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'Bonded by reverence toward the Buddha': Asian decolonization, Japanese Americans, and the making of the Buddhist world, 1947–1965*

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Abstract

This article examines Asian and Japanese American participation in a post-Second World War global movement for Buddhist revival. It looks at the role that Buddhism and the World Fellowship of Buddhists organization played in shaping transnational networks and the development of a global Buddhist perspective. It contextualizes the growth of a 'Buddhist world' within the history of decolonization and Japanese American struggles to reconstruct individual and community identities thoroughly disrupted by the war. The article considers Asian Buddhist approaches toward recognition as national and world citizens rather than colonial subjects and their influence on Japanese American Buddhists' strategies for combating racial and religious discrimination in the United States. Finally, the article examines how Japanese Americans joined Asian efforts to formulate a distinctly Buddhist response to the Cold War. Buddhists hoped that Buddhism might serve as a 'third power' that would provide a critical check on a world increasingly polarized by Cold War politics and threatened by the prospects of nuclear war.

Keywords Cold War, decolonization, internment, Japanese Americans, world Buddhism

In 1950, 129 delegates from twenty-nine countries gathered in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to participate in an inaugural conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), an Asia-based organization that sought to build a global Buddhist movement in the midst of massive decolonization throughout Asia.[1] The conference drew participants from each of the

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1 World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), *Report of the inaugural conference*, Ceylon: World Fellowship of Buddhists, June 1950, pp. 1–2.

three major Buddhist traditions, underscoring its commitment to building unity across the Buddhist world. Theravada Buddhists comprised a majority of the participants: eighty from Ceylon, twenty-two from Burma (Myanmar), and eight from Thailand. Smaller numbers of Mahayana Buddhists from Vietnam and Japan attended; and Nepal, Tibet, and Mongolia, representing Tibetan Buddhism, also sent delegates. In addition to delegates from nations with Buddhist majorities, attendees were also invited from nations and regions with Buddhist communities and organizations throughout the world: twenty-one representatives journeyed from Malaysia, eighteen from India, and small numbers from Pakistan and Dar-es-Salam, Tanganyika (Tanzania). European Buddhists sent a handful of delegates, while two Nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans), Sunao Miyabara and Teumika Maneki, attended and represented the American delegation.[2]

The conference provided Asian political leaders and lay Buddhist organizations with a platform for highlighting the shared historic and doctrinal origins that had united Buddhists in the past and to promote Buddhist revival in the present.[3] U Nu, Prime Minister of Burma, celebrated the shared origins that led to the establishment of Buddhism in Ceylon and Burma.[4] India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, expressed his 'homage to the memory of the greatest of the sons of India' and urged delegates to 'think of the basic truths that the Buddha taught, not the many dogmatic and other accretions that grow round every truth, but rather that truth itself in all its simplicity and nobility'.[5] Lay Buddhist representatives in Thailand declared their historic regard for Ceylon and India as the 'cradle of Buddhism' and recalled that Thailand had played an important role in helping to restore the ordination of monks in those nations during the mid eighteenth century.[6]

Japanese American delegates to the conference demonstrated a shared interest in bringing a world Buddhist movement to fruition. Sunao Miyabara first learned about the conference from G. P. Malalasekera, a Ceylonese Buddhist lay leader who would become the WFB's first president. The two had met a year earlier at the 1949 East–West Philosopher's Conference held in Honolulu. As Miyabara later recalled, the East–West conference provided him and Malalasekera with 'the opportunity to discuss the future of Buddhism'. He described 'burning the midnight oil together with Dr. Malalasekera in a ramshackle wooden building called the Hale Aloha at the University of Hawaii'.[7] Miyabara concluded, 'From these beginnings emerged the idea of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. It was simply that if in the past there had been divisions among the Buddhists, the time had now come, for the sake of humanity's future, for us to bridge differences and cement relations with fellowship and mutual understanding.'[8] The vision of a world Buddhist movement, first realized in the

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 22–8.

3 For a discussion of longstanding trans-regional Theravada connections see Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Ethnicity, indigeneity, and migration in the advent of British rule in Sri Lanka', *American Historical Review*, 115, 2, 2010, p. 434.

4 WFB, *Inaugural conference*, pp. 32–3.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

7 Sunao Miyabara, *A history of the World Fellowship of Buddhists*, Bangkok: WFB Headquarters, 2000, pp. 3–4.

8 *Ibid.*

inaugural WFB conference, was transformative for Miyabara, who would go on to dedicate his life to building such a movement.

Dialogue with Asian Buddhists and participation in international organizations such as the WFB by Buddhist lay persons like Sunao Miyabara suggests that the practices and identities of Japanese American Buddhists after the Second World War were not as circumscribed and confined within the US nation-state as the historiography has suggested. Instead, Buddhism provided a conduit for the circulation of transnational networks and the development of a global Buddhist perspective at a critical moment when Asians were emerging from colonization and Japanese Americans were reconstructing individual and community identities thoroughly disrupted by the war. The centrality of Buddhist revival to Asian Buddhist struggles for recognition as national and world citizens rather than colonial subjects inspired Japanese American Buddhists and informed some of their strategies for combating racial and religious discrimination in the United States. At the same time, Japanese Americans joined Asian efforts to formulate a distinctly Buddhist response to the Cold War. Buddhists hoped that Buddhism might serve as a 'third power' that would provide a critical check on a world increasingly polarized by Cold War politics and threatened by the prospects of nuclear war. They argued that materialism was a core factor driving the escalation of war and emphasized the important role that Buddhist values could play in guiding technological innovation and economic development in ways that could reduce suffering and create a more balanced and peaceful world.

Recent scholarship on Issei (first-generation Japanese immigrants) has stressed the transnational dimensions of immigrant identity.[9] Eiichiro Azuma has argued that framing the history of Japanese immigrants through an 'inter-National' perspective was important in understanding both possibilities and limits created by living across and between the power of the Japanese and US nation-states.[10] In their edited anthology *Issei Buddhism in the Americas*, Duncan Ryûken Williams and Tomoe Moriya have highlighted the role that migration played in shaping complex transnational identities that underscored competing projects of supporting the local needs of Japanese immigrant communities overseas while also advancing the priorities of Japanese Buddhist institutions by promoting '*Bukkyō tōzen*' or the 'eastward transmission of Buddhism'.[11]

In contrast to studies of the emigrating Issei generation, much of the historiography of Japanese American communities during and after the Second World War has tended to foreground a narrative of second-generation Nisei acculturation to the US nation-state. There are a number of explanations for the predominance of the US acculturation framework. The containment of Japanese American history after the war within a US national narrative remains a legacy of the forced incarceration of Japanese Americans in concentration camps during the war as well as of the Cold War politics of US multiculturalism. Japanese immigrants and their descendants and later historians all highlighted the American national dimensions of

9 See for example, Michihiro Ama, *Immigrants to the pure land: the modernization, acculturation, and globalization of Shin Buddhism, 1898–1941*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011.

10 Eiichiro Azuma, *Between two empires: race, history, and transnationalism in Japanese America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 5.

11 Duncan Ryûken Williams and Tomoe Moriya, eds., *Issei Buddhism in the Americas*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010, p. ix.

Japanese American identity in response to the unjust and racist policies of the US government prior to and during the Second World War.[12] The pursuit of justice through the chronicling of offenses and campaigns for redress by Asian American activists and scholars in the 1970s, and the federal government's acknowledgement of these injustices in the 1980s, supported the promotion of the US as a multicultural nation, one of the justifications for American global expansion during and after the Cold War.[13] As was true in Japanese American history as a whole, studies of Japanese American Buddhists and Buddhist communities by scholars addressed the role that religion played in Japanese American negotiations and resistance to discrimination and in shaping community and identity formation within a US national framework. These studies considered the central role that Buddhist temple worship, festivals, rituals, and Buddhist-sponsored organizations, played in the lives of Japanese American immigrant communities.[14]

A wartime and post-war acculturation narrative does not fully convey the complexity of perspectives and identification for groups such as Japanese American Buddhists who, while oriented towards local and US national contexts, also increasingly defined themselves as participants in what they described as a broader 'Buddhist world'. Arif Dirlik's application of the concept of the historical ecumene is useful for thinking about the transnational religious networks in which Japanese Americans participated, and the particular contours and dynamics that shaped an emerging global Buddhist perspective shared by Japanese American and Asian Buddhists. Dirlik observed that national histories have long privileged those aspects of transnational developments that support national narratives while excluding those that do not. To address this problem, he posited the concept of 'historical ecumene' as a useful alternative model for interpreting the dynamics of transnational networks and perspectives, particularly among religious communities. Critical to the concept of historical ecumene is the 'foregrounding of commonalities as well as differences and recognizing a multiplicity of spatialities within a *common space marked not by firm boundaries but by the intensity and concentration of interactions*, which themselves are subject to fluctuations'.[15]

During the period after the Second World War, South and Southeast Asia emerged as a focal point for a Buddhist revival movement that sought to build networks and a transnational Buddhist perspective across Asia and with Buddhist laypersons and organizations across the globe. The next two sections of this article will examine the broader context of decolonization and national movements for independence that shaped Asian Buddhist efforts to develop transnational networks and a global Buddhist perspective.

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12 See, for example, Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei: the quiet Americans*, New York: W. Morrow, 1969; Paul Spickard, *Japanese Americans: the formation and transformations of an ethnic group*, New York: Twayne, 1996; Jere Takahashi, *Nisei/Sansei: shifting Japanese American identities and politics*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997; Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American celebration and conflict: a history of ethnic identity and festival, 1934–1990*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.

13 See Roger Daniels, Sandra C. Taylor, and Harry H. L. Kitano, eds., *Japanese Americans: from relocation to redress*, Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1986; Yasukio I. Takezawa, *Breaking the silence: redress and Japanese American ethnicity*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995.

14 Tetsuden Kashima, *Buddhism in America: the social organization of an ethnic religious institution*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975; David Yoo, *Growing up Nisei: race, generation and culture among Japanese Americans of California, 1924–1949*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000, pp. 38–42.

15 Arif Dirlik, 'Performing the world: reality and representation in the making of world histor(ies)', *Journal of World History*, 16, 4, 2005, p. 407, emphasis added.

For Japanese Americans, participation in the Buddhist world also offered hope and possibility for the future of Buddhism and Buddhist Japanese Americans during a period when confidence in identities and ties with Japan and the United States were at a nadir. The final two sections will examine Japanese American participation in the Buddhist world, and the influence of participation in shaping Japanese American transnational Buddhist perspectives and identity.

Transnational Buddhist networks in the age of decolonization

In the aftermath of the Second World War, lay Buddhists in South and Southeast Asia sought to develop transnational Buddhist networks in support of Buddhist revival. Their efforts were greatly influenced by decolonization and the rise of postcolonial nationalism. Ceylon and Burma were the first two nations with a majority of Buddhists to gain independence from European colonial powers after the war, Ceylon in 1947 and Burma in 1948. India also became independent in 1947; though a majority of the population was not Buddhist, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru the country played an important early supporting role in the intensification of Buddhist revival in South Asia.[16] Meanwhile, in Thailand, which had maintained its independence from colonial powers, the state recognized Buddhism as an important symbol of national unity and international prestige and thus provided substantial economic support for both national and international Buddhist organizations.[17]

The infrastructure for building transnational networks was established in 1950 by delegates to the inaugural conference of the WFB, who drafted and approved a constitution for the organization. This constitution expressed delegates' interest in promoting Buddhist values and practice to people and governments across the globe in the name of world peace. The preamble declared delegates' intention to 'observe and practice the teachings of the Buddha that we may be radiant examples of the living faith'. The WFB would also seek to 'make known the sublime doctrine of the Buddha … inspiring peoples of the earth and their governments to lead the Buddhist way of life which is for all ages and times, so that there be peace and harmony amongst men and happiness for all human beings'.[18]

The WFB constitution included specific provisions designed to support the development of transnational Buddhist networks. Underscoring the important role that South and Southeast Asia were to play, the constitution established a WFB Headquarters to be housed in Colombo, Ceylon.[19] The headquarters would move to Burma in 1958, and later to

16 George D. Bond, *The Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka: religious tradition, reinterpretation and response*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988, p. 76; Juliane Schober, *Modern Buddhist conjunctures in Myanmar: cultural narratives, colonial legacies, and civil society*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011, p. 79; C. Robert Pryor, 'Bodh Gaya in the 1950s: Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahant Giri, and Angarika Munidra', in David Geary, Matthew R. Sayers, and Abhishek Singh Amar, eds., *Cross-disciplinary perspectives on a contested Buddhist site: Bodh Gaya Jataka*, New York: Routledge, 2012, pp. 111–14.

17 Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha and state: Thai Buddhism in history*, trans. Peter Hawkes, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986, p. 122.

18 WFB, *The constitution of the World Fellowship of Buddhists*, Rangoon: The Fellowship Burma Centre, n.d., p. 1.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

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Thailand in 1963, which would become its permanent home.[20] Next, the constitution authorized the creation of 'regional centres' in countries 'with appreciable numbers of Buddhists' or with existing Buddhist organizations.[21] The location of the forty-two initial regional centres underscored the centrality of Asia as a region, but also demonstrated that transnational networks among Buddhists extended beyond Asia. A majority of the centres (twenty-three) were located in Asia; one was created in Hawai'i; four were established in the Americas, including one in North America; nine were set up in Europe, including one in the USSR; there was also one in Africa and one in Australia.[22]

Each regional centre was charged with nominating a representative to serve on the WFB General Council.[23] This was significant because the General Council was vested with the 'power of general control and administration of all the affairs of the World Fellowship of Buddhists'.[24] Regional centres were also permitted to send five delegates to the WFB conferences and could petition to send more. Significantly, the constitution specified that 'non-Buddhists' could not serve as delegates to WFB conferences, though they could attend if sent by a regional centre as an 'observer'. This effectively restricted voting privileges to those who identified themselves as Buddhist. In addition to voting rights, regional centres could also forward resolutions for consideration to the conference committee chairman, though ultimate power to move them to the floor rested with the chairman.[25]

Asian Buddhist leaders faced major challenges in their efforts to develop transnational networks. First, they had to bridge doctrinal and historical divisions between the three major Buddhist traditions: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana or Tibetan. They also faced intra-regional and ethnic divisions created or exacerbated by European colonialism, and which had been further inflamed during the Second World War by Japanese Buddhist participation in campaigns to develop a pan-Asian coalition under Japan's 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere'.[26] These campaigns both encouraged resistance to European colonialism and reactivated longstanding animosity toward Japanese imperialism.[27]

To reinforce unity and understanding across the major divisions of Buddhism, WFB delegates forwarded and approved four motions at the inaugural conference. The first two motions, which were also included in the constitution, were proposed by Sunao Miyabara, representing the United States and the regional centre in Hawai'i. The WFB adopted two symbols to reinforce unity across the major Buddhist traditions: the '*Dharma-Chakra*' or eight-spoke Wheel of Dharma, representing the Buddha's eightfold path, as an 'International Buddhist symbol', and the 'six-coloured Buddhist flag now being used in Ceylon' as the

20 Miyabara, *History*, p. 14.

21 WFB, *Constitution*, p. 2.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 15.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

26 Ama, *Immigrants*, p. 182–5.

27 Donald Seekins, *Burma and Japan since 1940*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007, p. 3; Xue Yu, *Buddhism, war, and nationalism: Chinese monks in the struggle against Japanese aggressions, 1931–1945*, New York, Routledge, 2005, esp. ch. 5.

'International Buddhist flag'. Conference participants also resolved to create *Vesak* or Buddha Day as a public holiday in all countries where Buddhists resided. A third resolution involved changing 'Hinayana' to 'Theravada'. Hinayana, or 'lesser vehicle', was a term juxtaposed to Mahayana or 'greater vehicle'; in contrast, Theravada was translated as 'doctrine of the elders'.[28]

The WFB also sought to promote unity across the major divisions through the circulation of conferences among host nations representing the various traditions of Buddhism. While a majority of the conferences were hosted by Theravada Buddhist nations, the second conference, in 1952, was hosted by Mahayana Buddhists in Tokyo, while the fourth conference, in 1956, was hosted by Nepalese Buddhists in Kathmandu, representing Tibetan Buddhism.[29] In a further gesture that linked Nepal and India with the WFB, a resolution was passed at the third Buddhist conference to restore the sacred sites of Lumbini, Nepal, and Kusinārā, India, the sites of the birth and death of Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha.[30]

WFB leadership relied on the participation and aid of its regional centres in further developing transnational networks among Buddhists throughout Asia and the broader Buddhist world. Beginning in 1951, regional centres, coordinated with WFB headquarters in planning and sponsoring visits by WFB presidents to meet with Buddhist organizations, laypersons, and clergy across the world. In April 1951, G. P. Malalasekera, encouraged by the WFB Executive Council, began a two-month tour across Southeast Asia that included stops in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Burma, before returning to Ceylon. Malalasekera recalled that organizations in regional centres 'were asked to draw up programmes in accordance with local requirements. They did so with great zeal and enthusiasm, so much so that most often my day began at seven in the morning and ended nigh upon midnight! If the programme was strenuous for me, it was equally exacting for the organizers themselves.'[31]

The trip allowed Malalasekera to reunite with WFB delegates and further cultivate ties with them through joint efforts to promote Buddhism among the broader populace. He gave lectures, moderated discussions, attended dinners, participated in pilgrimages to sacred Buddhist sites, and met individually with laypersons, monks, dignitaries, and politicians.[32] In Singapore, he was assisted by the WFB representative Pitt Chin Hui, the principal of the Maha Bodhi (Girls') School, whom Malalasekera described as 'the pivot round which most of the Buddhist activities of the city revolve'.[33] In Malaysia, a dinner in Malalasekera's honour was organized and hosted by the WFB Penang Regional Centre.[34] In Phnom Penh, his schedule and needs were organized by JyotiñānŁa, a senior monk who had represented Cambodia at the inaugural conference.[35] In Burma, he met with U Chan Htoon,

28 WFB, *Inaugural conference*, p. 83. On Miyabara's proposal, see Miyabara, *History*, p. 4.

29 Miyabara, *History*, pp. 5, 9.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

31 G. P. Malalasekera, *The Buddhist flag of South Asia*, Colombo: Buddhist Publishers, 1951, p. 1.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Burma's representative to the inaugural conference and a primary architect of the 1947 Burmese Constitution.[36]

Malalasekera's presidential tour was designed to promote the message of unity across Buddhist traditions and nations to Buddhists in regional centres throughout the world. His reports were initially published in the WFB's *News Letter* and were later collected for the WFB publication *The Buddhist flag of South Asia*, which was distributed to delegates and observers in attendance at the 1952 WFB conference in Tokyo.[37] Readers in regional centres throughout the world learned that Buddhist laypersons, politicians, and dignitaries responded to Malalasekera's tour with much enthusiasm. In Cambodia, he presented a WFB Buddhist flag to King Norodom Sihanouk, who received the flag and issued an official decree to fly it over his palace on *Vesak* Day.[38] As Malalasekera visited cities such as Malacca, Bangkok, and Hanoi, he reported viewing prominent displays of the WFB Buddhist flag.[39]

Vietnam was the only country with Mahayana Buddhists that Malalasekera visited on his 1951 tour, and he viewed his time there and the exchange of viewpoints as critical toward developing ties across Buddhist traditions and nations. Despite the fighting taking place between French and Vietnamese nationalist forces, Malalasekera managed to visit Saigon, Hanoi, and Hue. His participation in Mahayana Buddhist services in Vietnam provided him with a forum for criticizing European colonization and Christian proselytization, and for promoting unity. He praised the Mahayana Buddhist emphasis on the *Bodhisattva* ideal of service, noting that, in contrast to Vietnam, 'in the [Theravada] Buddhist lands of south-east Asia, the Buddhists did not show sufficient interest in humanitarian activities – the care of the infirm and the destitute, the rehabilitation of the criminal and the disabled person'.[40]

Malalasekera's visit to Southeast Asia established a precedent for transnational cultural exchanges that would extend beyond Asia to the broader Buddhist world. Following the pattern of his 1951 tour, in 1953 he travelled for several months in the United States and Europe, where he met with Buddhist societies and Japanese American members of the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA),[41] attended conferences, gave lectures, and participated in seminars.[42]

Later on, cultural exchanges would not be limited to WFB presidents, but would also include priests and lay members from WFB regional centres across the globe. Asian Buddhist lay leaders and other participants in the WFB worked to encourage the organization and growth of transnational networks among Buddhists, which they viewed as necessary for developing a global Buddhist perspective. They believed that the timing of the emergence of these networks was auspicious and that a global Buddhist perspective was critical for

36 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

37 See the 'Publishers note' in *ibid.*

38 Malalasekera, *Buddhist flag*, p. 29.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 16, 38.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

41 Japanese American Buddhists adopted Christian terminology as a strategy bridging inter-ethnic generational divides and for combating racial and religious discrimination in Hawai'i and the United States. By the 1920s, many temples were called 'churches' and priests were addressed as 'reverends'. See Kashima, *Buddhism*, pp. 41, 59–61.

42 WFB, *Report of the third conference*, Rangoon: WFB, 1954, p. 79.

reversing the past effects of colonialism, shaping postcolonial nation-building, and guiding a world increasingly threatened by the Cold War toward a more peaceful path.

Toward a global Buddhist perspective

During the 1950s and 1960s, Asian Buddhist lay leaders and other participants in the WFB believed that the development of a global Buddhist perspective was both timely and critical in addressing the legacy of colonialism in Asia and the emerging Cold War. Their efforts to craft and develop a global Buddhist perspective would inspire fellow Buddhists throughout Asia and the broader Buddhist world to view and promote Buddhist values as a means to counter the effects of colonialism and the Cold War.

Theravada Buddhists, who had initiated plans for the WFB, viewed the timing of decolonization, national independence movements, and the rise of transnational Buddhist networks as auspicious because it coincided with the Buddha *Jayanti*, the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's entry into *Parinibbāna* (final *Nirvana*) in 2493 BE (1956). In the Theravada tradition, the anniversary was believed to mark a period of 'great renewal and resurgence' of Buddhist *dhamma* (teachings). It was in preparation for the *Jayanti* that the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, a leading group of Sri Lankan laypersons, organized the WFB inaugural conference.[43] Meanwhile, Burmese Buddhists under the leadership of U Nu planned and organized the *Chaṭṭha Sangayana* (Sixth Buddhist Council)[44] to be held in Burma from 1954 to 1956 in conjunction with the *Jayanti*.[45]

While Theravada and Mahayana Buddhists held a longstanding disagreement on the exact date, in a show of unity, Mahayana Buddhist participants in the WFB acknowledged the year as auspicious according to the Theravada Buddhist calendar.[46] At the inaugural conference, delegates across the three major Buddhist traditions resolved that their organization's primary purpose was to bring

> closer together the Buddhists of the world, of exchanging news and views about the conditions of Buddhism in different countries and of discussing ways and means whereby Buddhists could make their due contribution towards the attainment of peace and happiness, so that, when the 2,500th year after the Passing Away of the Buddha was reached in 1956 A.C., the whole world would have adopted the Buddhist Way of Life.[47]

In a show of solidarity across the major traditions, Buddhists from the Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhist traditions were invited and attended the *Jayanti* and the *Chaṭṭha Sangayana*.[48]

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43 Bond, *Buddhist revival*, pp. 75–6.

44 The *Chaṭṭha Sangayana* is recognized as the Sixth Buddhist Council in the Burmese tradition. Other Buddhists recognize different numbers of councils. For example, Thailand recognized nine councils prior to 1789. See Ishii, *Sangha*, p. 12.

45 Schober, *Modern Buddhist conjunctures*, p. 60.

46 Buddhist Study Center Archives, Honolulu, Hawai'i (henceforth BSC), Makoto Nagai, 'Congratulatory address', *Young East*, 6, 19, Autumn 1956, pp. 12–13.

47 WFB, *Inaugural conference*, p. 1.

48 BSC, 'Editorial: Otani's visit to Ceylon', *Young East*, 6, 19, 1956, p. 1; Nagai, 'Congratulatory address', pp. 12–13.

Inspired by what they viewed as the auspicious concurrence of the *Jayanti* and Buddhist revival with decolonization, Asian Buddhist lay leaders actively sought to develop a global Buddhist perspective that highlighted the resonances of Buddhist doctrine with anti-colonialism, anti-racism, and tolerance. In *Buddhism and the race question*, published in 1958 as part of a UNESCO series, Malalasekera and K. N. Jayatilleke aimed to highlight Buddhism's critique of racial essentialism and discrimination. The authors noted that Buddhist teaching complemented the findings of modern biologists who had challenged earlier theories of racial difference. They located the modern roots of 'racial myths' in the theories of Western 'natural historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth century', whose racial classifications 'had a close connection with the economic and imperial policy of European colonial powers, which often made them an excuse for exploiting overseas territory'.[49] Malalasekera and Jayatilleke argued that there was a 'close analogy' between race and caste. From this starting point, they declared that the teachings of the Buddha and the Buddhist tradition were inherently anti-racist. In support of this, they noted that Buddhist teachings revealed that castes were fluid and subject to historical conditions rather than natural,[50] that obsessions with race and caste were 'among the intoxicants (*avijjâsavā*) of the mind and have to be got rid of by a process of self-analysis and conscious elimination',[51] and that enlightened beings 'cease to think of themselves in terms of 'being superior' (*seyyo*), 'being inferior' (*niceyyo*), or 'being equal' (*sarikkho*), perspectives generated by caste and racial categories.[52]

They concluded by highlighting the role that Buddhism could play in addressing exploitation and racism and promoting tolerance, justice, and peace:

> According to Buddhism the springs of action of human individuals are greed, hatred and delusion (or erroneous beliefs) as well as their opposites. The Buddhist view is that unless the former are entirely replaced by their opposites – charity, love and wisdom – … no just society can be founded. The greed for economic and political power can be so great as to blind people to the nature, feelings and needs of individuals other than themselves or of human groups other than those they (erroneously) identify themselves with. Hatred can also find an outlet towards human beings or groups considered as alien or hostile to oneself or one's group.[53]

Nevertheless, the promotion of Buddhism alongside postcolonial nationalism was closely associated with ethnic politics that would later lead to political crisis in Burma and a civil war rooted in ethnic and religious conflict in Sri Lanka. The linking of Buddhism and the Singhalese language with Sri Lankan national identity would simultaneously marginalize Hindus, Christians, and Muslims, many of whom were part of the ethnic Tamil minority.[54] In the 1950s, however, Theravada Buddhists were swept up in what they perceived as the auspicious timing of independence with the *Jayanti* in 1957; and many lay leaders involved

49 G. P. Malalasekera and K. N. Jayatilleke, *Buddhism and the race question*, Paris: UNESCO, 1958, p. 19.

50 *Ibid.*, p 47.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 52–3.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 70–1.

54 Schober, *Modern Buddhist conjunctures*, p. 60; Bond, *Buddhist revival*, pp. 106–7.

with the WFB shared an optimism that Buddhism's history of tolerance could help to promote peaceful and diverse new nation-states.

In addition to the issues of colonialism, nation-building, and anti-racism, Buddhist lay leaders in Asia believed that a global Buddhist perspective could also serve as a counter-force to a world increasingly subjected to Cold War politics and the possibility of a nuclear war. In a message presented to the inaugural congress of the WFB in 1950, Nehru expressed hope that the efforts of the conference will 'lead more people to think [about] the teachings of the Buddha'.[55] He concluded that the Buddha's teachings

> have a value in every age. But no other period in history requires them more than this present one in which we live. We pass from crisis to crisis and think always in terms of violence and coercion, forgetting that these methods have seldom, if ever, yielded any substantial results. The vicious circle goes on and both as individuals and as national communities, we are dragged into it.[56]

Other delegates shared Nehru's concern about violence and were particularly concerned with future wars fought with atomic weapons. The Buddhist Federation of Japan proposed a seven-point programme that included arms reduction and the use of atomic energy for peaceful rather than destructive purposes.[57] Somdej Phra Vajirananavamsa, the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, contrasted the efforts of Buddhists from around the world to build unity with the 'militant powers' who were 'striving hard for world domination to gain their selfish ends through greed, hatred and ignorance'.[58] The primary focus of the second WFB conference, held in Tokyo, was the promotion of peace amid increasing tensions from the Cold War and the threat of nuclear war.[59] During the conference, delegates created and adopted a resolution 'on the Establishment of World Peace on the Basis of Buddhist Principles'.[60]

As Cold War tensions escalated, a number of Asian Buddhist delegates to the WFB imagined themselves as part of a third space, beyond the world that was in the process of being defined and demarcated by the United States, the Soviets, and their respective allies. Delegates to the inaugural congress sought to respond to the shared need to preserve regional integrity and promote peace by proposing the creation of a permanent international Buddhist organization.

> This conference is of the opinion that all the different Buddhist countries of Asia should unite together into an economic, political and cultural federation to stand out as a bastion of peace in East Asia and to lead the world on the path of peace, brotherliness and universal love as indicated by the Great Master; and it sends out an appeal to the different Buddhist countries to evolve a machinery on the model of the United Nations Organization for the aforesaid purpose.[61]

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55 WFB, *Inaugural conference*, p. 31.

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 30–1.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

59 BSC, Japan Buddhist Council, 'The second world Buddhist conference: prospectus', *Young East*, April 1952, p. 31.

60 Miyabara, *History*, p. 5.

61 WFB, *Inaugural conference*, p. 86.

The prospects of the Cold War turning hot remained a pressing issue for Asian lay Buddhists. The opening report of the WFB conference held in Burma in 1954 began, 'The world has no sooner emerged from the most cruel and devastating war ever known in its history, than it is faced with the possibility of another and yet more catastrophic conflict, which threatens mankind and all life on this planet with nothing less than total destruction.'[62] In the face of this threat, the report noted that Burma and WFB Buddhist delegates offered the world 'the sublime Teaching of the Buddha as the beacon of hope and salvation'.[63] During the Burma conference, the All Japan Buddhist Youth Organization suggested that the world's peoples were 'standing at the turning point of history'. Commenting on the 'political antagonism between the free and Communist countries', the organization declared that 'Buddhist countries in Asia in general and of Southeast Asia in particular' had a responsibility to 'constitute a Third Power of the world', based on their 'unique Buddhist qualities such as upholding of the Middle Way, the spirit and concord, and the persevering effort for creating quiet and peace in any environment'.[64]

Delegates to the WFB also stressed the role that Buddhist principles were playing in contributing to an emerging 'Third World' non-alignment movement. In a report to the 1958 WFB conference held in Bangkok, representatives of the Maha Bodhi Society commented on the role that the Buddhist doctrine of *Pancha-Shila* (moral precepts for laypersons and monks) had played at the 1955 conference held in Bandung, Java. Indonesia's President Sukarno adopted *Pancha-Shila* (or 'Pancasila') as the doctrine of state in 1945. His support for it led to the resurgence of Indonesian and especially Javanese Buddhism.[65] Delegates to the Bandung conference explained that 'The principles of *Pancha-Shila* as enunciated at the Bandung Conference are a glowing tribute to the leadership of the South and East Asian countries. The Buddhist doctrine of *Pancha-Shila* pervaded through the entire proceedings of the Conference in letter and spirit.'[66] In highlighting the presence of the principles of *Pancha-Shila* at the Bandung conference, Buddhists sought to remind 'Third World' political leaders, including Sukarno, that it was *Buddhist* principles that provided a moral and spiritual force that would help to guide them as they sought to define themselves as an alternative to the materialist-based ideologies that guided the policies of the Cold War superpowers.

In sum, the development of a global Buddhist perspective emerged in the context of decolonization in South and Southeast Asia. Asian Buddhist lay leaders viewed this development as auspicious and as an important component of postcolonial nation-building. They asserted that Buddhist revival was necessary to counter the marginalization of Buddhism and a lack of corresponding values in postcolonial societies. At the same time, they argued that a global Buddhist perspective was necessary both as a regional strategy for negotiating the politics of the Cold War and more generally to curb materialism and

62 WFB, *Third conference*, p. 2.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

65 Michael Morfit, 'Pancasila: the Indonesian state ideology according to the new government order', *Asian Survey*, XXI, 8, 1981, pp. 843–44.

66 WFB, *Report of the fifth conference*, Bangkok: WFB, 1958, p. 69.

desire in order to promote tolerance, justice, and peace. Their efforts to promote this global perspective would find a receptive audience among Japanese American Buddhists, who identified with the themes of Buddhist revival and with the need to cultivate Buddhist values in the face of racial and religious discrimination and the escalation of the Cold War.

Japanese Americans in the Buddhist world

> The conviction has grown within me, becoming stronger with every passing day, that the world is in vital need of the Message of the Buddha and mankind everywhere is ready to receive it and profit by it.[67]

In the two decades after the Second World War, Buddhism offered a conduit for Japanese Americans' engagement with Buddhists throughout Asia and the broader Buddhist world. They participated in and facilitated the development of transnational networks through their involvement in WFB conferences and cultural exchange programmes, and their contributions to US- and Asia-based Buddhist publications.

After the creation of the Hawaii and North American WFB regional centres at the inaugural conference, Japanese American Buddhists regularly sent Buddhist lay leaders, priests, and students as delegates to the WFB conferences. Fifteen Japanese Americans from the BCA, including Dr Kikuo Taira, Mrs Shinobu Matsuura, Manabu Fukuda, Arthur Takemoto, and Taitetsu Unno, attended the 1952 conference in Japan.[68] Japanese Americans were also well represented at the 1954 conference in Rangoon. As the head of the North American delegation to the Burma conference, Reverend Kenryo Kumata delivered an address on the floor of the general conference. Kumata headed a delegation that included Reverend Ejitsu Hojo and LaVerne Senyo Sasaki of the Stockton Buddhist Church, and Reverend Chonen Terakawa of the San Francisco Buddhist Church.[69]

Japanese Americans also participated in WFB-sponsored cultural exchange trips and served in the governance of the organization. LaVerne Sasaki took part in a cultural exchange trip to India, Nepal, and Ceylon from January to February 1955 and published accounts of his travels in Japanese and Japanese American Buddhist journals. At the inaugural conference, Sunao Miyabara served on the committee that drafted the WFB constitution and was elected by the General Council to serve as one of six members of the Standing Committee on Unity, Solidarity, and Diversity.[70] Over the next five decades, Miyabara would hold prominent positions on the Executive Council, including a 1961 appointment as one of the vice-presidents, a post he would hold until 2000. Throughout the 1960s, he also served on an assortment of standing committees:[71] at the 1964 conference, he was asked by the President, Princess Poon Diskul of Thailand, to take the chair of the Executive Council

67 G. P. Malalasekera, quoted in *Berkeley Bussei*, 1953.

68 Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, California, Buddhist Churches of America Collection (henceforth JANM, BCA), Western Young Buddhist League, 'Minutes of the official delegates' meeting', Western Young Buddhist League convention, San Jose, California, 23 February 1952, p. 3; BSC, 'Delegates', *Young East*, December 1952, p. 27.

69 WFB, *Third conference*, p. 24.

70 Miyabara, *History*, p. 4.

71 *Ibid*.

Steering Committee, with vice-chairs Venerable Gombojav of Mongolia and Mr S. D. Dylykovo of the Soviet Union, a position to which he would later be elected.[72]

As was true for their counterparts in regional centres in Asia and the broader Buddhist world, Japanese Americans worked with WFB headquarters to plan, publicize, and report on the itinerary and visits of WFB leaders. When Malalasekera toured the United States and Europe in 1953, he was invited to present a memorial address at the annual conference of the Western Young Buddhist League held in Exposition Park in Los Angeles.[73] After delivering the address, Malalasekera travelled to the San Francisco Bay Area to lecture at the American Academy of Asian Studies. In support of his visit, the Reverend Kanmo Imamura and his wife, Jane Imamura, of the Berkeley Buddhist Church, helped to raise scholarship funds so that members of the Berkeley Young Buddhist Association could attend Malalasekera's talks.[74]

When the WFB's third president, Princess Poon Diskul of Thailand, toured the United States accompanied by the Honorary General Secretary, Aiem Sangkhavasi, in 1965, Japanese American lay leaders planned an extensive visit that introduced the new president to Japanese American Buddhist communities and highlighted their relation to Thai Buddhists and the broader Buddhist world. Organizers prepared a lunch followed by a visit to the Buddhist *stupa* housing holy relics received from Thailand in 1935[75] and accommodated at BCA headquarters in San Francisco. BCA members also prepared a display for Diskul that included 'a huge color photo of the BCA Altar, pictures of all the BCA churches, a map pointing out locations of all Buddhist Sunday schools throughout the BCA, publications of the BCA, photos of Sangharaja of Thailand and his group on [a] 1961 visit, and others'. After viewing the display, the princess and BCA lay leaders met in the conference room for a 'leisurely discussion on problems of Buddhism and the world'. The princess's visit concluded with an evening reception that included the BCA bishop and Mrs Hanayama, together with BCA lay leaders and priests, including a number of WFB delegates.[76]

While smaller numbers of Japanese Americans made direct contact with the Buddhist world, many more were able to participate in transnational Buddhist networks as producers and consumers of an emerging global Buddhist print culture. Japanese Americans contributed to international news coverage, editorials, essays, and Buddhist commentary in their own publications. After the Second World War, these publications began to include more extensive coverage of Asian politics and the activities of Asian Buddhists. This represented a departure from earlier publications, which were primarily concerned with Japanese American immigrant community activity and, to a lesser extent, with the activities of Buddhists in Japan. In its 1950 issue, the first since the outbreak of the war, *Berkeley Bussei*, a publication of Japanese American members of the Berkeley Young Buddhist Association reported on the emerging Buddhist revival movement in Asia. The *Bussei* noted

72 WFB, *Report of the 7th Annual Conference,* Sarnath, India: WFB, 1964, p. 53.

73 BSC, G. P. Malalasekera, 'Transcript of memorial service sermon', *Tri-Ratna*, 7, 3, May–June 1953, p. 7; WFB, *Third conference*, p. 79.

74 JANM, BCA, 'Asian studies', *Berkeley Bussei*, 1953, p. 32; Malalasekera, 'Transcript'.

75 *Buddhist church of San Francisco, 1898–1978*, San Francisco, CA: Buddhist Church of San Francisco, 1979, p. 20.

76 JANM, BCA, Buddhist Churches of America, *1965 annual report*, San Francisco, CA, 1965, pp. 32–3.

that decolonization had led to an 'upsurge of interest in Buddhism' among nations in Asia and that Thailand, Ceylon, and India were reported to have 'drawn closer together since they have been free from exploitation by Western nations'. The report concluded that 'a new era of freedom has begun, resulting in a better cultural and spiritual relationship among these countries'.[77]

Japanese American Buddhist publications also sought to share with their readership the Buddhist perspective that was developing in Asia. The Fresno-based journal *Tri-Ratna* printed a copy of Malalasekera's memorial address to members of the Western Young Buddhist League. In the address, Malalasekera questioned the value of knowledge, and particularly scientific knowledge, in the absence of Buddhist values.

> We find that quite often the greatest crimes which bring misery and destruction to the world and unhappiness to men are being committed by those who have a large amount of knowledge at their disposal. The guns and the weapons of war, the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb are the results of discoveries of those who had tremendous knowledge in their heads and that knowledge is being used not in order to bring about happiness but in order to bring about destruction and war and unhappiness as the result.[78]

He concluded that knowledge needed to be infused with a Buddhist perspective that included 'right understanding, the accumulation of wisdom, the adoption of right attitude of mind' in order to bring balance and happiness.[79]

At the same time, Malalasekera sought to convince Nisei that they had a responsibility as Buddhists to engage with the broader world, a message that the publishers of *Tri-Ratna* hoped to convey to their readership. Malalasekera stated,

> We cannot be convinced of the fact of sorrow unless we are aware of what is happening in the world, in our own personalities, and in the affairs of those who live in the world. The awareness must always be there and that awareness can come only when we give up our feeling of smug self-satisfaction, when we forget, or are prepared to forget our own petty business of life and to realize that we are part of the whole universe, that whatever we do and feel and think, that is going to affect the rest of the world and that therefore there is a tremendous responsibility upon all of us.[80]

He saw engagement with the broader world as a precondition for the empathetic state of mind required of Buddhists.

The message of Japanese American obligation to the Buddhist world was shared by *Berkeley Bussei* when it published an essay by Malalasekera, which discussed his visits to Buddhists across the world and reminded Japanese American readers that the Buddha stressed interdependence rather than individualism and the importance of participating in a broader community:

> The Way of the Good Life begins, says the Buddha, when the individual appreciates the fact that he cannot live alone, for himself, by himself, but that he is a member of a

77 JANM, BCA, 'News from …', *Berkeley Bussei*, 1950, p. 15.

78 Malalasekera, 'Transcript', pp. 5–6.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

80 *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

> community. An individual is like a wave in the ocean, ocean and wave being mutually dependent on each other. This conception of the individual and community as being interdependent also means that there are obligations.[81]

Malalasekera's choice of the metaphor of oceans and waves nicely illustrated concepts of interdependence and reciprocity in the Buddhist world. His emphasis on interdependence also underscored the important role and obligation that Asian Buddhists believed that Japanese Americans Buddhists could play in the spread of Buddhism in the United States and as part of a world Buddhist movement.

Participation in conferences, cultural exchange programmes, and a global Buddhist print culture offered Japanese Americans an unprecedented opportunity to engage with a broader Buddhist world. Through their involvement, they shared and contributed to the development of an emerging global Buddhist perspective.

Japanese Americans and a global Buddhist perspective

For many Japanese Americans, a global Buddhist perspective provided an important alternative to ethno-national identity, a source of inspiration for addressing racial and religious discrimination and marginalization in the United States, and an alternative perspective from which to view the Cold War policies of the United States and Soviet Union. The message of interdependence and a global Buddhist community resonated with them. Contact with Asian Buddhists and subsequent participation in the Buddhist world emerged at a critical moment when Japanese Americans were reconstructing individual and community identities that had been thoroughly disrupted by the Second World War. The aftermath of the war weakened institutional ties between Buddhist institutions in Japan and Japanese American Buddhists. Communication channels were severed during the war and Japanese American Buddhist institutions were under intense pressure to abandon any ties to Japan or Japanese cultural markers. Before the war, there were divided and conflicting feelings throughout the 1930s over the role of Japanese Buddhism in colonial projects in Asia, yet these largely remained internal to Japanese American communities.[82] With the bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 and the US declaration of war, Japanese American Buddhist institutions declared their loyalty as residents and citizens of the United States; and during the war, lay leaders of the BCA drafted a constitution that severed ties between the BCA and the nation of Japan, and minimized ties after the war with Jodo Shinshu religious headquarters in Kyoto. To underscore this change, under a new constitution adopted in 1944, the BCA was to be run by a board of directors comprised exclusively of Nisei who were American citizens, and affiliated churches would elect the BCA's bishop rather than having one appointed by the leaders in Kyoto as had previously been the case.[83]

While ties with Japanese Buddhist institutions were cut, Japanese American Buddhists were also drawn to the Buddhist world as a result of the wartime targeting of Japanese Americans and Buddhism in the United States by the federal government and local citizens,

81 JANM, BCA, G. P. Malalasekera, 'Message', *Berkeley Bussei*, 1953, p. 2.

82 See Ama, *Immigrants*, ch. 7.

83 Kashima, *Buddhism*, p. 60.

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which culminated in the mass forced incarceration of some 110,000 Japanese Americans. Priests and lay leaders along the West Coast of the United States were among those targeted in government arrests in the days and weeks following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. American media coverage, particularly on the West Coast, characterized Buddhism and Buddhists as terrorists and part of a secret 'fifth column'. During the war, panicked Japanese Americans burned Buddhist *sūtras* (scriptures) and *butsudans* (family altars) in fear that associations with Buddhism would result in persecution. Many others hastily converted to Christianity or declined to participate in Buddhist services. Toward the end of the war, the US government's War Relocation Authority promoted cultural assimilation to European Protestant middle-class norms as the ideal for Japanese American resettlement outside the camps. During this period, some Japanese Americans Buddhists sought to reconstitute ties between themselves and the US nation. Yet many were disheartened by the systematic wartime conflation of Japanese Americans as part of an enemy race and of Buddhists as an enemy religion. Reflecting the trauma inflicted by US wartime policies, the question of Buddhism's future in the United States remained one of the most frequently recurring themes raised in Japanese American Buddhist publications, conferences, and meetings throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[84]

Within the context of weakened ties with Japanese Buddhist institutions and racial and religious discrimination within the United States, Asian Buddhist revival offered Japanese Americans a cause to struggle for in the promotion of Buddhism, just as ties to the Buddhist world offered a new source of community and identity as Buddhists. Sunao Miyabara recalled first being inspired to commit to Buddhist revival after a pilgrimage to Lumbini in India (today Nepal) to view the birthplace of the Buddha. He went on this pilgrimage in 1943, at the age of twenty-four, while serving in the US armed forces in China, Burma, and India as a translator.[85] He travelled by train across India from New Delhi to Kasia. From Kasia he journeyed to Lumbini and back by foot. He later recalled that his 'inspiration to work for Buddhism grew from that time especially when [he] saw the ruins and sad state of condition of this holy place of Buddhism'.[86]

Through their participation in WFB conferences and cultural exchange programmes, and as part of an emerging post-war global Buddhist print culture, Japanese Americans both contributed to and gained insight, solace, and inspiration from an emerging global Buddhist perspective. Reporting on the second WFB conference in 1952, Dr Kikuo Taira observed that 'what struck us more deeply than anything else was the friendly nature of the people who assembled there. Within this atmosphere, our anxiety for world peace was quieted to an objective resoluteness.' Taira noted that he and fellow delegates 'had not realized before that many of these countries were inherently "Buddhist" nations with actual cabinet positions, such as Minister of Religious Education, existing within the government systems'.[87] Taira noted and celebrated the spirit of unity that transcended Buddhist traditions, nations,

84 Michael K. Masatsugu, '"Beyond this world of transiency and impermanence": Japanese Americans, Dharma Bums, and the making of American Buddhism during the early Cold War years', *Pacific Historical Review*, 77, 3, 2008, pp. 432–5.

85 'Sunao Miyabara obituary', *Honolulu Advertiser*, 27 August 2010; Miyabara, *History*, p. 3.

86 Miyabara, *History*, p. 3.

87 JANM, BCA, Kikuo Taira, '2nd World Buddhist Conference', *Berkeley Bussei* , 1953, pp. 25–6.

culture, race, and ethnicity: 'We realized that these delegates from different parts of the world appeared differently, dressed differently and spoke different languages, but underneath these superficial appearances, all were bonded by reverence toward the Buddha and the Truth that Buddha had taught.'[88]

LaVerne Senyo Sasaki's participation in the 1954 WFB conference in Rangoon and his 1955 pilgrimage to Burma, India, Nepal, and Ceylon left a similar long-lasting impression of the Buddhist world that would inspire his own contribution to developing and promoting a global Buddhist perspective. At the time of his travels, Sasaki was a student in the Indian Philosophy Department at Tokyo University.[89] He accompanied Dr Shoyu Hanayama of Seabrook Buddhist Church in New Jersey and Reverend Shojun Bando of Ohtani Buddhist University, Kyoto.[90] Sasaki was impressed with the respect shown for Buddhist pilgrims in Ceylon. Upon landing at the airport in Jaffa, he recalled that 'it was during the custom inspection that we learned how much of a Buddhist country Ceylon is'. He continued,

> When we were asked the reason for entering the country by the inspector, we simply answered saying that we [were] entering Ceylon as Buddhist pilgrims for the purposes of conducting a religious pilgrimage of the historical Buddhist sites. Then, the inspector smiled and calmly stated that our group [would] not be inspected for customs because it [was] comprised of Buddhists![91]

The three visited a number of important religious sites. In Sravasti, India, at the Jetavana monastery, Sasaki recalled that he was 'disappointed at the noted spot, for there was hardly any trace of the former grandeur of the original monastery except for some red bricks that obscurely formed what appeared like the base of the temple'.[92] Travelling to Sanchi, an ancient ruin, they visited the Great Stupa established by Asoka, which Sasaki noted was discovered by Sir Alexander Cunningham in 1851. He also described the presence of stone memorials to the sacred relics that were found and housed at the Maha Bodhi *Vihara*. The memorial read, 'Namo Buddhaya. Opening of this *Vihara* and enshrinement of sacred relics of Arahans Sariputta and Maha Mogallana were performed by Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India on November 30, 1952.'[93] In Ceylon, they visited the Sacred Tooth relic at Kandy, Sigiriya Rock, and Anuradhapura, which Sasaki referred to as 'the most famous of Ceylon's ancient cities'.[94]

The trip also offered Sasaki and his companions the opportunity to meet South Asian political leaders and fortify ties created with Buddhist lay leaders from the WFB headquarters and various regional centres. In India, they met with Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan,

88 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

89 LaVerne Senyo Sasaki, 'A recommended one-year Buddhist curriculum for high school seniors in the Buddhist Churches of America', MA thesis, University of the Pacific, 1965, p. iii.

90 *Ibid.*, p. v.

91 BSC, Sasaki, 'In reminiscing our travel to India, Nepal and Ceylon (3)', *Young East*, 6, 18, Summer 1956, p. 29.

92 BSC, Sasaki, 'In reminiscing our travel to India, Nepal and Ceylon (2)', *Young East*, 5, 17, Spring 1956, p. 28.

93 *Ibid.*, pp. 30–1.

94 Sasaki, 'In reminiscing (3)', pp. 30–2.

Vice President of India, whom Sasaki characterized as 'one of the great thinkers of the world'.[95] Sasaki recalled, 'For half an hour over a cup of tea and sweets, the great philosopher cordially talked with us at his private residence and discussed the great significant role that Buddhism had played in Asian history and the need for the West to understand better its profound underlying thought [that] it treasures.'[96]

Sasaki was also able to meet Malalasekera at the University of Ceylon and to reconnect with Raja Hewavitarne and Mahiman Amarasuriya, two Ceylonese lay Buddhists from Colombo whom he had met at the 1954 Burma conference.[97] Sasaki noted the charitable work of his hosts. They visited the Malikka Home for the aged which had been founded by Hewavitarne's grandmother, a small orphanage, and one of forty-nine Maha Bodhi schools managed by Hawavitarne. Sasaki was informed that 1,500 students between the ages of three and eighteen were enrolled and that they were taught both English and Singhalese. He described the class as 'well disciplined', and was impressed by 'the fact that they would worship the Buddha daily before class'.[98]

At the conclusion of his series of reports, Sasaki expressed gratitude and hope on behalf of the group that their trip had represented 'a kind of good will mission. That is we hope that, however small it may have been, we had contributed to a better mutual understanding between the southern Buddhist countries and Japan and only wish that the continued warm understanding and mutual assistance prevail between the many Buddhist countries in the world.'[99]

Sasaki's participation as a delegate to the WFB conference and as a participant in a cultural exchange programme would continue to shape a Buddhist identity that was at once locally based in Japanese American Buddhist communities in the United States and, at the same time, connected to the broader Buddhist world. Moreover, his exposure to Buddhist revival through education would later inform his own approach to addressing the issue of discrimination against Japanese American Buddhists in the US. After completing studies in Japan, he returned to the United States to minister to Japanese American Buddhist communities. In the early 1960s, he attended the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, and wrote a master's thesis in Education that addressed a proposed plan for a Buddhist curriculum for Japanese American high-school seniors directed towards Jodo Shinshu Japanese American Buddhists.

Sasaki's interest in creating a 'Buddhist curriculum' was influenced both by his experience of institutional religious and racial discrimination in the US and by his exposure to Asian Buddhist strategies for addressing the effects of European colonialism on Buddhism. Efforts by Japanese Americans to introduce Buddhist teachings to their young people had a long and at times contentious history in Hawai'i and the continental US. As Noriko Asato has shown, Buddhist Japanese language schools were attacked by Christians and government officials in the era before the Second World War.[100] Sasaki and his family were affected by the religious

95 Sasaki, 'In reminiscing (2)', p. 30.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

97 Sasaki, 'In reminiscing (3)', p. 30.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

99 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

100 Noriko Asato, 'The Japanese language school controversy', in Williams and Moriya, *Issei Buddhism*, p. 48.

and racial targeting of Japanese American Buddhists during the war: the FBI visited his family home and the family was eventually sent to the Walerga Assembly Center near Sacramento and then to the Tule Lake Internment Camp for the duration of the war.[101]

While influenced by racial and religious discrimination in the United States, Sasaki's curriculum also revealed the impact that participation in the Buddhist world had made. Among the acknowledgements in his master's thesis, he thanked Bhikkhu Amritananda, whom he had met in Kathmandu; he also thanked Shoyu Hanayama and Shojun Bando 'for making possible the never-to-be-forgotten Buddhist pilgrimage in Burma, India, Nepal and Ceylon in 1954 and 1955'.[102]

Moreover, Sasaki's participation in the WFB's conferences and cultural exchange programmes had exposed him to anti-colonial attempts to build Buddhist education programmes, which in turn had provided him with a model for addressing historic problems of racial and religious discrimination in the US. His thesis framed the project as one that sought to address tensions revolving around Japanese American Buddhist acculturation. He noted that 'Buddhism in the United States is confronted with a great challenge that any foreign religion faces in a predominantly non-Buddhist country such as problems of comparison and lack of the Buddhist tradition and background.'[103] The curriculum created by Sasaki began by defining the *sangha* (community of Buddhists) and participation in the *sangha*. His suggested programme went beyond a more conventional introduction to Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in Japan and the United States. Instead, like the WFB, it sought to highlight the historical relationship between and points of unity among Buddhist traditions. Curiously, the thesis said very little about Tibetan Buddhism, with one exception: a brief mention of 'Lama Buddhism of Tibet' as one of the 'Three Treasures' in an introduction to terms.[104] Sasaki did, however, demonstrate a tolerance and respect for the Theravada tradition that reflected a departure from traditional Jodo Shinshu Buddhist discussions. He argued that 'Buddha's teaching may be liberally interpreted according to the needs of his disciples'.[105] Sasaki also qualified his use of 'Theravada', the term adopted at the WFB inaugural conference to replace 'Hinayana':

> Although the name of *Hinayana* (smaller vehicle) was used to refer to the Theravada Buddhists by the *Mahayana* (larger vehicle) Buddhist scholars, the reference is directed not to the Theravada Buddhists themselves but to the difference in the spiritual ideals – The Theravada's concept of self-enlightenment as contrasted to Mahayana's Bodhisattva concept of Enlightenment that all beings must be enlightened. Furthermore, many of the present-day Theravada Buddhist practices are the same, if not superior, to the works of the so-called Buddhists of the 'greater vehicle'. Therefore, the Mahayana Buddhists should learn to respect the Theravada Buddhists with sympathetic understanding.[106]

101 Interview with Reverend LaVerne Senyo Sasaki, 22 April 1996, San Francisco.

102 BSC, Sasaki, 'In reminiscing (3)', p. v.

103 Sasaki, 'A recommended', p. 2.

104 *Ibid.*, p. ix.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

106 *Ibid.*

In sum, the curriculum reflected Sasaki's adoption of and contribution to a global Buddhist perspective shared with a transnational community in which he had participated throughout the 1950s. He hoped to promote Buddhist education as well as tolerance and respect for the many traditions in Buddhism and, ultimately, to 'develop a greater awareness and appreciation of Buddhism as a world-wide universal religion not confined to any one country' and to 'develop enthusiasm and constructive action to help promote a harmonious relationship within the Buddhist brotherhood (Sangha)'.[107]

In addition to providing a critical vantage point from which to tackle racial and religious marginalization in the US, participation in transnational Buddhist networks provided Japanese American Buddhists with a shared global Buddhist perspective from which to assess and critique the Cold War. Kikuo Taira, who would become the BCA's president in 1961,[108] reiterated the WFB's critique of materialism and lack of spiritualism in the West in a public radio broadcast to listeners on 'Buddha Day' in California's Central Valley, which was probably delivered within a decade of his participation in the 1952 WFB conference. Taira noted that 'due to tremendous advance[s] in science mankind is standing on the threshold of an atomic era whose possibilities and potentials defy our imagination', yet also 'is beset with [a] multitude of problems and confrontation[s] of opposing ideologies'. Added to this were the issues that advances in science 'were primarily with [a] military purpose in mind' and had led to atomic arms build-up. Reflecting the WFB's critique of the Cold War, Taira argued that the sources of these problems were that 'man [had] failed to keep up his spiritual development with his material progress'. Even the 'freedom of democracy' had for 'many persons meant nothing more than an unbridled license to grab something for himself without any consideration for others whatsoever'. Taira concluded that guidance was available from 'the sage of India who became a Buddha – the enlightened one'.[109]

Manabu Fukuda, an active Nisei Buddhist lay leader, former President of the Japanese American National Young Buddhist Association, and WFB delegate, commented on the need for Buddhism as a guide for scientific, medical, and philosophical development. In an article titled, 'The coming religion', written shortly after returning from the 1952 WFB conference, Fukuda emphasized the importance of a living, progressing, socially engaged Buddhism. He proclaimed that 'there shall be no faith in a religion and its leaders if they are standing upon the laurels of the past and being complacent about the future of mankind'. Restating the words of lay Buddhists at the conference, Fukuda argued that 'religion must not only follow in the footsteps of science, medicine and philosophy, but it must lead them in the right direction'. He concluded 'the wisdom, courage, and energy of the 20th century must be embodied in Buddhism before it can be of any value to the people who live in these times of grave uncertainty'.[110]

By the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, a decade of contact between Asian and Japanese American Buddhists through conferences and cultural exchange programmes, and through the circulation of articles and publications, had made Japanese American Buddhists

107 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

108 *Buddhist Churches of America: 75 year history, 1899–1974*, vol. 1, Chicago, IL: Norbart, Inc., p. 41.

109 BSC, Dr Kikuo H. Taira, 'Thoughts on Buddha's birthday', transcript of radio address (date of broadcast unknown), in *The call to adventure: twentieth anniversary*, Central California Buddhist radio broadcast, Fresno, CA, 1970, pp. 29–31.

110 JANM, BCA, Manabu Fukuda, 'The coming religion', *Berkeley Bussei*, 1953, p. 13.

conscious of their place in a broader Buddhist world. One of the indices of this new world Buddhist consciousness was the growing news coverage of the Buddhist world in Japanese American Buddhist publications. By the late 1950s, many Young Buddhist publications and the BCA's flagship English-language publication, *American Buddhist*, included discussion of the broader Buddhist world, with covers featuring South and Southeast Asian Buddhist sculptures, monuments and sacred sites. Coverage in the *American Buddhist* increasingly came to include world Buddhist events, particularly in Asia, such as the massive plans and celebration revolving around the *Jayanti*, Indian independence, and the struggle of Buddhists in Tibet and Vietnam.[111]

Meanwhile, the BCA sponsored projects that were motivated by the trans-tradition and transnational connections that the WFB had promoted over the course of the 1950s. In January 1959, the BCA initiated a fundraising 'Project for overseas Buddhists'. In launching the campaign, the *American Buddhist* staff writer Robert Jackson noted that 'as knowledge of the history of Buddhism increases and along with it an understanding of the profound changes taking place in Asia deepens, Buddhists in America feel a wider loyalty than to their own small group'. Jackson explained that the project would allow BCA members to 'help Buddhist students in Asia, to help temples and monasteries in charitable works. We can make person to person contact with young Buddhists overseas to consolidate the far-flung sentiments of faith in sangha as a world-wide expression of the Buddha's dharma.' Jackson stated that members could help by 'holding dances, benefits and bazaars in the same way as in the past, but with a new purpose'. He concluded,

> we have had a great development in social programs from the early days of the lonely Issei arrivals to the not so lonely Sansei high-school kid. We have had study groups for the interested laymen and even for the intellectual. But we have not had a program where local leadership could feel itself part of the world Buddhism, where it could give the membership a sense of being a part of something that means something for others as well as themselves.[112]

While Jackson's reference to the Eisenhower Administration's People-to-People programme suggested the increasing interest and role of the US government in encouraging and guiding transnational interactions, the BCA's Overseas Project campaign was largely indicative of a global Buddhist perspective developed among Japanese American Buddhist communities in dialogue with a broader Buddhist world throughout the 1950s.[113]

Conclusion

At the November 1965 WFB Conference held in Chengmai, Thailand, Dr Kikuo Taira of the BCA presented a message addressed to the conference by the US president, Lyndon B. Johnson. Just eight months after sending ground troops to Vietnam, Johnson offered his

111 See, for example, *American Buddhist*, June 1959, p. 4 (India); *American Buddhist*, April 1959 (Tibet), p. 6; *American Buddhist*, May 1959, p. 1 (Tibet).

112 Robert Jackson, 'The project for Buddhism overseas', *American Buddhist*, January 1959, pp. 1, 6.

113 For a discussion of Eisenhower's People-to-People programme, see Christian Klein, *Cold War orientalism: Asia in the middlebrow imagination*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003, pp. 49–56.

greetings and wished delegates a successful conference, proclaiming that he and the United States were in 'full support for the realization of your goal to "promote peace and harmony among mankind"'. 'To this noble program', Johnson added, 'we would like to add our pledge to work unstintingly for the attainment of peace, freedom, health and social opportunity for all.' Johnson noted that America held a tradition of supporting religious freedom, stating, 'We firmly believe in the freedom of all religious faiths for the betterment of man and in the continuing reaffirmation of these convictions to help achieve peace in this world.'[114] Taira's address on behalf of Johnson highlights the increasingly important and precarious position from which Buddhism and Buddhists had to negotiate as the Cold War continued to polarize and wreak havoc throughout Asia.

Through participation in transnational networks and the development of a global Buddhist perspective that reflected their shared and distinct interests, Asian and Japanese American Buddhists channelled their hopes, aspirations, and energies toward a broader Buddhist world in the two decades after the Second World War. Taking place in the midst of massive decolonization and with the escalation of the Cold War, these networks and perspectives offered Asian Buddhists a potential path toward human rights, justification for postcolonial nation-building in Asia, and a critique of unrestrained materialism and technological development that they believed was driving the escalation of war and suffering. For Japanese American Buddhists, in the aftermath of weakened ties with Buddhist institutions in Japan and the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans in the United States during the Second World War, participation in the Buddhist world allowed them to view themselves as sharing with Asian Buddhists in a global movement to promote Buddhist values and a more peaceful world. Moreover, in an era when Buddhists continued to be largely invisible in the United States, these ties allowed Japanese Americans to view Buddhism through a new global lens and to find renewed solace and purpose in identifying as Buddhist. Connections drawn by Asian Buddhists between Buddhist revival and struggles against colonialism provided a model for Japanese Americans who struggled to negotiate the legacy of discrimination and marginalization in the United States. Through participation in the Buddhist world, Japanese Americans also acquired a broader global Buddhist perspective from which to assess and critique the Cold War. In sum, they gained insight into how domestic struggles and concerns were interconnected with broader international struggles for independence, human rights, tolerance, and pacifism.

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114 WFB, *Report of the 8th General Conference,* Chengmai, Thailand: WFB, November 1965, p. 27.

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