on the Order of Interbeing come from those within the Order itself. *It is only necessary that these essentialist-normative definitions be framed correctly.* There must be an awareness that King and Loy strive not to present a diverse Buddhism, but to appropriate the cultural authority of the academy in order to *interpret* Buddhism for 'us'. Recognizing the authority and potential obligations of scholar-practitioners can open space for learning how to recognize and understand works perhaps best approached as theological such as *Socially Engaged Buddhism* and *The Great Awakening*.

6.2.1. Writing about Modern Buddhism

King and Loy seem in many ways to mirror self-representations of the Order of Interbeing – all focus strongly on Pali text analysis and the life of the Buddha, have similar Western audiences, tend to be ethically-focused with a bent for liberal democratic values, tell common historical narratives, may share critiques of 'traditional' Buddhism,[252] and converge rhetorically in the way they define 'what is Buddhist'. Do lines exist between popular, religious/theological and academic writing when it comes to the field of Buddhist Studies? The study of Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Order of Interbeing has shown me that works that seem best understood as popular can be filled with useful, detailed information not found in academic works; and academic works, which carry an air of inherent validity, may need to be problematized. It is not, by any stretch, harmful to be sympathetic to Buddhism in one's depictions of it – but I should ask myself, and

[252] Thích Nhất Hạnh's commentary on various Pure Land sutras might be taken as critiques of devotional Pure Land practices as less advanced styles of Buddhist practice. Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Finding Our True Home: Living in the Pure Land Here and Now* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2003), 23: "The notion that the Pure Land is an exterior reality, a place to be found far away in the western direction, is just for beginners. If we deepen our practice, the Buddha and the Buddha's land become a reality in our mind."

my readers, *which* Buddhisms I am so interested in being sympathetic towards, and who is excluded from my sympathies.

Lopez notes in *Prisoners of Shangri-La* that the study of Tibetan Buddhism has a complicated history as an academic field and often draws new students due to its mystical connotations; religious *authority* in this field can be embodied in positions of academic privilege.[253] Perhaps his discussions can serve as a starting-point for a critical method that recognizes the power of scholastic works for certain practitioners. At the very least, in order to deal with such convergences, the scholar-practitioner must be taken seriously. The field today demands lucid methodologies in order that sympathetic accounts of modern Buddhist traditions will not risk the denigration of Asian religions. I am in agreement with Tweed that it is not necessarily the job of scholars to determine which forms of a religion are authentic;[254] and yet, I must recognize that this can be a central concern for scholars who are also religious leaders. Perhaps methodologies need to be generated for both scholars and practitioners in their dual roles – or these two roles, in being clarified, may prove to be more than merely dualistic and may raise far more complicated questions than merely classifying one as 'detached' scholarship and the other as 'engaged' hermeneutics. It is, after all, likely that anyone willing enough to involve themselves in the field of Buddhist Studies for years on end holds some personal interest in the religion; objectivity, whatever it might mean, should not necessarily be the ultimate goal in this regard. The many publishers, authors, and readers sympathetic to Buddhism seem to blur the boundary between scholars and practitioners, to the point that it may not even be helpful to assume such dualistic conceptions can be used at all.

6.3. Defining Modern Buddhisms

In light of my critiques of not only King and Loy, but also of Yarnall's categories of traditionist and modernist accounts, some notes must be given here

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[253] See Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La,* 107-111, 174-180.
[254] Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?", 27.

as to my own thoughts on how to approach the definition/origins of modern and/or engaged Buddhisms. I believe it is useful to ask if one can *prove*, even provisionally, *Westernness*, *Easternness*, or *Buddhistness* in various forms of Buddhism without resorting to problematic generalizations, racial stereotypes, historical obscuration, or unclear methods based on text analysis. Should it be the goal of scholars to make such simplistic classifications? Today's Buddhism, whether 'ethnic' or 'convert', whether Asian or Western, is *not* merely a case of one culture infiltrating another, or of cultures mixing, but rather of a whole host of self-representations, shared literatures and technologies, common and distinct histories, power relationships, attempts to 'purify', 'protect' and to 'update' Buddhism for a world perceived as new, and undoubtedly much more. If we, as scholars of modern Buddhism, are to continue to take the terms Western and Eastern for granted as in the case of King's and Loy's works, then I do not feel it is necessary to attempt to distance one from the other, since this only reifies stereotypes vague in substance yet oft-repeated in Orientalist discourse.

I agree with Tweed that essentialist-normative definitions are, in many ways, inherently problematic; yet, James Deitrick's discussion of how core-periphery arguments are allowed by defining a 'core' Buddhism[255] means that such projects can prove useful. Similarly, Linda Learman's reflections on the way that employing 'East' and 'West' and 'ancient' and 'modern' as categories can lead to illuminating studies of cross-cultural interaction should not be dismissed.[256] Despite the usefulness of such approaches, I still believe they should not be the primary way in which scholars think about definitions of modern Buddhism: as much of the history of Asian Studies and indeed as even this thesis shows, narratives which require orthodox definitions of religious belief risk obscuring and denigrating religious forms that are excluded. It is absolutely critical that scholars take on board the Orientalist history of Buddhist Studies in order to more accurately understand forces that may be at work in essentialist-normative projects.

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[255] Deitrick, "Mistaking the Boat for the Shore", 260-263.
[256] Linda Learman, "Introduction." *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Linda Learman (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 1-2.

How, then, can scholars approach the sympathetic or critical investigation and dissemination of information about modern Buddhist movements, if both traditionist and modernist accounts seem more bound up in questions about an ill-defined 'true' Buddhism than about Buddhists? In my view, it is highly problematic to attempt to 'prove' *in the scholastic arena* whether or not a Buddhism constitutes a *truly* 'authentic Buddhism' on the basis of the Buddha's life, ancient texts, or 'views and values'; authenticity is something that those who identify with Buddhism may evaluate in different ways. I am more interested in the fact that authenticity is important to engaged Buddhists themselves, and perhaps especially important to scholar-practitioners in the style of King or Loy. Similarly, I am interested – personally and academically, if the two can be discussed separately in any sense – in exploring how different leaders and communities lay claim to Buddhism, how they justify their beliefs, how they create meaning for adherents, and how they tell their own historical narratives. This is largely blocked by essentialist-normative definitions, which seek to limit the field of study to forms of Buddhism defined in some sense as essential.

I feel that Tweed's suggestion of self-definition is useful in studying modern Buddhism, although it is both too relativistic for practitioners, in that it recognizes no boundaries on adherence, and too limiting for scholars, in that it does not make much room for the examination of Buddhism outside of those who explicitly declare themselves to be Buddhist.[257] In terms of Buddhism in Western cultures, should definitions of 'who is Buddhist' include people who grow up in but do not identify with Buddhist traditions? What about the effect of popular media and consumerist commodities on how Buddhism is disseminated to 'nightstand' Buddhists? Investigations of modern Buddhism need to be able to deal with these points of entry without the need to establish one dominant mode of defining Buddhist belief *a priori*.

[257] There are, perhaps, other problems, such as the lack of space for normative 'core-periphery' analyses; yet such analyses may still be undertaken in a provisional sense – that is, by explicitly using particular methodologies (text analysis or the study of practices, for instance), what is 'core' and what is 'periphery' to a given Buddhism can still be analyzed without essentialization.

Perhaps, rather than even *attempting* to define a hegemonic sense of who is Buddhist or what is Buddhism – which seems, in many ways, a project founded on the idea of defining orthodoxy – scholars can begin to consider with more openness ways in which communities, individuals, and even depictions in popular culture *communicate themselves as Buddhist to different audiences.* How do different communities and people speak for Buddhism? From what symbols, texts, rituals, cultural groups, ethics, lineages, histories, materials and more does Buddhism seem to *emerge*, and *for whom*? Why, for some, does Buddhism centrally mean meditation practice, mindfulness, and lay monasticism, while for others this practice defines not Buddhism but simply 'New Age' reforms? Why, on the other hand, does merit-making seem an essential part of practice to some, while to others this is merely a strange cultural ritual? How is *Zen* an adjective? For whom is Buddhism what it is, and why? Modern Buddhisms are diverse and scholars often lack data; to admit that there is insufficient research, a lack of methodology, and difficulties in understanding 'who is a Buddhist' need not be regarded purely as weaknesses. These problems are, in fact, potential strengths, and reflect the way in which Buddhism must be studied today.

While this offers but a beginning to approaching the definitions of modern Buddhism, it is, I believe, part of a way of thinking that can help scholars move away from essentialist-normative definitions. Instead of essentializing Buddhism through text-based, historical, doctrinal, or racial approaches, a method that seeks more actively to understand how various types of *Buddhistness* are communicated to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike may open a space for a much wider and more inclusive way of studying the religion today. It is not for scholars, in their culturally authoritative roles as educators, to forcefully declare *what is* and *what is not* Buddhist – that declaration is for Buddhists to make in their roles as religious leaders. Is violence really absolutely separate from *Buddhistness*? How do King and Loy limit their own studies by defining Buddhism exclusively in this way? Buddhists do not, I would venture, need the seal of approval of academia in order to continue being Buddhists; and as scholars we have an opportunity simply

to remain interested, to analyze ourselves along with our objects of study, and, perhaps, as Tweed suggests, to seek to understand.

6.4. Further Discussion: Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Order of Interbeing

Finally, it seems necessary – given my focus on the distortion of the figure of Thích Nhất Hạnh – to give a few recommendations for how he and his community could be studied in the future. The remarkable preponderance of sympathetic narratives on this tradition needs to be balanced with a more critical look at how it has reformed from its Lâm Tế roots, what political implications these reforms might have, and why its community continues to be so controversial in Vietnam today; *Le Bouddhisme mondialisé* provides one basis for this more critical investigation. An effort should be made to discuss Thích Nhất Hạnh beyond the wisdom that he, as an Eastern Buddhist, seems to hold for 'us' as Westerners – and indeed, more critiques may need to be made of the ways in which he is stereotypically depicted in other works, from Cooper & James's *Buddhism, Virtue, and the Environment* to Peter Harvey's *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. It may be worthwhile to compare his depiction to how monks less popular in the West are represented in scholarship. The project of critiquing ostensibly Western perspectives is undoubtedly important for the construction of Western 'convert' Buddhisms, but this project seems to have been taken up and replicated generally in many studies that are clearly academic in tone. Thích Nhất Hạnh should not be treated uncritically as a 'second Buddha', even if his views are very interesting and seem sensible; for if he is, scholars will risk unfairly disseminating his beliefs as those of *essential Buddhism* itself.

Specifically, studies of Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Order of Interbeing should not, as they tend to in a considerable number of accounts, begin only in the 1960s with the Vietnam War and the peace movement. As I have pointed out in this thesis and as a variety of sources I have cited make clear, Thích Nhất Hạnh is not an isolated figure of Vietnamese War activism, and may be better approached through the history of how Buddhists in Vietnam sought to modernize the various lineages of Buddhism throughout the twentieth century. While Thích Nhất Hạnh's

Vietnamese War context is absolutely indispensable to understanding the emergence of the Order of Interbeing, it is also important to recognize that there are more contexts yet to be elucidated. In this, Shawn Frederick McHale's *Print and Power* and histories of Vietnamese Buddhism such as *The History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, edited by Nguyễn Tài Thư, will prove very useful.

A willingness to dig more deeply into Vietnamese history and the history of Buddhism in Vietnam will aid greatly in creating space for the tradition in academia. As Thích Nhất Hạnh, born in 1926, ages and is no longer able to lead the Order of Interbeing, scholars will be forced to move beyond questions that concern solely his person and will have to deal more directly with questions about his community – I believe that this shift is a reasonable one to make, and should be made even now, while Thích Nhất Hạnh still leads. Much demographic data about the Order of Interbeing and information on its practices, monasteries, and finances, in addition to its many disparate *saṅgha*s and their societal influence, is lacking in detail. Looking more deeply at the community will fundamentally help to counter the problem of Thích Nhất Hạnh as an Asian sage in scholarship.

Concerning Iwamura's 'virtual' analysis, I would like to add a number of additional questions at this point. Considering the ways in which the tradition and Thích Nhất Hạnh himself have adopted social media (Facebook, livestreams of talks, etc), how is the Asian sage representation possibly also a self-representation? What power might this image have outside of the realm of Western appropriation? In terms of the Order's Eastern and Western Buddhists, how does this image communicate what might be understood as spiritual notions of purity (sexual, financial, mystical) to a Western audience, and how does it hold power for Eastern audiences as well? Are West and East distinctions the most important ones at play? Learman touches on the interesting question of how exile can "force" a community "to make a success" in a new context:[258] along these lines, how does the virtual image in scholarship or in the tradition's own writings attract new members to the Order? How different are scholastic and non-scholastic accounts, considering the role of Parallax Press and books like *Dharma*

[258] In this, she refers to Tibetan missionaries: Learman, "Introduction," 10.

Gaia which make direct use of Thích Nhất Hạnh's writings in elucidating Buddhist ethics?[259]

In looking at such questions of how modern Buddhisms like the Order of Interbeing communicate their *Buddhistness*, it is inevitable that the roles of the scholar and of the sage will be central. These questions require methodologies that will consider exactly *how* to study modern Buddhism, both in general and in the case of Thích Nhất Hạnh and the Order of Interbeing specifically. The main purpose of this thesis is not to denounce or demean Sallie B. King and David Loy as such, but rather to call attention to the fact that their volumes would be *much* more useful if they could be placed within a framework that explicitly considers their authority as scholars *and* as sympathetic practitioners, and the difficulties attendant with these dual roles. Academic definitions of Buddhism, emerging as they do from the complex cultural role and history of Buddhist Studies, are also part of the milieu of modern Buddhism that scholars should be interested in investigating today.

[259] As well as the use of Thích Nhất Hạnh as a voice of Buddhist authority in praising certain accounts: see Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism*, back cover.

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