

Constructing Religious Modernities: Hybridity, Reinterpretation,  
and Adaptation in Thailand's International Meditation Centers

by

Brooke Schedneck

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved April 2012 by the  
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Juliane Schober, Chair  
Tracy Fessenden  
James Rush

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2012

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation project addresses one of the most critical problems in the study of religion: how new formations of religion are constructed and constituted. My work builds on the recent revisions of the secularization theory, which demonstrates the alternative and hybrid ways people seek out religion in modernity. To this end, my project examines the emerging popularity and phenomenon of international meditation centers in Thailand, focusing on encounters between international meditation center teachers and their international students. Through participant observation and in-depth interviews at these sites throughout Thailand, my project explores the social processes of religious change and adaptation, and the construction of religious meaning. I detail the historical conditions that led to the formation of persisting ideas of Buddhism by tracing the continuities between Orientalist interpretations and modern-day spiritual seekers. My work contributes to a greater understanding of the most recent articulation of this engagement and interaction between Buddhism and the international community and adds to the burgeoning scholarship that reconsiders the relationship between religion and modernity.

I investigate this relationship in regard to international meditation centers in Thailand through three angles: promotional materials concerning meditation in Thailand, experiences of international meditators, and teachings of international meditation center teachers. I contextualize this ethnographic analysis with an evaluation of the relationship of Buddhism to discourses of modernity and Orientalism as well as a historical inquiry into the rise of lay meditation in

Thailand. Throughout I argue that international meditators' engagement with meditation in Thai temples constitutes a hybrid religiosity where the decontextualized practice of meditation is mixed with both non-religious and other religious beliefs and practices. Social discourses and practices involving meditation, even in a Buddhist country, demonstrate the deconstruction of traditional religiosity in modernity and the rise of hybrid religiosity. Through the decontextualization of meditation and the discourse of the practice having no religious boundaries, meditation becomes mixed with tourism, therapy, healing, as well as other religious and secular practices. This research contributes to studies of Theravāda Buddhism as well as modern, global religions and the contemporary intersection between religion and tourism.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all of the people who supported and encouraged the writing of this dissertation. Special thanks go to my advisor, Juliane Schober, for her advice, gentle encouragement and constant enthusiasm for my project. Her mentorship has extended beyond this dissertation to include all aspects of academia. I would also like to extend my gratitude to committee members Tracy Fessenden and James Rush. Their comments on the theoretical conceptualization of the project were crucial. Joel Gereboff, chair of the department, greatly encouraged and supported my graduate student needs.

Thank you to all of my informants throughout Thailand, both the international meditators I encountered who were happy to share their stories and the international meditation center teachers who valued my project. The international meditation center teachers especially took time out of their busy schedules to discuss issues of adaptation and reinterpretation with me.

I extend my thanks to Fulbright for funding my research in Thailand, as well as Arizona State University Graduate College, and the Philanthropic Educational Organization for their dissertation writing awards. I want to thank all of the people who gave me feedback in conferences, workshops, and lectures where I presented my work in North America, Germany, the Philippines, and Thailand. Especially important in this regard is the Henry Luce Foundation for its support of my participation in the Theravāda Civilizations Dissertation Workshop. For their comments during this workshop I thank Steven Collins, Anne Hansen,

Christoph Emmrich, and Justin McDaniel. Jaques Leider, director of the Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient in Chiangmai also allowed me use of their beautiful library, which was beneficial as I settled into life in Thailand and the initial stages of dissertation writing. Professor Donald Swearer's enthusiasm for Buddhism in Southeast Asia sparked my own, and I would like to thank him for encouraging my interest in this field.

My graduate school colleagues at Arizona State University offered support and helped me to think through my ideas in the early and developing stages of my research. I want to thank especially Jordan Johnson, Jean-Marie Stevens, and Semiha Topal. My friends and colleagues in Chiangmai, Thailand, my base while researching this dissertation, also need to be acknowledged. Thank you to the community of the American Pacific International School where I was given a space to write and contemplate, with much encouragement and interest. Also to my friends from Payap University, Adam Dedman, Jessica Loh, and Eva Pascal, for their interest in my work and discussions about all things Southeast Asia.

My thanks and love also go to my parents and sister. Jillian Schedneck, an author and Ph.D. Candidate herself, provided much encouragement and direction while shaping this dissertation. My parents' belief in my goals was never doubted; many thanks for their support.

And most of all I thank my husband, William Starner. Not only did he move with me to Thailand, but has always supported me in whatever I felt I needed to complete my research and writing. His easygoing and light-hearted

manner eased stressful moments and I will always be grateful for his time, patience, and partnership during the course of this project.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TRANSLITERATION OF THAI TERMS .....	x
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	xi
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Hybridity Studies.....	4
Postcolonialism.....	9
Modernity and Postmodern Religiosity .....	12
Globalization and Cultural Flows .....	16
Tourism, Religion, and Commodification .....	21
Global Buddhist Studies.....	26
Methodology.....	29
Focus and Questions .....	36
Chapter Summaries .....	37
Conclusion .....	41
2 MODERN BUDDHISM AND THE DECONTEXTUALIZED	
PRACTICE OF MEDITATION.....	42
Orientalism and Buddhism.....	43
Modern Buddhism.....	50
Modern Buddhism in Thailand .....	55
Postmodern Conjunctions of Meditation .....	60
Postmodern Buddhist Hybridity.....	72

CHAPTER	Page
Conclusion .....	88
3 THERAVĀDA MEDITATION AND THE HISTORY OF MODERN <i>VIPASSANĀ</i> .....	90
The Path to <i>Nibbāna</i> .....	91
Sources of Theravāda Meditation .....	97
The History of Modern <i>Vipassanā</i> .....	104
Thai Buddhist Understandings of <i>Vipassanā</i> .....	124
The Field of Meditative Engagement .....	129
Sites Descriptions .....	140
Conclusion .....	155
4 MEDITATION AS COMMODITY, PROMOTING MEDITATION TO INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS IN THAILAND .....	157
Tourism as a Modern Phenomenon .....	161
Consumerism and Modern Buddhism .....	164
Commercialization of Thai Buddhism .....	168
History of Tourism in Thailand .....	171
Institutions Promoting Thai Buddhism .....	174
Promoting Meditation Through Guidebooks .....	176
Tourism Authority of Thailand’s Advertising Meditation .....	184
International Meditation Center Retreat Pamphlets .....	191
Images .....	196
Conclusion .....	200



CHAPTER	Page	
5	PORTRAITS OF INTERNATIONAL MEDITATORS’ EXPERIENCES .....	202
	Modern Religious Identities .....	205
	Selective Appropriation and Engagement.....	209
	Subversion and Dissent .....	228
	International Meditators’ Daily Practices .....	234
	Wat Rampoeng .....	234
	International Dhamma Hermitage.....	245
	Conclusion .....	252
6	DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES OF REINTERPRETATION IN THAILAND’S INTERNATIONAL MEDITATION CENTERS .	254
	Reinterpretation and Adaptation .....	255
	Thailand’s International Meditation Center Teachers .....	258
	Meditation Reinterpreted.....	261
	Implementing Reinterpretations.....	265
	Conclusion .....	286
7	CONCLUSION .....	291
	Role of Translation .....	292
	Modern Religious Identities and Hybridity Revisited .....	294
	Practices of the Self.....	297
	Conclusion .....	303

	Page
REFERENCES .....	307
APPENDIX	
A RESEARCH SITES .....	330
B INTERNATIONAL MEDITATION CENTER STATISTICS .....	333
C GLOSSARY OF PĀLI AND THAI TERMS.....	335
D INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORM.....	339

## TRANSLITERATION OF THAI TERMS

The romanization system I use follows a simplified version of that used by the Library of Congress. For example, for the consonant *čh* I use *j* and I do not indicate long vowels or tones. A number of Thai transliteration systems exist and in some cases references use a different spelling from the ones I use in the text. In these cases I have kept the original romanization. When using Thai words derived from Pāli, I use the Thai romanization. For temple and monastic names I have used the most popular spellings.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration	Page
1. <i>Mae chii</i> chanting, Wat Chom Tong, Chom Tong, Thailand.....	33
2. Evening Chanting, Wat Umong, Chiangmai, Thailand.....	126
3. Meditation hall, International Dhamma Hermitage, Chaiya, Thailand.....	132
4. Meditation hall, Wat Doi Suthep, Chiangmai, Thailand .....	142
5. Meditators, Dipabhavan Meditation Center, Koh Samui, Thailand.....	153
6. Sign outside of Wat Pah Tam Wua, Mae Hong Son, Thailand.....	214
7. Meditators, Wat Rampoeng, Chiangmai, Thailand .....	219
8. Typical meditator's room, Wat Prayong, Bangkok, Thailand .....	245
9. Bridge to Dhamma Hall, Vimutti Dhamma Retreat, Mae Tang, Thailand.....	285

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

This dissertation project examines the phenomenon of international meditation retreat centers in Thailand, focusing on the experiences and attitudes of international meditators and the adaptations and reinterpretations of their teachers. In contrast to recent works on meditation by Cook (2010), Pagis (2009), Newell (2008), and Houtmann (1990) that look at meditative techniques and their histories and relationships to the Buddhist tradition, my work charts a new direction that focuses on social discourses surrounding meditation as well as the use of meditation within global networks of Buddhist communities. Examining sites of religious encounters through participant-observation and in-depth interviews with teachers and meditators at international meditation centers in Thailand, I explore the social processes of religious change and adaptation, and the construction of religious meaning.

Employing the recent revisions of the secularization theory (Casanova 1994; Asad 2003; Smith 2003), I demonstrate that the discourse of modern religion should not center on measuring people's increase or decrease in religious behavior, but instead on the constitution of hybrid religious forms. With the increasing global appeal of meditation, alternative modes of religiosity have arisen, whereby divisions between secular and religious become blurred. One of the most pressing issues for scholars of religious studies is the mechanisms by which religion maintains its relevance in contemporary times. Important manifestations of religion and modernity are developing through temporary or

partial religious engagement, transient communities, and spiritual travel. By investigating these manifestations in Thailand, I present new understandings of hybrid religiosity and modern reinterpretations of Buddhism, within the context of cultural and transnational flows of information in a globalized world.

In addition to analyzing meditative discourses, I detail the historical conditions that have led to persisting interpretations of Buddhism by tracing the continuities between Orientalist interpretations and modern-day spiritual seekers. Spurred by interest in Edwin Arnold's (1879) publication of the now classic, *The Light of Asia* and *A Buddhist Bible* by Dwight Goddard (1966 [1938]), Buddhism entered the popular imagination of English-speaking societies for the first time. The world of Buddhism described in these books— and other ideas, values and images of Buddhism that quickly became public knowledge through various routes— presented a challenge to this audience as it confounded the characteristics of other known religions. Alternately praised and derided for stepping outside the fixed religious categories known to the western world, Buddhism has continued to be a particularly contentious religious and philosophical category in Western countries. Orientalists praised the 'pure,' rational and scientific origins of the Buddhist tradition (Lopez 1995) while late 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans derided the belief system as nihilistic (Tweed 1992). Scholarly attention has been directed toward colonial readings of Buddhist thought, (Lopez 1995; Almond 1988; Prothero 1996), yet Buddhism continues to be re-imagined in the modern era. Just as early scholars and popular audiences constructed various readings of Buddhism in the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries, modern religious seekers represent the most recent iteration of this search for religious meaning.

In order to explore modern-day spiritual seekers, I focus on the emerging popularity and phenomenon of travel to meditation retreats in Thailand. Although many people were interested in Buddhist philosophy and related Asian culture in the nineteenth century, it is only since the twentieth century that meditation has held a powerful influence over cultural trends with many people using the practice as a supplement or alternative to their own faith. I trace the history of interpretation of meditation—its genealogy as a practice and the production of knowledge surrounding it—through following processes of cultural and global flows. Hybrid constructions of religiosity are created through foreign travelers' varied interactions and engagements with Thai Buddhism. I explain these interpretations and hybrid religiosities by investigating social discourses about Buddhism and meditation practices and interactions on the ground in Thailand. I focus on the consequences of these social discourses when international travelers interested in Buddhism transport these ideas to Thailand. Travelers' and long-time residents' interactions with Thai Buddhism often constitute new, hybrid forms of Buddhism that draw on indigenous Buddhist ideas as well as secular and other religious frameworks.

In order to illuminate the various facets and trajectories of international meditators in Thailand, this introduction highlights the theoretical underpinnings of my research. I focus on postmodern religiosity in hybrid multicultural contexts, which are informed by Orientalism and postcolonialism. Laying a foundation for

these topics, I move to a discussion of the first engagements with Buddhism by early scholars and practitioners and trace the continuities seen today in international travelers' dialogues with their teachers in Thailand. The introduction also utilizes previous ethnographic studies on meditation and describes my methodology for the specific context of international meditation centers in Thailand.

### **Hybridity Studies**

Hybridity is a useful theoretical concept to discuss the religiosity of international meditators' engagement with Buddhism and meditation as well as the teachings presented to international meditators. I use hybridity in order to show the diverse engagements of international meditators with meditation practice and the disparate routes through which meditation is mixed with other religious and secular frameworks. One of the advantages of hybridity is that it can be used to counter tendencies to essentialize culture, religion, and identities while taking into account the nuances of how cultural elements are mixed. Because of the global nature of religiosity, including missionization, diasporas, and religious tourism, hybrid forms of personal religiosity and identification are more possible as well as more likely.

I use hybridity as a concept that describes non-essentialised blendings of cultural and religious practices and beliefs. This aligns with Homi Bhabha's focus on cultural hybridity as a continual process of representation, translation and signification that deconstructs binary oppositions. Bhabha writes that we need to



“think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (Bhabha 1994, 1). He calls the intersection of these cultural differences in-between spaces where new identities, subjects, and social spaces are created. He sees hybridity as a border-crossing experience where cultures meet, interact, and resist bounded categories. Hybridity creates new forms of identities and communities through fragmentation and the recognition of impurity.

Hybridity thus sheds light on modernity’s narratives of purity and progress. Instead of tracing distinct cultural interactions, I investigate processes of mixing, which create new possibilities and social spaces. Hybridity therefore is a significant analytical tool for understanding complex realities, including blending among identities, cultures, and societies. It debunks essentialist ideas to reveal the falsehood of a pure race or identity untainted by other cultures (Bhabha 1994, 159). Significantly, Bhabha investigates hybridity in the context of colonialism. Bhabha uses hybridity to describe the construction of culture and identity within colonial relationships. He sees this relationship as creating something new, as the colonizer attempts to create and translate the identity of the colonized. These relationships within colonial society call into question essential cultural identities and hegemonic narratives. These findings about hybridity are applicable to studies in postcolonial societies as well, as my work aligns with Bhabha’s call for studies of in-between places that cross boundaries. My research demonstrates that hybridity is a process of negotiation and compromise but it can also cause dissent

and subversion, as we will see with the experiences and practices of international meditators.

Most recently hybridity has been removed from the context of colonialism and brought into postmodern global studies. This scholarship helps to show the wide applicability of hybridity and demonstrates the term's usefulness for analyzing interactions between international meditators and their teachers. Scholars in this field often characterize hybridity as both a reaction to and product of globalization. Kraidy writes, "Hybridity is one of the emblematic notions of our era. It captures the spirit of the times with its obligatory celebration of cultural difference and fusion, and it resonates with the globalization mantra of unfettered economic exchanges and the supposedly inevitable transformation of all cultures" (Kraidy 2005, 1). Like Kraidy, I align hybridity with globalization and the flows of information that construct meaning for both international travelers and the host country. Instead of viewing globalization as the creation of a hegemonic Westernized consumer culture, in the scenario of international meditation centers, I see the encounter between international meditation center teachers and international meditators as a process of hybridization in which intercultural contact creates adaptations and continuously transforms and renews cultural expressions.

Hybrid religious formations arise from accelerated intercultural and religious encounters in modernity, which open new possibilities and spaces for religious practices to enter into diverse contexts. Canclini (1995) asserts that, "the *uncertainty* about the meaning and value of modernity derives not only from what

separates nations, ethnic groups, and classes, but also from the sociocultural hybrids in which the traditional and the modern are mixed” (Canclini 1995, 2). Pieterse (2001), also writing about modern hybrids, identifies the importance of hybridity as problematizing boundaries (Pieterse 2001, 220). Hybridity helps to describe multiple identities, boundary-crossing experiences, eclecticism, and intercultural communication (Pieterse 2001, 239). The hybridity I am discussing is a postcolonial cultural hybridity— I use it both to describe a phenomenon and as an analytical tool to critique boundaries of religious identities.

Along with globalization and postcolonial cultural interactions, my study demonstrates that contemporary Buddhism generates hybrid mixtures. Buddhism in Thailand and North America has been described as hybrid. McMahan (2008) identifies the reception and adaptations of Buddhism in North America as consisting of a hybrid of indigenous Buddhist concepts mixed with discourses of psychology, romanticism, and science. The result is something neither dominated by Buddhist ideas nor by discourses of modernity. Indigenous Buddhist concepts, appropriated in a modern context, reveal a hybrid process drawing on Western ideas and concepts. I conceive of the modern transformation of discourses of meditation in Thailand’s international meditation centers as a hybrid consisting of both Buddhist ideas and reinterpretations that occur through processes of globalization. International meditation center teachers, although appealing to discourses of modernity, also present their meditation teachings in ways that are consistent with the history of Buddhist interpretation. My work shows that there can be continuums of hybridity so that hybrid religiosity and hybrid teachings can

be minor or dominating. International meditation center teachers represent these continuums with some adding only slight changes to the Thai Buddhist retreat model for foreigners, while others adapt the retreat environment vastly for their international guests.

These theories, which connect hybridity to globalization, postcolonialism, and postmodernity, help to describe and analyze the hybrid religiosities and hybrid discourses occurring within international meditation centers in Thailand. Taylor (2008), writing in the context of Thai Buddhism asserts that hybridization “implies the emergence of an alternative religious spatiality... undermining the centre and creating something new, different, not previously noticed, and marked by negotiation of meaning and representation” (Taylor 2008, 38). I examine how exchanges between international meditators and teachers create a mutual process of learning where foreign travelers’ ideas and assumptions about Buddhism are changed as Thai Buddhists create new spaces for alternative forms of religiosity among their international visitors.

Throughout the course of this dissertation one of my aims is to show that hybridity is an inevitable outcome resulting from the modern endeavor of decontextualizing *vipassanā* meditation from its Theravāda roots. Scholars (Kirsch 1977; Swearer 2010), and more recently international meditation center teachers identify strands of a complex religious system in Thailand that includes Theravāda Buddhism along with elements of Brahminism and spirit worship. These non-Buddhist strands are often distinguished as syncretic, ‘impure’ elements. This modern project of classifying and separating Buddhism from non-

Buddhism does not carry over to Western signifiers of modernity. Secular, scientific, psychological and interreligious discourses are combined with Buddhism as a way to claim modernity.

### **Postcolonialism**

Along with hybridity, postcolonial studies comprise another aspect of my analysis of the cultural and religious encounters between international meditators and Thai Buddhists.<sup>1</sup> Postcolonial discourses affect the ways international meditators engage with Thai Buddhist meditative practices. Postcolonial scholarship describes the encounter between indigenous forms of knowledge and imperial culture (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995, 1). Ashcroft et. al. have defined postcolonial as representing “the continuing process of imperial suppressions and exchanges” that occur throughout formerly colonized countries (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995, 3). Postcolonial theories draw attention to the persistence of colonialism on an ideological level and to the ways power structures create binary oppositions between First and Third world countries (Simmons 2004, 47). Although never a colony, Thailand meets many of these criteria of a postcolonial nation.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term post-colonial or postcolonial originally referred to the historical, postcolonialism and post-colonialism are used to understand colonial discourse, responses to colonialism, as well as the period after independence (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2000, 182-184).

Scholars have commonly depicted Siam's colonial period<sup>2</sup> as exceptional, as a result of the monarchy having managed to avoid direct colonization.<sup>3</sup> Although Thailand was never a colony in the literal sense, there are many arguments that cast it as a semi-colonial state. Jackson writes in his chapter of *The Ambiguous Allure of the West* that his aim is "to draw on postcolonial understandings of power, culture and knowledge in ways that recognize that while Siam/Thailand occupied a subordinate position in the Western-dominated world order it was never a direct colony" (Jackson 2010, 39). He goes on to argue that because of Thailand's ambiguous status, a dialogue with postcolonial studies is appropriate. In the same volume, Harrison also writes that Thailand has been called semi-colonial and crypto-colonial and can be considered in part apostcolonial (Harrison 2010, 4). Harrison finds that the West had the most significant impact "on forms of knowledge and modes of representation in Thailand, both locally in Thai language discourses and internationally in European language accounts" (Harrison 2010, 10). Thailand was not formally colonized but this did not stop

"the country from being constrained by Western imperial powers - mainly British and French - in ways reminiscent of what colonized nations suffered ... it was as though the *farang*, {white foreigner} more than the Indian or the Burmese or the Malay or the Chinese or the Cambodian or

---

<sup>2</sup> Roughly this colonial period can be taken to begin during the reign of King Mongkut (Rama V) in 1851 and last at least through the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama VII) in 1925. During this time period Siam faced Western colonial powers in a substantial way for the first time. Siam's name was changed to Thailand in 1939.

<sup>3</sup> For a critique of this view see Winichakul (1994).

the Lao, was *the* Other against whom the modern person measured himself or herself” (Chakrabarty 2010, ix).

In this way, Thailand during the colonial period of Southeast Asia<sup>4</sup> can be compared with other colonized nations but also with colonial powers. Loos (2006) argues similarly that Siam is not exceptional in its avoidance of formal colonization but eminently comparable given its role as both colonized, symbolized by unequal treaties and liberal granting of extraterritoriality with European countries, and colonizers, shown by their efforts to control the Muslim Malay provinces in the south. The Siamese Buddhist tradition mirrors the socio-political situation during this period. Politically, Siam was not fully submissive to an imperial authority, but it was also not fully in control of its own territory. Religiously, the country was not fully changed by Western moral standards, but was impacted by Western ideas of logic and science.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore postcolonial analysis is applicable and important in discussing Thailand and the international community. In addition to Thailand’s specific experience of postcolonialism, I use postcolonial analysis (following Tucker & Akama 2009; Craik 1994; Teo & Leong 2006; Hall & Tucker 2004) to illustrate representations of Thai Buddhism within tourism publications. I demonstrate that these materials show more about the imaginative construct of Buddhism and the meditation retreat than the reality. Meditation publications in Thailand draw on constructions of meditation as an escape from modernity, a form of Romantic

---

<sup>4</sup> For my work I am specifically referring to the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century.

<sup>5</sup> For more on Siam and modern Buddhism see Ch. 2 in this dissertation.

Orientalism, and modern Buddhist discourses. Therefore through the appropriation of postcolonial imaginings of the 'exotic spiritual East' the appeal of meditation is commodified to promote travel to Thailand. Through advertisements about meditation to the international community, mostly markets in Europe and America, Thailand is imagined as an other and its meditation practice as a marker of difference. This signifies not only Thailand's postcolonial status, but also the discourses of modern and even postmodern religiosity.

### **Modernity and Postmodern Religiosity<sup>6</sup>**

Modernity is often described as the period after the European Enlightenment with its focus on secularism, individualism, autonomy, a break with the past, and rationalism (Brenner 1998, 10; Gaonkar 2001, 2). It is also referred to as the state of living in the present and viewing the world with more self-reflexivity (Taylor 1989). Modernity is characterized as both a rupture with the past and fragmentation of the present through its own internal contradictions. These tensions include the rigidity of categories such as religious identity in opposition to the distinctiveness of cultural and ethnic groups. At the same time, modernity has constructed identity in new ways. New significations such as universal and transcendental were created as nation-state boundaries and cultural groups were defined (Eisenstadt 2002, 6). The notion of modern continues to evolve as it is

---

<sup>6</sup> By religiosity I refer to the wide range of religious ideas, beliefs and practices. The term encompasses a person's religious worldview in all its complications and contradictions, manifested through their cultural imaginations. Religiosity is inflected by emotions, uncertainty, unknowing, and the search for answers to ultimate questions.



encountered anew and remade (Gaonkar 2001, 23). Within modernity people adapt, negotiate, and engage with global processes such as capitalism as well as local influences such as particular historical circumstances. Conceptualizing modernity in this way is important for my project where global, universal, and local influences come to bear on the processes of reinterpretation within Thailand's international meditation centers.

Bruno Latour (1993) discusses how processes of translation and purification play critical roles in the construction of modernity.

“... the word ‘modern’ designates two sets of entirely different practices which must remain distinct if they are to remain effective, but have recently begun to be confused. The first set of practices, by ‘translation’, creates mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture. The second, by ‘purification’, creates two entirely distinct ontological zones, that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other. Without the first set, the practices of purification would be fruitless and pointless. Without the second, the work of translation would be slowed down, limited, or even ruled out” (Latour 1993, 10-11).

Latour asserts that hybrids are proliferating despite the modern process of purification. I look at practices of translation as they are created through hybrid teachings of meditation and Buddhism. Instead of purifying meditation practices, a plurality and diversity of strategies and methods for teaching non-Buddhists have created hybrid forms of Buddhist practice.

For my work, I am focusing on modernity's attention to the self. Through this, religion is framed as a quest to discover the self. Gaonkar writes of modernity that, “a high premium was placed on spontaneous expression, authentic experience, and unfettered gratification of one's creative and carnal urges”

(Gaonkar 2001, 3). Religions of modernity are marked by their personal nature as religious worldviews are constructed out of individual preferences (Houtman & Aupers 2010, 5). Religion in modernity is constituted by a plurality of belief systems and thus a variety of choice that to a large degree had not been present before. Even though religious choice in modernity is diverse, the underlying principle of a self-constructed religion is a unifying factor (Houtman & Aupers 2010, 6).

These self-constructed religiosities are created within particular socio-cultural contexts. It is for this reason that Talal Asad's call for studies of religion as constituted within social contexts is necessary, as religion doesn't exist apart from its socio-cultural and historical circumstance. He writes, "there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that {universalist} definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes" (Asad 1993, 29). In this context I argue that it is not universal definitions of religion that should be theorized but instead attention should be paid to personal forms of hybrid religiosities. I illustrate that international meditators, within the context of Thailand's international meditation centers, construct postmodern hybrid religiosities through their engagement with Thai Buddhist meditation as well as their particular religious and secular frameworks.

These hybrid religiosities are created through intercultural and interreligious exchange. Investigating contemporary cultural and religious encounters cogently

illuminates postmodern forms of religiosity. I use postmodernity<sup>7</sup> not as a radical rupture with modernity but as an avenue to problematize the contradictions and tensions within modernity (Canclini 1995, 19). The postmodern does not always signify a time period but instead is a “more globally inflected term applicable to a variety of regions” (Wilson, Sandru, and Welsh 2010, 2). Indeed theorists of postmodernity find that rather than a break with modernity, postmodernity can be understood as a discourse that deconstructs and amplifies modernity (Krishnaswamy & Hawley 2008, 5). Postmodern religiosity, together with its important hybridity component, tempers the grand narratives of modernity. Therefore I am concerned with postmodernity as a form of religiosity but refer to religion in the period of modernity. Postmodern religiosity, with its relation to globalization,<sup>8</sup> migration, and travel, helps to contextualize my study, which investigates the routes and discourses of meditation within international meditation retreats in Thailand.

---

<sup>7</sup> Natoli and Hutcheon describe the term postmodern as a “shift away from modernity’s universalizing and totalizing drive” that “deliberately contests the exclusive ‘either/or’ binary oppositions of modernity” (Natoli & Hutcheon 1993, vii). I use postmodern to highlight the breakdown of modernity’s categories to reveal the ambiguity and indeterminacy of religious practices and identities in the present-day.

<sup>8</sup> The relationship between postmodernity and globalization is explored in Lyon (1999). He writes that the two terms are related through globalization’s creation of increased opportunities for contact, and that postmodernity highlights how older boundaries are being erased.

Varied imaginings of Buddhism occur at different moments and to different audiences as Buddhism is reframed within various contexts.<sup>9</sup> Through the eclecticism of postmodern religious formations international meditators in Thailand draw from meditative practices and incorporate these into their own religious worldviews. Meditation practice within the frame of postmodern religiosity creates new spaces for foreign travelers to Thailand. Through the ability to experiment with religious practices in modernity, postmodern hybrid religiosities form through processes of globalization and flows of information.

### **Globalization and Cultural Flows**

Transnational connections allow for encounters of a plurality of people as well as of cultural practices, religions, and ways of life. These connections occur at contact zones and sites of encounter such as international meditation centers in Thailand. The rapid transference and constant migrations of people, images, ideas, and commodities has brought increased contact with alternative religious beliefs and practices as well as contributed to the rapid emergence and proliferation of hybridities. Different religions, cultures, and traditions encounter one another and are reinterpreted in the process.

---

<sup>9</sup> Scholars sometimes ignore the Buddhist tradition's contextual nature. Gombrich's (2009) introductory text on Buddhism titled *What the Buddha Thought*, considers the Pāli suttas as the key to understanding the Buddha's teachings. He finds later developments of Buddhist thought to be misunderstandings, rather than elaborations and adaptations for new audiences and time periods.

Globalization is a distinctive feature of modernity that brings to light contemporary social realities. Ina and Rosaldo offer a comprehensive definition of globalization: “the intensification of global interconnectedness, suggesting a world full of movement and mixture, contact and linkages, and persistent cultural interaction and exchange” (Ina & Rosaldo 2002, 4). Globalization is characterized by an unboundedness so that space does not exist wholly in the form of nations and territories. The proliferation of international social connections and transnational networks demonstrates the decreased significance of borders as “. . . commodities traverse various routes and circulate within networks created across transnational boundaries” (Sinha 2011, 189). Therefore globalization allows for flow and movement without spatial restrictions (Scholte 2000, 16).

Pieterse (2001) and Appadurai (1996) write about the convergence of globalization and hybridities. Pieterse argues that globalization is a creative and productive force in modernity that does not lead to homogenization of cultures but produces unique and complex forms where new ideas are gained (Pieterse 2001, 224). The idea of flows helps to capture the movement of discourses across time and space that have come to converge on Thailand’s international meditation centers. Appadurai defines globalization in terms of disjunctive flows of people, capital, technology, images and ideologies.<sup>10</sup> He focuses on disjunctures in order to stress the different streams along which cultural materials cross boundaries at

---

<sup>10</sup> Appadurai specifically defines globalization as constituting “a complex overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models” (Appadurai 1996, 32).

the rapid rate of modernity. Global flows circulate and create hybrids, forming a proliferation and variety of modernities. Appadurai also applies ideas of flow and disjuncture to religion and culture (Appadurai 1996, 33). To this end he proposes that we think of cultural forms as fractal and boundary-less, but also overlapping, therefore emphasizing images of flow and uncertainty. He emphasizes that religions are dynamic, moving across time and space and leaving traces and trails with significant effects. He invites scholars to find the various ways that religious flows have left traces, which transform people's beliefs and practices (Appadurai 1996, 62). I investigate traces of Orientalism and discourses of modern Buddhism at work in the presentation of meditation to international visitors.

These processes of cultural flows within globalization, therefore are useful in analyzing broad trends within modern religious traditions. Tweed's (2008) theory of religion in *Crossing and Dwelling* makes sense of religious life in a transnational period and addresses themes of movement and flow. Tweed exhorts scholars to trace the flows of people and their beliefs across boundaries. He finds that most religious theories do not highlight historical relations or the complexity and changing nature of religious traditions. They do not pay attention to hybridity or the fact that religions are products of processes of contact and exchange (Tweed 2008, 6). Tweed defines religions as "confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and superhuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries" (Tweed 2008, 54). I draw predominantly on the idea of religion as 'confluences of organic-cultural

flows,' as I delineate these flows within the contact zone of Thailand's international meditation centers.

These flows within intercultural exchange create mixtures of the religious and secular. Tweed theorizes that religion is a flowing together of currents that can intersect with other religions or non-religions, thus changing the original stream or creating a new one. This metaphor "avoids essentializing religious traditions as static, isolated, and immutable substances, and so moves toward more satisfying answers to questions about how religions relate to one another and transform each other through contact" (Tweed 2008, 60). Said writes similarly that all culture is "entangled and overlapping with what used to be regarded as extraneous elements" (Said 1993, 17). Religion too, as part of culture, overlaps and becomes interdependent with influences from other religious and non-religious streams. My study, which takes into account both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist, religious and non-religious flows, draws on these ideas to analyze hybridity and confluence within Thailand's international meditation centers.

The global flows of Buddhism can be traced by following the appeal of meditation as it enters new societies and the popularity of adapted formations of the practice. Lehmann writes about these adapted formations as stemming from a form of globalization that is characteristic of contemporary religion. These disorganized formations are driven by independent actors "who pick and choose elements from different cultures (modern and premodern) without regard to the constraints of regulating, official religious hierarchy" (Lehmann 2002, 345). Modernity provides the force for creating new frontiers in diverse contexts so that

globalization can engage in processes of unbinding both national and local cultures, producing complex and situational identities (Lehmann 2002, 347). Therefore globalization creates new forms of religiosity without the boundaries previously present, so that religious identities are becoming less and less appropriate, and this phenomenon has affected Buddhist traditions. Through globalization new centers of Buddhist authority are being created throughout the world. These new centers interact with and affect traditional Buddhist centers. I explore the flows of these mutual influences in regard to Thailand's meditative practices.

With globalization, distance and borders become increasingly irrelevant allowing for transnational networks to form and ideas to circulate rapidly. Tourism, migration, missionization, and diasporic communities are also increasing due to globalization—this movement creates hybridities at a level and rate previously unmatched. Tourism is a significant way in which global flows and circulation of ideas can be analyzed. Salazar finds that collective imaginaries represent and attribute meaning to our lifeworlds, building upon implicit understandings to influence collective behavior (Salazar 2010, 7). Salazar argues that these imaginaries “‘travel’ in space and time through well-established circular conduits” (Salazar 2010, 9). By contextualizing the history of interpretation of Buddhism and discourses of modern Buddhism I show how, through globalization, Thai tourist literature and meditation teachings draw from a wide range of cultural imaginaries in order to present a fantasy of religious exploration in Thailand.



## **Tourism, Religion, and Commodification**

Together with the revival of *vipassanā* meditation and the influence of modern Buddhism, international tourism in Thailand has helped to create new cultural and social spaces for international meditators. Therefore another issue of interest for this study is the complex relationship between tourism, religion, and commodification. As various Buddhist institutions promote meditation retreats, meditation becomes commodified while it is shaped into a desirable experience. Promotional materials within Thailand draw from notions of tourism as an escape from modern life. Meditation enhances the idea of escape as it is seen to promote relaxation and peacefulness within natural settings. I investigate the ways in which various voices participate in this discourse to make meditation an object of desire and thereby commodify it.

Scholarship, as well as popular ideas concerning religion and commerce, often assumes that this mixing rings a disingenuous note. This section demonstrates that a negative relationship between commodities and religiosity is a false assumption. I argue that commodifying the sacred does not lead to a decrease in religiosity, but rather shows how religious practice is reconfigured in its relationship with the market and leads to new social spaces through reinterpretation and hybridity (Hefner 1998; Tambiah 1984; Taylor 2008). The critique of consumer culture and capitalism appears especially in studies of religion, with the idea that consumption practices invade, intrude and threaten the sentiment of the religious domain leading ultimately to its disgrace and

domination by the vulgarity of market forces (Marx 1912; Ward 2003). A critical portrayal of consumption is premised on the view that consumer culture negatively changes one's relationship to religious beliefs and practices through its emphasis on hedonism and worldly pleasures (Featherstone 2007, 111). However, religion and commerce are often entangled in complex, intimate ways proving that the assumed polarity between religion and the marketplace is unfounded (Sinha 2011, 201). Rather than leading to the degradation and fragmentation of religious traditions, Sinha argues that “. . . consumption could be an imaginative and creative process, involving the participation of active agents—the consumers—who appropriate goods and commodities for their own specific, meaningful purposes” (Sinha 2011, 198). Building on the scholarship concerning religious commodification in Thailand,<sup>11</sup> I examine the ways in which Thai Buddhist meditation is promoted to foreigners as a desirable commodity, and the selective appropriations that foreign meditators display in their meditation retreat experiences.

A history of scholarship demonstrates how religion has interacted in a variety of ways with commerce. Weber's (2003 [1958]) classic work on the affinity between Protestantism and the spirit of capitalism illustrates the ways that religion can be a causal factor in transforming economic exchange. The ideology

---

<sup>11</sup> For scholarship concerning religious commodification specifically in Thailand see Tambiah (1984), Kitiarsa's (2007) volume on religious commodification in Asia, and other seminal articles on the state of the commodification of Thai Buddhism in the 1990s (Apinya Fuengfusakul (1993); Jackson (1999); Satha-Anan (1990), as well as Tambiah's classic study of forest saints and amulets (1984), and James L. Taylor's (2008) more recent work on urban religiosity in Thailand.

and beliefs of Calvinist Protestantism, Weber held, were uniquely suited to capitalism because the basic values of both systems aligned. Therefore the flourishing of capitalism reflected the religious complex of the Protestant worldview. More recently Taylor (2008) discusses how the current commodification of Thai Buddhism is a response to globalization through the case of the new religious movement, Dhammakaya. The leader of the movement, Phra Dhammacayo, applies a capitalist logic to Buddhist merit making, explicitly linking material benefits with large donations to Dhammakaya projects. Dhammakaya is the most visible and controversial of the new religious movements in Thailand primarily because of this reinterpretation of merit making. This movement represents one of a variety of ways religion and commerce interact in modern societies.

Tambiah (1984) discusses another aspect of the commodification of Thai Buddhism: the amulet trade. He argues the function of amulets, traditionally, was to remember the Buddha and revered monks. Amulets now function as goods that can be sold for profit. Because of this, amulets have entered into a consumerist cycle of monetary value and increased consumption.<sup>12</sup> This shift demonstrates how religious movements and practices that connect with commerce are complex expressions of religiosity within daily life. Hefner as well argues that

“There is a relationship between market growth and religious revival . . . Religion is not being everywhere pressed toward individualistic or hedonistic ends, as some might predict in an era of rising affluence and detraditionalization. Nor is it being uniformly used to mobilize resistance

---

<sup>12</sup> These authors’ work and the implications for the commercialization of Thai Buddhism will be more fully explored in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

against the individualizing or alienating tendencies of capitalism and urban life” (Hefner 1998, 26-270).

Thus there can exist a middle ground where religious traditions neither lose their sense of discipline and asceticism nor do they resist consumerism and exit from society. Religious traditions, such as that of Thai Buddhism, find ways to commodify certain practices that capitalize on reified images of Thailand. The commodification of meditation demonstrates how Thai Buddhists, in conjunction with international meditators and tourists, connect with consumer markets as they provide a decontextualized product tailored to a specific audience.

Together tourism and consumption lead to postmodern discourses that contribute to an increasing number of religious vacations. Tweed finds that “sometimes tourism overlaps with pilgrimage as consumers of aesthetic pleasures and leisure diversions invest their travel with spiritual significance” (Tweed 2008, 131). Religious travel is contributing to a postmodern religiosity wherein people experience aspects of religious traditions and integrate some features into their changing religious worldviews. Religious tourism, in this context, is not a substitute for organized religion but is instead a space where tourists are encouraged to sample a number of religious practices and possibly integrate them into their life (Vukonic 2002). Tourism, therefore, constitutes another avenue for new forms of religiosity. For some the search for the sacred has been replaced by a search for the exotic cultural other. Meditation is especially significant in this regard because it offers an experience and practice that can be consumed.

Desire for religious tourism and the commodification of this experience was possible due to the role of print capitalism (Anderson 2006).<sup>13</sup> Literature about meditation was instrumental in creating a modern desire for the practice, which is advertised as a way to deal with or escape from modern disenchantment and malaise. Eliade writes of modern man's fear and anguish of death and nothingness as he finds much of the modern world has lost its faith (Eliade 1960, 236). He continues to describe the nostalgia of modern man who longs for the time of ancient religions when everyone's worldview was pervaded by a religious sensibility, and the sacred was easily recognized. Modern man seeks to go back to this time because he finds historical time lacks value or purpose (Eliade 1971, 147-154). Weber also writes of the disenchantment of the modern world that is characterized by fragmentation, autonomy, estrangement, and dissatisfaction. Modern man is subjugated to such conditions because of continuous rationalization and knowledge that unity or common values can never be achieved (Weber 2003 [1958]).

The postmodern condition is therefore marked by a nostalgic longing for a simpler way of life with moral certitude. Influences from the West are seen to impact religions globally so that there is increasing secularization and

---

<sup>13</sup> According to Anderson, print-capitalism, or the expansion of printed materials, contributed to the historical rise of nationalism and the sense of imagined nations. People who spoke and read one vernacular became aware of the many others like them who spoke and read the same vernacular. This contributed to a sense of an 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006, 44-46). In a similar way, people who have access to printed materials about meditation are able to imagine themselves as part of a larger community, practicing meditation in an exotic setting in the mountains of Asia.

marginalization of public religiosity (Taylor 2008; Casanova 1994). Because modernity is often defined by increased secularization, urbanization, and rationalization, a search for re-enchantment marks much of the commodification of meditation. Modern man sees value in a timeless era, and tourist materials evocatively draw on this. Tourist publications draw on this idea of returning to a mythical, unchanged past, when promoting Thailand's international meditation centers. Along with tourism and modernity, this study takes part within a wider conversation of global Buddhism.

### **Global Buddhist Studies**

Buddhism has been especially prominent and successful in making use of globalization processes by attracting large numbers of followers from non-Buddhist countries. However in taking advantage of global flows, new streams have been created. Peter Beyer writes about the new formations of Buddhism often created in Western countries:

“ . . . the Western converts have formed their own organizations largely independent of Buddhist forms from the ‘sending’ countries like Tibet and Japan. To be sure, much of this Western Buddhism has depended on the ‘missionary’ activity of Buddhist masters and leaders from traditionally Buddhist Asian countries . . . Yet the adherents and by now much of the leadership of most of these Western organizations consists of Westerners, and the particular versions of Buddhism practiced in these organizations are in most cases quite different when compared to the typical practice in Asian countries. As with various forms of Christianity in the non-West, the Buddhism of Western converts has spawned new Buddhist variations in their own way just as legitimate or authentic as those of the older Buddhist regions” (Beyer 2007, 451).

The body of scholarship on Buddhism in Western and non-Buddhist countries illuminates the global flows of this tradition. Many of these studies look at the reception of Buddhism in Euro-American contexts. Almond (1998) analyzes the British understanding of Buddhism during the Victorian age in *The British Discovery of Buddhism*. He shows that Victorians selectively accepted or rejected facets of Buddhism based on their values and social mores. Tweed (1992) looks at the reception of Buddhism in Victorian America, analyzing the diversity of reactions including criticism, sympathy, and conversion. Harris (2006) also looks at the British understandings of Buddhism but within colonial and missionary writings from Sri Lanka. She analyzes the accounts of these early writers and the doctrines that were deemed acceptable and unacceptable. Harris shows that the understanding of Buddhism has as much to do with the contexts of one's home country as it does with the tradition as found in Asia. Prothero (1996) illustrates how one individual, Henry Steel Olcott, maintained his American cultural and religious ideals while appropriating Buddhist ideas. Prothero calls this process creolization because Olcott maintained his Protestant grammar but added a Buddhist vocabulary. What these projects are missing, however, is the focus on both sides of the cultural flows. These studies analyze the Euro-American processes of appropriating and understanding Buddhism, but not the contributions and influence of the Asian Buddhists to this dialogue.

The field of Buddhist studies has increasingly contributed to studies of contemporary religion. Buddhism is a global religion and Buddhist studies

scholars have begun to theorize about this phenomenon.<sup>14</sup> However, scholarship on this topic is bifurcated to include either studies focusing on Buddhism adapting to Western countries or studies concerning Buddhism in Asian countries. This bifurcation is unrepresentative of reality as Buddhist practitioners continually oscillate between East and West. Therefore this study takes into account the reflexivity of cultural exchange and phenomenon of transnational links.

It is necessary to acknowledge an intercultural mimesis between Asian Buddhists and their non-native Buddhist students. Hallisey (1995) addresses this theme of intercultural mimesis by drawing attention to the role that both Asian Buddhists and Orientalist scholars played in constructing knowledge about Buddhism. He critiques scholarship that does not attend to this intercultural exchange and dialogue (Hallisey 1995, 33). Acknowledgement of interchange and agency is critical for a postcolonial study. Buddhism in the West has been constructed in response to Orientalist cultural assumptions and interests but the tactics and innovations of Asian Buddhists also deserve to be acknowledged (King 1999, 152). I acknowledge this by investigating discourses of modern Buddhism that are propagated by international meditation center teachers over the course of their exchanges with international meditators.

These global flows are more complex than a center-periphery model; it is not only Buddhist countries influencing non-Buddhist ones, nor is it the reverse, but both sides continually influencing and creating new flows and streams.

---

<sup>14</sup> See for example Baumann (1994, 1995, 1997, 2001, 2002), Cadge (2005), McAra (2007), McMahan (2008), Prebish (1999), Rocha (2006), Tweed (1992, 2002), Wilson (2009).



Specifically, the practice of meditation has been the primary stimulus within global Buddhist flows. Thinking of meditation as a commodity is helpful in this context. Rosaldo and Inda write that “. . . commodities drift briskly from one locality to another, becoming primary mediators in the encounter between culturally distant others” (Inda & Rosaldo , 5). The practice of meditation has become disembedded and thus moves freely between cultures. Meditative practices are modified through contact and are also reinscribed in new cultural contexts in diverse ways. Meditation lineages spread throughout the Buddhist and non-Buddhist world through the establishment of branch meditation centers internationally. I next turn to my particular methods for studying meditation teachings within Thailand’s international meditation centers.

## **Methodology**

This dissertation incorporates ethnographic work and analysis of textual sources using the disciplinary perspectives of religious studies and anthropology. I have interviewed over thirty international meditation center teachers and visited over twenty sites for varying lengths of time from August 2009-September 2010. During this period I have expressed my observations and fieldwork analysis via my research website, “Wandering Dhamma.”<sup>15</sup> My fieldwork experiences include attending ten-day retreats at long-running and well-attended English-speaking centers as well as shorter visits to sites throughout Thailand, which have shorter

---

<sup>15</sup> See [wanderingdhamma.org](http://wanderingdhamma.org).

histories and house English-speaking meditation teachers and small groups of international visitors.<sup>16</sup> At these sites, I investigated how English-speakers learn about Thai Buddhism and the practice of meditation. Through participant-observation I delved deeper into the ways teachings are received by and presented to the foreign participants. I am not focusing on any particular lineage or school of meditation, but rather the pedagogical strategies of the teachers and the ways they utilize the physical environment of each site.<sup>17</sup> My approach in analyzing my data aligns with that of King (1999). His aim in *Orientalism and Religion* is to ‘anthropologize’ the West and to make Western constructions of reality ‘exotic’ by drawing attention to the West’s cultural particularities. Through looking at international meditators from Western countries as well as other international groups in a Thai Buddhist context, it is easy to draw out the cultural particularities of these non-Thai groups.

Along with highlighting the ways non-Thai groups constitute the exotic, my methodology also relates to the anthropology of meditation. A number of scholars have conducted fieldwork in meditation centers and retreats. Houtman

---

<sup>16</sup> I selected sites that consistently host foreign meditators and are the most well-known among travelers and foreign residents. There are a few international meditation centers wherein the qualifier ‘international’ is questionable. These centers might occasionally have a few foreign guests but do not have the institutional structure to support English-speaking guests.

<sup>17</sup> Although lineages are an important organizing feature of Theravāda Buddhism and indeed of meditation methods in Southeast Asia, there are other structures in place for international meditation centers. As we will see some international meditation centers are established based on tourism and demand rather than an established lineage with charismatic teachers. In this way lineage is not the only organizing principle for centers that cater to international meditators.

(1990), who wrote his dissertation on meditative traditions of Burma, has also done ethnographic work in meditation centers and found it challenging, if not impossible. He writes that he found remarkably little information of ethnographic value about *vipassanā* while spending 10 days at the International Meditation Centre in Heddington, England and in 2 weeks at the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha in Yangon, Burma. Being a foreigner, he was grouped with other international meditators. Because of this he was isolated from the Burmese practitioners and what he considered authentic ethnographic data. He was denied concrete information about the organization of the centers or the lives of the teachers or meditators. He also could not combine meditation with ethnographic observation as the center forbade speaking, reading, or writing.

Houtman relates how his curiosity about the daily functioning of the center hindered his ability to meditate, and he could not convince his teachers he was making progress. When he tried talking to Burmese meditators and administrators they were either busy meditating or teaching. He found that the Burmese meditators did not have time or inclination to sit around socializing. Social pleasantries were a distraction to meditation and there were few occasions for small talk. Houtman therefore couldn't have written his dissertation if he only meditated, and if he were strictly a researcher he would have been unable to gain access to the teachers and meditators he wished to interview. He writes, “Academic anthropology, I concluded, was irreconcilable with meditation” (Houtman 1990, 132).

I had a markedly different experience in the Thai meditation centers. For the most part, the monk and lay teachers understood that I was doing research but were also happy I decided to meditate as they thought my research would have no value without the practice component. We agreed that I would meditate and report to them as a regular meditator, but at the end of my retreat I could conduct research interviews. This arrangement worked out well in many of the centers. Of course my meditation could have progressed further had I not been interested in talking with the international and Thai meditators, and attending the evening and morning chantings with the *mae chii*<sup>18</sup> and female Thai meditators. However, many meditation teachers understood that I was interested in the ‘Buddhist’ aspect of living at a center and encouraged a deeper understanding of this as long as it did not interfere too much with my meditation. Therefore many of the Thai meditation centers are not as strict as the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha in Yangon, and were more flexible in terms of their evaluation of academic knowledge. They found my research a valuable pursuit of knowledge, but of course, not as valuable as attaining liberation.

---

<sup>18</sup> *Mae Chii* are white-robed Thai Buddhist nuns. Because females cannot be fully ordained within the Thai sangha, the status of *mae chii* creates for the female renunciant a lifestyle that is more disciplined than that of a lay person but does not adhere to as many behavioral rules as that of a fully ordained monastic.



Figure 1. *Mae chii* chanting, Wat Chom Tong, Chom Tong, Thailand

Jordt (2007) was more successful than Houtman in conducting ethnographic fieldwork at the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha. However, Jordt had a personal background and interest in meditation and was ordained at her fieldsite. Along with observations at the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha, she also interviewed members of the government ministries and high-ranking monks. She found her status as a meditator helped her to gain access to high-level information with her visas issued from the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs, and it allowed her to stay for longer periods than other visitors. Jordt admits that conducting ethnography in this context is difficult. She writes:

“From an ethnographic point of view, meditation presents a challenge as a subject of study. . . Although the conditions for this practice are carefully structured at MTY {Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha} and one can refer to this structure in a tangible way, the inward encounter is less accessible. The challenge to the ethnographer is immediately obvious on entering a meditation hall” (Jordt 2007, 56).

The challenge that Jordt is referring to is the fact that the meditators are all sitting straight-backed with their eyes closed in absolute silence. In considering how to connect social scientific research techniques to this phenomenon, she aligns her study with other ethnographies of interiority, such as ones that study ritual, embodiment, and artistic expression (Jordt 2007, 58). I agree with the difficulty such an interior practice as meditation creates for the anthropologist; however for my research focus and questions, I was not primarily interested in the inward experience. My observations concerned the interaction of the international meditators and their teachers, reflections of international meditators, their teachers’ strategies for instructing their students, and the presentations of meditation and Buddhism to large groups of foreign meditators at group meditation sites.

Another ethnographer who focuses to a large extent on meditation is Cook (2010) in her recent book called *Meditation and Modern Buddhism*. She ordained as a *mae chii* and participated in the meditation retreats required for all monastics in the meditation temple, Wat Bonamron, where she resided. Cook found that experiential knowledge of meditation “was of paramount importance if I was to have any understanding of how meditation becomes meaningful and why people commit themselves to what is often a grueling practice” (Cook 2010, 19). She

considered her ordination to be central to her research and a personal commitment that was understood as a demonstration of respect for monasticism and the monastic project. It was known in the monastery that she would be doing anthropological research but also that she was committed to ordination and meditation. This resembles the balance that I was able to achieve while researching at the international meditation centers I visited. International meditation center teachers, for the most part, value and feel proud that a non-Thai is conducting research at their temple. If the researcher also participates in meditation, this shows her respect for the tradition and is thought to enhance the information collected.

Michal Pagis (2008) also conducted ethnographic fieldwork concerning meditation. In her dissertation she is interested in the organization and method of S.N. Goenka. She focuses on the popular perception and practice of meditation rather than the details of a particular site where the method is practiced. I also chose a variety of sites that would illuminate the practices of foreign meditators in Thailand. I found that each of the sites I researched captured different aspects of foreign meditators' experiences.

With permission from the international meditation center teachers, I was able to connect with other international meditators inside and outside of retreat sites. Depending on the structure of the retreat, there is often time during the orientation and closing periods for discussion with participants. In those cases I used this time to describe my research and make contacts with other retreatants. At some of the less strict centers that do not require silence I was able to

communicate, interview, and discuss the motivations and reflections about the meditation experience in Thailand with international meditators during the retreat period.

### **Focus and Questions**

This dissertation considers boundary crossing and boundary crossers, and the social phenomena that accompany this such as commodification, reinterpretation, hybridity and tourism. I was motivated to undertake this study because of my long-term interest in understanding religious change and adaptation in modernity. During my last semester as an undergraduate I conducted field research at meditation centers in the Boston area for a seminar paper comparing contemporary meditation practice with the first Buddhist communities. At this time, I realized that I was drawn to topics concerning religion in modernity. Through this experience I also developed an interest in meditation and a desire to study this global phenomenon more closely.

In the summer of 2008 I conducted preliminary research in Thailand. During this time I discovered the rich field of international meditation centers available for research. I began to uncover the diversity of meditation instruction geared toward English-speakers and non-Buddhists. During that summer I participated in two retreats in order to sample what the field research would demand. Through this practice and meeting some of the international meditation center teachers, I developed contacts that would prove to be valuable during my dissertation research period. The experience also helped me win a Fulbright grant



to conduct this research. In August 2009 I returned to Thailand and began visiting sites, participating in retreats, making contacts and conducting interviews, a process which lasted over thirteen months. This multi-sited field research was complex at times but ultimately rewarding for the range and quality of data I was able to collect.

Through the course of my dissertation field research I developed a set of questions to which I offer answers in this dissertation: How do international meditation center teachers relate to non-Buddhists? What are the consequences of treating meditation as a non-Buddhist practice? What happens to ritual and devotional activities in this context? What kinds of new social spaces are being created through international meditation centers? What are the motivations and goals of international meditators? What are the significant discourses surrounding the promotion of meditation? How do these affect the ways meditation is taught?

### **Chapter Summaries**

In order to foreground hybrid religiosity, which, in this context, mixes meditation with other religious and non-religious beliefs and practices, the scholarly term and phenomenon of modern Buddhism is explored in Chapter 2. Meditation has a significant role within the phenomenon of modern Buddhism. Modern Buddhist writing often divides Buddhism into ‘cultural’ and ‘universal’ forms. The most significant ‘universal’ aspect of Buddhism is its meditation practice. This opens up a way for practitioners to practice meditation as an abstract element of the tradition— divorced from other so-called ‘cultural’

practices. This discourse of meditation as a decontextualized component of Buddhism is a significant factor in the creation of hybrid religiosities. Meditation has become a secular practice in the popular imagination that isn't only intended for Buddhists. These discourses are affirmed and recognized in the interesting and illuminating example of Thailand's international meditation centers. After this background on modern Buddhism, Chapter 3 turns to the specific case of *vipassanā* meditation. I give an overview of the modern history of *vipassanā* meditation as well as Thai Buddhist understandings of the practice. The chapter concludes with an overview of Thailand's meditative practices and sites that are most popular with international meditators.

These discourses surrounding meditation and modernity are extended further when promoting the practice. Chapter 4 explores the representations of meditation in tourism brochures, meditation guidebooks, and meditation retreat pamphlets in Thailand. Investigating these materials through a postcolonial lens, I argue that Romantic, ancient, authentic, and scientific discourses of meditation serve to reinforce Orientalist ideas of an 'other.' Described as both modern, with its rational and scientific approach, as well as rooted within the traditional Thai monastic setting, meditation provides the best of all possible worlds for advertising a spiritual vacation. Although much has been said about commodification and cultural tourism as well as consumerism within modern Thai Buddhism, the methods by which Thai Buddhists have tried to communicate meditation teachings and practices to a foreign audience have not been explored. The experience becomes the souvenir or marker of taking the other back home.

In the subsequent chapters I explore in detail the experiences of international meditators and the teachings about Buddhist meditation that they receive. Chapter 5 demonstrates that the experience of and response to meditation retreats in Thailand has many faces—from travelers who mix meditation with a beach vacation to serious practitioners with hopes of becoming ordained; from accidental religious tourists to people who intend to change their lives. All of this diversity illustrates the various routes by which hybrid religiosities are created. The portraits of international meditators discussed here illustrate the extent to which meditation has become divorced from the Thai Buddhist context. International meditators selectively appropriate aspects of the meditation retreat according to their personal motivations and goals. An experience of the exotic, a connection with nature, a way to recover from addiction, and catharsis are all discourses with which international meditators engage when deciding to attend a meditation retreat. This chapter concludes with a detailed exploration of the retreat settings, schedules, activities, and meditation experiences of participants in two disparate international retreat centers.

Chapter 6 investigates ways international meditation center teachers specifically adapt their teachings for foreign visitors. International meditators' opinions and ideas about meditation and the Buddhist tradition influence the ways meditation teachings are offered and presented to them. The meditation instructions may be an indigenous Thai meditation method or popular *vipassanā* method such as that of Mahāsī Sayadaw, but the way they are presented to foreigners is a product of intercultural dialogue, and it results in both hybrid

teachings and hybrid religiosity. Reinterpretation is necessary as religions encounter modernity, globalize, and connect with new communities and audiences. The discursive strategies that Thailand's international meditation center teachers employ show the necessity of reinterpretation and the creation of new forms of hybrid religiosity. Through international meditation center teachers' various strategies of reinterpretation, Buddhist meditative practices become part of a hybrid religiosity among international meditators. Both teachers, with their adaptations and reinterpretations, and international meditators, through their understandings based on popular discourses of Buddhism work together to create these hybrid discourses and hybrid religiosity. In this chapter I delineate the conditions and outcomes of hybridity in Thailand's international meditation centers.

The Conclusion to this dissertation revisits the main themes and arguments presented throughout. I summarize prevalent discourses of meditation and reveal their consequences as seen in the creation of hybrid religiosities and identities. The conclusion also revisits themes of religious identity, spiritual tourism, and the connection of modern Buddhist discourses to modern-day practices in Thailand's international meditation centers. I conclude by pointing to the global Buddhist networks that are created through participation in meditation retreats as well as the broader implications of my study for religious studies' theories of practices of the self.

## **Conclusion**

International meditators' interactions with Thai Buddhism and meditation represent a juxtaposition of isolation and engagement, of traditional lineage and reinterpretation, of Buddhist practices and new religious formations. Each traveler negotiates this tension between absorbing Thai Buddhist culture and practicing meditation in relative isolation. This continuum from cultural engagement to the practice of meditation, and its implications, demonstrate an extension of Orientalist discourse, out of which arose this distinction between 'culture' and the 'universal' practice of meditation. This dissertation addresses some of the most critical problems in the study of religion, how are new formations of religion constructed and constituted, and how are they engaged with more traditional forms? If we are going to learn from new modes of religiosity we need to investigate these sites of tension and interaction. The secularization theory linked modernity to disenchantment but increasingly scholars are finding that modernity instead embraces new religious articulations. Therefore this work adds to the burgeoning scholarship that reconsiders the relationship between religion and modernity and the ways cultural and religious encounters provide fresh perspectives on religious theory.

## Chapter 2

### MODERN BUDDHISM AND THE DECONTEXTUALIZED PRACTICE OF MEDITATION

This chapter explains how meditation has come to be perceived as non-religious in various contexts, and what it means for a tradition to propagate within the context of postmodernism and globalization. One significant way Theravāda has maneuvered within modernity is melding itself into other cultural and religious frameworks through its *vipassanā* meditation. This practice has been characterized as secular and transcultural. In this way the practice becomes so diffuse that in some cases it is unrecognizable. In order to foreground the process of disembedding meditation from its Buddhist roots, I first contextualize Orientalist and modern Buddhist scholarship. I explore this history as well as the specific case of Thailand wherein I analyze the particular manifestations of modern Buddhism within the country's history. In the second part of this chapter, I look at secular postmodern conjunctures of meditation including psychology and science as well as the incorporation of Buddhist meditation into theistic faith contexts.

The historical processes of scholarly and popular interpretations of Buddhism produced the possibility of hybrid religious formations that engage Buddhism and its meditation practice. Modern Buddhist writing often divides Buddhism into 'cultural' and 'universal' forms. These fragmentation and disembedding processes are characteristics of modernity. The most significant 'universal' aspect of Buddhism that is separated from its traditional context is its

meditation practice. This separation allows practitioners to practice meditation as an abstract element of the tradition— divorced from other so-called ‘cultural’ practices.

This discourse of meditation as a decontextualized aspect of Buddhism is a significant factor in the creation of hybrid religious formations within Thailand’s international meditation centers. Modern Buddhist discourses portray meditation as a secular practice with manifold benefits for everyone, not only Buddhists. The significance of this message is clearly visible inside Thailand’s international meditation centers where meditation is divorced from the Buddhist context specifically for foreign travelers. The perspectives of international meditators and the resulting hybridities of practice in Thailand are connected to Orientalist interpretations and the phenomenon of modern Buddhism.

### **Orientalism and Buddhism**

Said’s (1978) theory of Orientalism<sup>19</sup> is applicable to the Western interpretation of Buddhism. His theory provides the context from which to examine the frameworks wherein Buddhism was constructed. Orientalism describes the ways in which European powers sought to dominate colonized countries, not only through physical force, but also through knowledge. As colonizers learned about the colonial world, they created discourses of unbalanced

---

<sup>19</sup> Edward Said made the term ‘Orientalism’ well-known in his book of the same title. In it he defines Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (Said 1978, 2).

power and domination over colonized nations through their representations of the Orient. Said describes how Orientalists found the cultures and ways of life of the countries in the Orient to be in direct contrast with those of European nations. If Europe was rational and organized then the Orient was filled with irrationality and disorder. In this way Orientalists maintained the discourse that Europe exemplified the height of human progress. By controlling the discourse surrounding knowledge of the Orient, Orientalists in a sense created the Orient and the terms through which East and West were constructed. This knowledge, therefore, represented the Orient as justifiably colonized and legitimated the ideology of imperialism (Said 1978, 3).

Orientalism played a role in the creation of discourses of modern Buddhism. The main characteristics of Orientalist studies of Buddhism are textual bias and creation of an 'original' Buddhism, along with humanizing the Buddha, demythologizing cosmological aspects, and emphasizing rational elements. Scholars assert that discourses of modern Buddhism were at least partly constituted during interaction with Western knowledge, technologies, and people. During the colonial period Asian Buddhists were in conversation with Oriental scholars of the tradition. These early scholars sought to learn about the traditions of the countries they controlled and through this, to find justifications for this control. They became 'curators of the Buddha' as the edited volume by Donald Lopez (1995) on this topic is titled. In this context it is important to note that European Orientalists were the first to present and shape Buddhism for a Western audience (Baumann 2012, 116).



Orientalist scholars sought to understand and construct Buddhism through the textual tradition, but held contempt for the contemporary practice. Orientalists perceived textual Buddhism as a tradition worth preserving (Almond 1988, 24). Protestant frameworks affected the ways scholars conducted research about Buddhism. Because Protestantism deemphasized ritual and the role of clergy, and highlighted the individual relationship with religion through scriptures, Buddhist texts were seen to represent the most ‘original’ and ‘true’ form of Buddhism. This idealized picture of Buddhism, assembled from its ancient texts, contrasted starkly, according to the Orientalist scholars’ interpretation, with contemporary Asian Buddhist lived practices. Because Asian Buddhists were considered to be denigrating their own tradition through their practices, Orientalists took it upon themselves to be the curators of the ‘real’ Buddhism that was worth preserving. In the care of contemporary Asian Buddhists, then, Buddhism had been lost and distorted, and the scholars’ task was to recover its lost glory. Therefore illustrating value in the textual tradition as opposed to the lived religion had advantages that advanced the colonial project.

Theravāda Buddhism of mainland Southeast Asia, through its Pāli Canon,<sup>20</sup> was assessed more highly during the colonial era because of the same Protestant bias that elevated what was thought to be the earliest and closest tradition to the historical Buddha. Early scholars of Buddhism such as T.W. Rhys

---

<sup>20</sup> Collins (1990) argues against the idea of a fixed canon that was closed and agreed upon shortly after the Buddha’s death. Instead he asserts that the Pāli Canon represents the work of one Buddhist community as a strategy of legitimation among other possible redactions of early Buddhist texts.

Dauids and Caroline Rhys Davids,<sup>21</sup> praised knowledge of ancient languages of Pāli and Sanskrit and did not highly value vernacular languages. Through this early textual analysis scholars constructed a life of the Buddha following the Victorian construction of the historical Jesus. Constructing a biography of the Buddha was a key component to understanding the religion within the Protestant lens. The Buddha's life, along with its analogy to the historical Jesus, was also implicitly compared with that of Martin Luther. The Buddha was seen to protest against Hinduism in similar ways as Martin Luther to Catholicism (Almond 1988, 73). The Buddha therefore was seen as a social reformer opposed to the Indian caste system.<sup>22</sup>

This Orientalist view of Buddhism as a universal world religion has been consequential for discourses of modern Buddhism that persist today. Masuzawa has noted that Orientalists constructed a Buddhism that had not been created

---

<sup>21</sup> T.W. Rhys Davids (1843-1922) founded the Pāli Text Society in 1922. Through their roles as leaders of this society, he and his wife, Caroline Rhys Davids (1857-1942), translated much of the Pāli literature that is available today including almost all of the Pāli Canon and a Pāli dictionary. They were both pioneers in the field of Pāli Buddhism, and although the features of Buddhism they document contain an Oriental construct, their rational interpretation of Buddhism formed the basis of understanding for many modern Buddhists (Snodgrass 2007, 186).

<sup>22</sup> In contrast to the Victorian image, Weber influenced later interpreters to understand the Buddha as an indifferent, world-rejecting figure, who is anti-political (Weber 2003 [1958], 206). Weber describes Buddhist monks as remaining passionless in order to facilitate the detachment they must exhibit for the goal of *nibbāna* (Weber 2003 [1958], 208). Buddha, the social reformer, is turned into an asocial, self-reliant individual, not dependent on a religious community, remaining aloof with no social or political component to his activity (Weber 2003 [1958], 213). Schober (2011) argues against Weber's construction of Buddhism that privileges Buddhist texts over lived Buddhist practice. Much recent scholarship has sought to redress this textual bias by listening to Buddhist communities and demonstrating the complexity of Buddhist traditions.

within a specific time and place but rather had sprung from the individual mind of the Buddha. The Buddha's message was thought to be universal, and it was ignored that particular languages and mores of India circa 500BCE shaped the teachings (Masuzawa 2005, 134). Because of this, the notion of a cosmological or ritualized Buddhism did not inform many early converts' understandings of Buddhism. Instead, they saw Buddhist practices as cultural and degenerate, having been artificially grafted onto a pure, universal, world religion. For nineteenth century Europeans this finding led to anxiety about the status of Christianity as the only uniquely universal religion. Masuzawa asserts that the European outlook on Buddhism represented bipolar characteristics of archaic and modern, alien and familiar (Masuzawa 2005, 121).

Lopez (1995) and Hallisey (1995) have sought to rectify the Orientalist construction of Buddhism. They demonstrate the ways that Buddhist studies and colonial history are intertwined. Lopez highlights the perceived alterity of the Buddha and Buddhism, so that Buddhism "could thus serve as a substitute self for Victorian Britain, a self present long ago in the very heart of the Orient" (Lopez 1995, 6). Lopez traces the connections between Buddhist studies and Orientalist scholarship under the study of Indology. He finds that there is still a tendency for Buddhist studies scholarship to replicate the discourses of Buddhists that describe it as a set of universal doctrines that travel from one region to another without significant change (Lopez 1995, 8). Besides replicating Buddhist universalism, some scholars have been critiqued for focusing only on the Western side of Orientalist exchange. Hallisey critiques Almond (1988) for replicating discourses

of Orientalism because Almond only concerns himself with the Victorian British and not with practices of Buddhism in Asia. Hallisey writes that this “has the unintended consequence of once again hypostatizing and reifying an absolute divide between ‘the West’ and ‘the Orient’” (Hallisey 1995, 32). This kind of scholarship has pervaded the popular understanding of Buddhism so that international travelers rarely expect to find regional variations or devotional activities during their visits to Buddhist temples.

Besides the deemphasis on ritual and devotion, the most significant aspect of Orientalism that remains influential for the popular understanding of Buddhism is what Said calls ‘Romantic Orientalism.’<sup>23</sup> Lopez describes the role of Buddhism in this context: to construct fantasies of lost wisdom, ancient civilizations and languages (Lopez 1995, 12). Tweed describes how a Romantic interest in Asia continued in the early nineteenth century. His typology of early American Buddhists includes a ‘Romantic’ type who is interested in the exotic culture and aesthetics of Buddhist Asia including its customs, architecture, and music, among others (Tweed 1992, 70). Almond concurs that it was “those heroic qualities of the Buddha, and the romantic ambience of Buddhism, that attracted so many Victorians” (Almond 1988, 3). These Romantic Orientalists desired a genuine, pure spirituality that they found inaccessible in Christian churches

---

<sup>23</sup> Romantic Orientalism built on the Romantic response to the European Enlightenment. Romantic Orientalists thought that knowledge of Asia could combat the materialism and rationalism of the Occident. Therefore the primary interest to Romantic Orientalists was how Asia could be used to balance the West’s worldly tendencies and help them know themselves better (Said 1976, 115). As we will see these Romantic Orientalist ideas continue today with a focus on Asian spirituality’s benefits to the individual.

(Baumann 2012, 115). McMahan also identifies Romanticism as one of the discourses of modernity that greatly affected the reception of Buddhism in North America. He finds that Romantics exoticize ‘the East’ and “project the hope that the ills of western society can be assuaged by the supposedly more spiritual, primal wisdom of Asia” (McMahan 2008, 11). Romantics seek a spirituality that is unconcerned with materialism and consumerism, and a premodern place filled with ancient wisdom. In this way, Buddhism, as part of the spiritual East, played a role within a wider hope for reenchantment amidst modern malaise (McMahan 2008, 27). McMahan writes that these themes “have worked their way into Buddhist modernism or provided interpretive frameworks that have shaped its development” (McMahan 2008, 81). Modern tourists often display this romantic interest. I have conversed with a number of international meditators who characterized their choice to visit Thailand as ‘a fascination with Asia in general.’ In this way Orientalist projections of Buddhism continue in the popular imagination.

These constructions of Buddhism existed not only in the writings and ideas of Orientalist scholars but also throughout the Buddhist world. Orientalist studies of Buddhism helped to create discourses of modern Buddhism, influencing both Asian Buddhists and later scholars. Lopez (2002) traces the history of this movement throughout Asia through institutions and transnational networks of actors. He argues that a new consciousness was being raised about the history and distinctness of Buddhism, and the need to protect and save it became crucial. In each Asian nation modern Buddhist adaptations and selective

interpretations of Buddhism were rooted in Protestantism, Orientalism, and Romanticism (Baumann 2012, 115). This history of Oriental scholarship and construction of a modern Buddhism is important for understanding the context in which international meditators engage with Thai Buddhism. Today Orientalism and discourses of modern Buddhism still influence interpretations and impressions of Buddhism, which are foundations for intercultural dialogue. Orientalist interpretations of Buddhism laid the groundwork for modern Buddhist studies and continue in the popular imagination as well.

### **Modern Buddhism**

This section analyzes the phenomenon of modern Buddhism in order to illustrate a genealogy of contemporary hybrid religious formations that takes place in Thailand's international meditation centers. I examine modern Buddhism as a form of practice in particular historical contexts and as a scholarly term. In the Buddhist traditions of Asia, the teachings of the Buddha developed in differing ways depending on numerous factors such as the religio-cultural and social contexts in which the tradition entered. With relatively limited contact between Buddhist traditions in premodern times, each context in which Buddhism developed occurred autonomously. During the nineteenth century this development entered a new phase with the introduction of Western colonialism and Western forms of religion. Buddhist responses to these transformations have been labeled modern Buddhism. Modern Buddhism has been molded by the colonial encounter, Orientalist scholarship, the rise of the nation-state,

comparisons with Christianity, as well as internal Theravādin dialogue. The shaping of modern Buddhism continues through the new Buddhist movements and has increased laicization of Buddhist practice.

Bechert (1966) was the first scholar to describe this scholarly category, dividing Buddhist history into three periods: canonical, traditional, and modern. He used modern Buddhism to detail a new phenomenon and transformation within the tradition (Bechert 1973, 85). The modern Buddhist period emerged as Western knowledge and missionaries arrived in Buddhist countries, which Bechert notes caused a “reinterpretation of traditional thought and values” (Bechert 1990, 97). Bechert finds this is characterized by a new importance placed on canonical texts, rationalization of the tradition, scripturalism, demythologization of cosmology, Buddhist forms of activism and nationalism, and revival of meditation (Bechert 1990, 97-99). Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) also find the encounter between Buddhism and other religions constitutes a transformation in the context of Sri Lanka in the latter half of the nineteenth century. They use the term ‘Protestant Buddhism’ to describe the Sinhalese Buddhist protest against Protestant Christian missionaries as well as the increasing equality between monks and laity (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, 7).<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Obeyesekere (1970) first coined the term ‘Protestant Buddhism’ to describe the practices of the new urban middle-class strata of Sinhalese society. I find this term is not useful in describing reinterpretations of Buddhist practices as it is modeled on Christian history. The Asian Buddhist context is too different for such a comparison, as well this term mirrors Orientalist scholars’ interpretations of Buddhism, which placed it within Protestant frameworks. Instead I use the terms

Through the influence of Christian missionaries in Sri Lanka, Gombrich and Obeyesekere argue that monks are criticized if they do not participate in some kind of social welfare project similar to the work of Christian chaplaincies (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, 228).<sup>25</sup> Along with external religious influence, Gombrich and Obeyesekere attribute Buddhist transformations to social changes of population growth, increased opportunities for Western education and literacy, and the emergence of a new middle class. They record how educated leaders, such as Anagarika Dharmapāla, elevated Buddhism's status above other religions because of its rationality, calling Buddhism a universal philosophy and not a religion (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, 10).<sup>26</sup>

More recent scholarship moves away from this 'Protestant Buddhist' terminology and examines indigenous causes, which prefigured modern Buddhism rather than only considering Western colonial influence. Hansen, in the context of colonial Cambodia, characterizes modernist Buddhist educational movements as attempts at purification, authenticity, and rationalism (Hansen

---

Buddhist modernism or modern Buddhism.

<sup>25</sup> The traditional village monk's role was pastoral in his care of the community, which took place in the monastery. Gombrich & Obeyesekere argue that the kind of social engagement required due to Christian missionary influence involves creating new institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and other cultural institutions. They specifically cite the example of the Sarvodaya development movement, which they argue is rooted in Protestant Buddhism through its vision of lay Buddhists' selfless labor for the world (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, 245).

<sup>26</sup> Anagarika Dharmapāla (1864-1933) was one of the key figures in modern Sinhalese Buddhism. He founded the Maha Bodhi Society in 1891 in order to develop the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment as a pilgrimage destination for all Buddhists, and he represented Buddhism in the World Parliament of Religions in 1893.



2007, 3). She finds that imperialism shaped modern Buddhism but asserts that religious modernism was also “a product of the interactions between colonial subjects and other non-Western and pan-Asian alliances. Cambodian and Siamese modernism was influenced by a pan-Theravadin dialogue that reached to Sri Lanka” (Hansen 2007, 2). She argues that the modernist ethical writings under her consideration prefigure the growth of nationalism in Cambodia (Hansen 2007, 3) and that “Buddhism remained the primary medium for understanding and articulating a new self-consciousness of what it meant to be Khmer and a modern person” (Hansen 2007, 12). In the context of Sri Lanka, Blackburn (2001; 2010) also takes into account the ways Sinhalese Buddhists engaged in pre-colonial reform movements. She traces how the eighteenth century new monastic order, Siyam Nikaya, and in particular the scholar-monk Ven. Hikkaduwe Sumangala, shaped new directions within Sri Lankan Buddhism through new educational institutions and Buddhist texts. Blackburn argues that these kinds of innovations challenged the idea of ‘Protestant Buddhism,’ and that colonialism was not the only factor to influence Buddhism in this period. Instead she notes that both European interest in Pāli sources and Siyam Nikaya’s emphasis on Pāli learning constitute examples of ‘intercultural mimesis’ where both constructions of Buddhism resonated with late nineteenth and early twentieth century Sri Lankan Buddhists. In this way scholars of early modern Buddhism assert that discourses of modern Buddhism are characterized by both internal and external influences.

Scholars also identify characteristics of modern Buddhism during the colonial period, with a focus on Buddhist nationalism and identity. Schober

(1995) writes of the characteristics of modern Buddhism that attend to the shift from premodern galactic polities to the creation of the nation-state and beyond. She finds that the modern nation-state is characterized by attempts to centralize the sangha, increasing avenues for social mobility, and accommodating to Western knowledge practices. All of these characteristics lead to increased questioning of the Buddhist tradition and the monastic community. The nation-state maintains some of the characteristics of galactic polities in order to maintain legitimation; however, in contemporary times even this legitimation is no longer effective. New forms of authority, instead, create altered relations between Buddhism and society as seen in the trend of laicization and decline of monastic authority (Schober 1995, 308).

Lopez has written most broadly on the phenomenon of modern Buddhism cross-culturally, which he explicates clearly in the 'Introduction' to his anthology of modern Buddhist writers, *A Modern Buddhist Bible*. He asserts that the trends of modern Buddhism, although they began in disparate locations in response to modernity and continue today, have formed a new sect of Buddhism (Lopez 2002, xxxi). This new sect, Lopez argues, is characterized by rationalism and empiricism, concern for social justice, placing universal over the local and the individual above the community, a focus on equality and the increased role of women, a rejection of ritual, and a return to a pristine past of the tradition (Lopez 2002, ix). These characteristics have made their way to non-Buddhist countries and it is this form of Buddhism that has been combined and inserted into new cultural frameworks. Modern Buddhist actors and practices have formed in

Thailand as well. Thailand's form of modern Buddhism is constituted by similar trends noted by Lopez and distinct formations relative to the particular modern history of Thailand.

### **Modern Buddhism in Thailand**

Although modern Buddhism occurred across the Buddhist landscape, each society encountered a particular engagement with this phenomenon. In mid-nineteenth century Siam, the intellectual atmosphere of the elite expressed more concern with modern sciences than traditional beliefs. The elite began to see certain Buddhist practices and beliefs as superstitions, while they strove to appear modern and civilized. A particular interpretation of Buddhism emerged as a way to demonstrate Siam's modernity (Winichakul 2000). During<sup>27</sup> the three reigns of Rama IV, V, and VI,<sup>28</sup> prominent modern Siamese attempted to demonstrate that at its core, the essence of Buddhism is rational and dependent on empirical analysis.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> An earlier version of the following passage was published in *Explorations, A Graduate Student Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. See Schedneck (2010).

<sup>28</sup> King Mongkut (Rama IV; 1851-1868), King Chulalongkorn (Rama V; 1868-1910) and King Vajiravudh (Rama VI; 1910-1925).

<sup>29</sup> 1851 marks King Mongkut's ascension to the throne, and 1925 marks the end of King Vajiravudh's reign. During these three reigns Siam faced Western powers and ideas of modernization in a substantial way for the first time. The modernization process began in earnest with King Mongkut's reign and was carried through by his two successors. I am not arguing that the monarchy was solely responsible for modernizing Siam but that their collective reigns mark a period of challenge and much negotiation with modernity.

Unlike Western modernity where Christianity was contrasted with secular rationality, in Siam, ritual and protective aspects of Buddhism were counterposed by rational forms of Buddhism. Modern Buddhists were interested in separating themselves from both foreign religions and non-doctrinal and unorthodox forms of Buddhism. Reynolds asserts that “the modernizing tendencies that gained strength during the nineteenth century tended to undercut the traditional cosmological orientations within Buddhism, at least among certain segments of the elite” (Reynolds 1977, 273). The examples below show how Siamese Buddhists created this idea of a modern Buddhism in light of their interactions with Western ideas.

King Mongkut’s Thammayut sect exemplifies a modern form of Buddhism, which focused on rational doctrine and belief while disparaging folk practices. Mongkut sought to make monastic discipline stricter and more distinct within Thai Buddhism (Tiyavanich 1997, 6). Mongkut and the elites of his time accepted the Christian missionaries’ critique that Buddhism was too superstitious and, in order to combat this, held up the rational aspects of the tradition (Tiyavanich 1997, 7). King Mongkut (Rama IV) and later King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) promoted this rationalized form of Buddhism that could stand up to the Christian missionaries’ critiques (Tiyavanich 1997, 213). Reynolds cites the Thammayut sect as contributing and representing a response to these changing qualities of mind with its emphasis on textual fundamentalism, rationalism, and the essentials of the Buddha’s teachings (Reynolds 1973, 125). Reynolds also traces how, among the educated elite, nature and science became separated from

religion and because of this some aspects of Buddhism came to be viewed as superstition and myth.

An example of modern Buddhism at the state level can also be found in the writings of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI). He has argued that the country's primary religion, Theravāda Buddhism, is superior, from an intellectual point of view, to religions practiced elsewhere. He compares Christianity unfavorably to Buddhism saying that his tradition does not foster such incredible beliefs as virgin birth (Greene 1999, 72). Here Vajiravudh is using categories of science and rationality to place Buddhism above other religions. Thus he creates a Buddhist worldview that is appealing from a rational Western point of view.

Another modern Buddhist, Prince Wachirayan, inherited the rationalism with which King Mongkut (Rama IV) applied to the Buddha's teachings. These new ideas about Buddhism became engrained in the minds of the men of Wachirayan's generation after King Mongkut (Rama IV) set the stage with his reform movement. Prince Wachirayan was the supreme patriarch of Siamese Buddhism from 1910-1921 under King Chulalongkorn. He too sought to distinguish 'original' Buddhism from later 'accretions,' and distrusted any aspect of Buddhism that did not stand up to rational explanation (Reynolds 1973, 144). Wachirayan believed early Buddhism existed without any magical practices and sought to return to this past. In his autobiography, Wachirayan describes the shift in thinking within himself and in Siamese Buddhist students toward a more rational understanding of the teachings. He writes:

“One work which struck me was the Kalama-sutta which taught one not to believe blindly and to depend on one’s own thinking. My knowledge and understanding at that time were typical of the modern Dhamma student who chooses to believe some things but not everything” (Reynolds 1979, 30).<sup>30</sup>

Thus some parts of the Buddhist tradition do not cohere with modern values and these were the passages that Wachirayan chose not to believe. Some passages he believed had been inserted by later generations, and other incredible passages he interpreted rationally as allegories and metaphors (Reynolds 1979, 30).

Presbyterian missionary Henry Alabaster presented another example of modern Buddhist writing at this time in *The Wheel of the Law*. This study of Siamese Buddhism was published in London in 1871 and based on Alabaster’s many conversations with Minister of Foreign Treasury, Chao Phraya Thipakorawong. Alabaster writes that in this work he seeks to “give a glimpse of the reasonable religious teaching and beautiful morality which lie buried among the superstitions of corrupted Buddhism” (Alabaster 1971, 247). The work reveals that Thipakorawong was critical of Siamese Buddhist beliefs, which contradicted empirical testing and logical rationality (Alabaster 1971, 2). These descriptions of early Siamese modern Buddhism show the impact of interactions with Western powers and the shifting ideas about religion among the influential Siamese of this period.

Thai Buddhists have drawn on these discourses of science and rationalisms as well as an appropriation of Romantic Orientalism to describe their

---

<sup>30</sup> The Kalama Sutta in the Anguttara Nikaya (AN 3.65) is often cited by modern Buddhists as evidence of the Buddha’s positive evaluation of self-authority. For a critique of this interpretation see Bhikkhu Bodhi (2010).

meditation practices. *Vipassanā* meditation is a large part of the modern Buddhist movement in Thailand. Bhikkhu Sujato asserts:

“The *vipassanāvāda* {the *vipassanā* doctrine} grew up as part of the movement of ‘modernist Buddhism,’ which started in the colonial era as the schools of Buddhism attempted to respond to the challenges of the modern age. This movement swept over the whole of the Buddhist world in a number of guises. In all its varieties, however, the key aspect of modernist Buddhism was rationalism” (Sujato 2009, 80).

He finds that concentration or *samatha* meditation was seen as suspect because of its relationship with supernatural powers and other effects that appeared ‘magical.’<sup>31</sup> *Vipassanā*, however, was portrayed as a rationalized practice that was linked with psychology. This promotion of *vipassanā* has continued within Thailand for both lay Thai Buddhists as well as interested travelers. In these ways Thailand has participated in the global discourses of modern Buddhism since its encounters with Western powers.

The remainder of this section looks at the postmodern conjunctures of Buddhist meditation, both religious and secular, that lead to hybrid formations mixing Buddhist meditation with one’s own cultural framework. These conjunctures form the basis for international meditators’ pre-understandings of meditation before entering a retreat. Motivations for enrolling in a meditation retreat in Thailand range from therapeutic to faith-based. I demonstrate the models for these various forms of engagement through investigating the conjunctures of science, psychology, and theistic faiths.

---

<sup>31</sup> Magic here refers to the supernatural powers (*iddhis*) one can attain through experiencing states of concentrative absorption called *jhānas*. See Chapter 3 on *vipassanā* meditation in this dissertation for more information.

## **Postmodern Conjunctures of Meditation**

Rather than conjunctures of authority and nationalism that shaped Buddhists' responses to colonialism, the international meditation centers of Thailand are characterized by secular conjunctures of science and psychology, and dialogue with theistic religious faiths.<sup>32</sup> These postmodern conjunctures, which began forming during the colonial period, have significant meaning in regard to meditation. Schober illustrates how colonial conjunctures “opened up venues and possibilities that had been beyond the scope of the Burmese cultural imagination” (Schober 2011, 5). In a similar way postmodern conjunctures with meditation have made available a proliferation of creative new avenues for Buddhist practice. Schober finds that “we can discern how intellectual and cultural strategies, like modern rationalism, can be employed to mobilize particular audiences” (Schober 2011, 59). These conjunctures have also created possibilities for non-Buddhist audiences to understand and receive meditation in new ways. In the postmodern context, strategies of reinterpretation using science, psychology, and hybridity with other religious faiths are employed to mobilize international tourists in Thailand to participate in international meditation center retreats. I will first discuss the rise in consciousness of meditation in non-Buddhist contexts, and then explore conjunctures of meditation with science and psychology.

---

<sup>32</sup> Following Scott (1999) I use conjuncture to refer to moments when sets of discursive formations encounter each other. My analysis focuses on the outcome of these meetings, and how they are determined by particular cultural contexts.



### *Meditation in Modern Buddhism*

Meditation, which is synonymous with Buddhism currently, was not discussed widely in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Western Buddhist studies' sources. Lopez marks meditation as significant within the phenomenon of modern Buddhism. He writes, "The essential practice of modern Buddhism was meditation, in keeping with the quest to return to the origin, modern Buddhists looked back to the central image of the tradition, the Buddha seated in meditation beneath a tree, contemplating the ultimate nature of the universe" (Lopez 2002, xxxvlii-xxxvliii). But during the Western colonial encounter with Buddhism, meditation was not seen as part of the monastic life, and it was hard to fit this practice into European frameworks of religion. Tweed finds it was the romantic, rational and esoteric appeal of Buddhism that created its many sympathizers—not its meditation practice. He writes that the "lure of an alien 'intellectual landscape' and the desire for a more intellectually satisfying worldview seems to have been more relevant to nineteenth-century Buddhist interest" (Tweed 1992, 159). But in contemporary times, a study quoted by Tweed found the most important factor motivating exploration of Buddhism was "to find relief from physical and psychological suffering through practices such as chanting and meditation" (Tweed 1992, 159).

While during the late nineteenth century the access to teachers and the ability to engage in meditation practice was limited, this began to change in the

1950s and 1960s when Asian Buddhist leaders sent missionaries abroad.<sup>33</sup> A century after Victorian American Buddhist sympathizers began their intellectual interest in the religion, psychological benefits derived from meditation became much more significant (Tweed 1992, 159). Therefore it was the ability to situate the practice of meditation within psychology and therapy, rather than religious frameworks, and the increasingly widespread availability of lay practice, teachers, and popular books about meditation, that brought it forth eventually to the mainstream.

Placing meditation within this secular psychological framework requires that the practice be removed from its ethical, social, and cultural contexts within Buddhism. Discourses of meditation circulate and create new contexts for Buddhist practices and teachings. Buddhist meditation has become extremely successful as a practice that can be reproduced in a variety of contexts. The construction of meditation as universal has travelled globally through modern Buddhist discourses. Bell writes, “Notions about the universal applicability of Buddhism provided an important impetus for the transmission and reception of Buddhism in new cultural contexts . . . ” (Bell 2000, 7).

The effects of this universalization are the decontextualization and appropriation of these elements within new contexts and worldviews. Inserting

---

<sup>33</sup> One of the first Asian Buddhist missionaries was D.T. Suzuki (1870-1966). He had a large impact on the American understanding and perception of Buddhism. His *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1974 [1934]) is one example of his writing that aims to explain Zen to his Western students. His interpretation of Zen Buddhism is notably psychological and places experience at the forefront of the practice.

meditation within religious and secular contexts has occurred frequently since the development of modern Buddhist practices. Dual processes of disembedding and reinsertion are exemplified through the practice of *vipassanā* meditation in non-religious contexts. The effects of this process can be seen in new combinations of meditation within non-Buddhist contexts. Roof writes that religion in the modern world “is often loosened from its traditional moorings—from history, creeds and doctrines, from broad, symbolic universes, from religious community” (Roof 1999, 109). These modern religious practices have shaped the perception of Buddhism in modern global contexts and in local reinterpretations of Buddhist teachings and practices in Thailand’s international meditation centers. Through the ideas of modern Buddhism, meditation has become a practice divorced from its Buddhist roots. Within Thailand’s international meditation centers, however, it is clear that *vipassanā* cannot be completely removed from its Theravāda worldview. In later chapters I discuss how this context remains connected and the ways international meditation center teachers attempt to transcend this.

The secular conjunctures of science and psychology are related tropes that modern Buddhists utilize to make Buddhist meditation appealing to non-Buddhist audiences. The term ‘science’ used by these authors is nebulous, mostly referring to a method of rational and empirical investigation. A focus on science and rationalism was a large part of the discourses of early Buddhist modernism, but within the postmodern dialogue between science and Buddhism, meditation emerges as a main object of scientific inquiry. Therapeutic benefits represent the most significant way meditation was able to enter mainstream culture. By

delineating these conjunctures I demonstrate the sites of mutual influence between Asia and the West and the contemporary discourse surrounding the relationship of Buddhism with the modern secular world.

### *Science and Meditation*

Science and the scientific worldview have greatly influenced the rise of secularism. Christian Smith writes that the construction of science “considered religion to be irrelevant and often an obscuring impediment to true knowledge” (Smith 2003, 2). He argues that late nineteenth century secularizers created a discourse where science is objective while religion is irrational (Smith 2003, 10). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, liberal Christians were facing a crisis of faith as skepticism of Christianity rose in light of scientific developments. During this same period, Western colonialists were encountering Buddhism and often found it was not opposed to science, but rather compatible with it. Science and Buddhism have had a close relationship and engaging dialogue since this time. McMahan writes “one of the prominent and persistent assertions of Buddhist modernism is that Buddhism is more compatible with a modern, scientific world view than other religions . . .” (McMahan 2012, 162). Buddhists in Asian countries agreed that their religion was scientific—realizing this was a way to represent themselves as modern and to show their tradition’s superiority to Christianity. They argued that Buddhism could withstand the test of secularity and scientific worldviews, when other religions, such as Christianity could not.

This type of argument gave Buddhists an advantage in the early twentieth century as theories of social evolution at the time offered a trajectory of progress moving from superstition, to religion, and culminating with science. Lopez notes, “By claiming it to be science, Buddhism, condemned as a primitive superstition . . . leaps from the bottom of the evolutionary scale to the top” (Lopez 2008, 24). Science was the modern Asian Buddhist weapon against the European colonialist idea of Buddhism as primitive. Schober describes how in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Burmese Buddhists utilized scientific discourse to explain Buddhist teachings to orientalist and interested westerners. This scientific discourse appealed to an audience seeking to define an ‘original’ Buddhism and find a rational system of ethics (Schober 2011, 58).

Through this positive association of Buddhism and science in colonized Southeast Asia, scientific discourse became one of the most important ways Buddhism gained currency in non-Buddhist contexts. David McMahan writes of the Western reception of this ‘scientific’ religion, “The interpretation of Buddhism as consonant with science has been an essential factor in the transmission of Buddhism to the West” (McMahan 2004, 897). Buddhism’s moniker as a ‘scientific religion’ supported the spread of Buddhism. This dialogue has continued through a diversity of figures throughout the Buddhist world such as the Dalai Lama.<sup>34</sup> Cho describes the history of the dialogue between Buddhism

---

<sup>34</sup> The current dialogue between Buddhism and science consists of a large body of literature. Significant among these studies are books that offer both Buddhist and scientists’ perspectives on topics such as cognition and the concept of the mind. The Dalai Lama has been one of the most prominent advocates of this dialogue.

and science, delineating how Buddhism is seen to fit a variety of historical scientific frameworks. She writes,

“In the late nineteenth century, the interest was in the Buddhist idea of causality and its compatibility with the mechanistic world view of science. After the Second World War, interest shifted to Buddhist emptiness philosophy and Einsteinian relativity. Currently the attention is on Buddhism and cognitive science . . .” (Cho 2012, 274).

Through the penetration of meditation into mainstream non-Buddhist contexts, Buddhism offered this practice as an object of scientific inquiry. Buddhist meditation, as an extension of this scientific discourse, is reconfigured as a pragmatic technique for healing and rendered as a rational attempt to alter one’s perception of the world (Sharf 1995, 267). The practice of meditation in postmodern Buddhist contexts offers not only an argument for the compatibility of Buddhism and science, but also an object through which to test and verify this coherence.

Scientific studies of meditation began in the 1960s and continue today, especially in regard to the benefits of mindfulness meditation.<sup>35</sup> Many Buddhist teachers have referred to meditation as a method of inquiry into one’s mind.<sup>36</sup> In

---

See Dalai Lama (et. al. 1999; 2006) as well as Ricard & Thuan (2001).

<sup>35</sup> The *Mindfulness Research Guide Website* is an example of this new research. The founder of this site, David Black, hopes for this website to be a comprehensive research guide and electronic source that provides information on the scientific study of mindfulness. Black has undertaken this task in order to update researchers and practitioners on current research and to have a centralized location specifically for mindfulness studies. Resources include publications sorted by month and year and any research that uses empirical measurement tools for mindfulness. There is also a list of research centers that have mindfulness studies as part of their central mission.

<sup>36</sup> For example, in his *Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, Nyanaponika Thera calls

this way meditators become scientists of consciousness and human interiority who test Buddhist practices as a scientist conducting experiments (Wallace 2003, 27).

B. Alan Wallace is one of the most prolific writers in this dialogue between Buddhist meditation and science, publishing a number of recent books on the topic.<sup>37</sup> He cites studies which recommend meditation for improving quality of life of patients with chronic illnesses such as cancer or AIDS (Wallace 2009, 30). Scientific studies have also suggested that meditation improves physical and psychological well-being. One of the most famous experiments involved connecting EEG sensors to highly advanced Tibetan monk meditators to understand the differences in their neural activities (Wallace 2009, 33). All of these cognitive studies are directed toward validating and understanding how the practice of meditation can aid mental and physical health and show an interest in combining scientific methods and Buddhist meditation. Summing up, Wallace asserts that scientists “are showing an unprecedented openness and curiosity to learn more about the physiological and psychological benefits of meditation and to explore its possible value for investigating the nature of the mind from within” (Wallace 2009, 36).

---

meditation a science of the mind and compares the meditator to a scientist who remains unprejudiced until he has examined his experience thoroughly (Nyanaponika Thera 1996 [1954], 42). Goenka calls meditators ‘explorers of inner truth’ (Goenka 1998a, 106) and *vipassanā* an exploration of “the reality within oneself, the material structure and the mental structure” (Goenka 1998b, 109).

<sup>37</sup> See Wallace (2003; 2007; 2009). Most of his writing is not a scholarly appraisal of the dialogue but rather a lament of Western scientific materialism and how Buddhist contemplative practices can help to show that subjective experiences and insights are important components of scientific understandings of the mind.

This dialogue between cognitive science and Buddhist meditation, however, is strictly empirical, testing the neurological effects of meditation rather than arguing for coherencies between Buddhist doctrines and scientific theories (Lopez 2008, 207). This is a significant departure from earlier dialogues between Buddhism and science. Instead of Buddhist leaders and interested sympathizers writing treatises expounding Buddhism's scientific worldview, scientists control this discourse through their experimental choices and their results. However, continuities with the popular imagination of Buddhism remain. Lopez notes, “. . . the focus on Buddhism for this research appears as yet another manifestation of the West's fascination with Buddhism—ever ancient, ever modern—as the most appropriate partner of science” (Lopez 2008, 210).

McMahan critiques these studies as presenting “meditation as a freestanding mode of inquiry, analysis, and transformation” while neglecting “its purposes and functions in its traditional social, ethical, institutional, and cosmological contexts” (McMahan 2008, 209). These contexts are ignored when Buddhist meditation is characterized as either itself a science or a scientific mode of inquiry with the goal of self-exploration. International meditators to Thailand are products of this dialogue and often use meditation as a tool for self-exploration. This idea of understanding the self is carried further in the dialogue between psychology and meditation.



## *Psychology and Meditation*

This engagement with science is also seen with mental therapy and the use of meditation within psychological contexts.<sup>38</sup> Not just a method used in the path towards *nibbāna*, meditation is now perceived as an aid to better mental health and self-discovery, rather than a specifically religious practice (McMahan 2008, 184). McMahan demonstrates how meditation has become disembedded from traditional worlds of Buddhism and has entered a new realm of psychology. Through this disembedding, meditation is no longer under the sole authority of the Buddhist tradition. He writes, “Beginning with Jung’s archetypal psychoanalytic theory and working its way up to current intertwinings of psychotherapy and mindfulness practices, psychology would become one of the most commonly used lenses for the interpretation of Buddhism” (McMahan 2008, 65). Psychologists have likened meditation to psychoanalysis in that both are thought to help reveal the unconscious and repressed memories which lead toward more individual freedom (McMahan 2008, 192).<sup>39</sup> Meditation, as a method of internal observation, is linked to modern psychology in a way that both seeks to

---

<sup>38</sup> Similar to the dialogue between Buddhism and science, Buddhist psychology comprises a large body of literature, a sub-field of Buddhist studies in itself. Some Buddhist universities have degree programs in this field of Buddhist Psychology. For my purposes I am investigating the links between Buddhist meditation and psychology in order to understand the avenues through which the connection between these two systems filter into popular understanding. For this reason I have chosen prominent, pioneering actors within this dialogue.

<sup>39</sup> This dialogue is part of both Theravāda and Zen engagements with psychology. For the Zen interpretation of psychotherapy see Suzuki (et. al. 1960).

aid in healing from emotional trauma as well as create purposefulness in daily activities through mindfulness meditation.<sup>40</sup>

Early on within the dialogue between Buddhism and the West, psychology was a significant framework of interpretation, granting Buddhism prominence and legitimacy. Initial figures in this dialogue stretch back to Sri Lankan Anagarika Dharmapāla and Pāli scholar Rhys-Davids. This early dialogue stressed the connections between canonical Buddhist texts and Western psychology (McMahan 2012, 167). Similar to the Buddhist dialogue with science, the tradition's relationship with psychology began with theoretical works describing how Buddhist doctrines are amenable to Western psychology. In this way Buddhist meditation affords more resources for the Western desire for therapeutic practices and this interest in psychology offers a way for Buddhism to integrate into Western society. These later conjunctures have enabled dialogues between psychologists and Buddhist meditation teachers. Psychologists and mental health care professionals use *vipassanā* mindfulness practices in hospitals and prisons in an extremely secular appropriation of this meditation practice.

Jon Kabat-Zinn has been the pioneering advocate for secular mindfulness practices. Kabat-Zinn was one of the first scientists to measure the effects of meditation from a clinical perspective and has published more than a dozen detailed studies on the effects of mindfulness meditation in major medical

---

<sup>40</sup> A number of recent books position meditation as a secular aid to daily life and all the ills of modernity including relationships, addiction, pain and recovery. See Smalley & Winston (2010) and Boyce (2011).

journals. He is the founder and director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester, Massachusetts. His programs use meditation strictly for practical purposes of reducing pain and decreasing effects of negative emotions, intentionally divorcing the practice from the ethical and cultural Buddhist context. He finds Buddhism too confusing for Americans and asserts that it would be too difficult to learn about a different culture and absorb unfamiliar meditation practices at the same time. For meditation to be accepted in mainstream environments like hospitals, he preferred the techniques to seem neither exotic nor foreign. “If you go in talking about the Buddha and inviting masters with shaved heads for lectures, its going to be perceived right away as some foreign cultural ideology—a belief system. Understandably so, it would likely be rejected” (Kabat-Zinn 1994, xv-xvi). He wants to emphasize that meditation is not a weird or cryptic activity and that it doesn’t involve becoming a mystic or Eastern philosopher (Kabat-Zinn 1994, xvii).

He finds that Buddhist teachings can be divorced from their original contexts because the relevance and significance of mindfulness practices has nothing to do with Buddhism per se or with becoming a Buddhist (Kabat-Zinn 1994, 3). Kabat-Zinn sees the Buddha’s teachings as an ancient force in this world that has nothing to do, essentially, with religious conversion or organized religion. He believes one doesn’t have to think of Buddhism as a religion but as a tool, a technique that is universally applicable. Kabat-Zinn writes, “The Buddha’s elaboration of the lawfulness of the dharma transcends his particular time and

culture of origin . . . even though a religion grew out of it” (Kabat-Zinn 2006, 136-137). He teaches that it’s best to think of mindfulness meditation techniques as universal descriptions of the functioning of the human mind. Thus he claims Buddhist meditation techniques need not be practiced only within the purview of Buddhism. The practices can be done without appealing to an Asian culture and Buddhist authority to authenticate it.

Meditation as a form of psychotherapy is one of the motivations for international meditators in Thailand to enter a meditation retreat. These secular conjunctures of science and psychology characterize the ways some international meditators approach and access Buddhist meditation practices. Through the cultural flows of globalization these discourses of secular Buddhist meditation travel to Thailand and back in the form of intercultural dialogues between international meditation center teachers and their students. But the ways international meditators engage with Buddhist meditation is not only secular; it can also create hybrids with other religious systems.

### **Postmodern Buddhist Hybridity**

These postmodern conjunctures of Buddhist meditation have generated possibilities for reinterpretation and hybridity. Because meditation is decontextualized from its Buddhist context and reinserted into discourses of secularism as well as other religious frameworks, these conjunctures create hybrid teachings and hybrid forms of religiosity. McMahan (2008) argues that modern Buddhism aids in creating hybridity, and finds this is the trajectory Buddhism

takes as it globalizes. He uncovers how the specific representations of Buddhism in North America as a spiritual, democratic, and peaceful tradition are rooted not in Asian historical contexts but recent constructions of Buddhism (McMahan 2008, 4). This reveals how global ideas of Buddhism are drawn from hybrid discourses of both traditional forms of Buddhism as well as Western cultural forms, constructed by both Asian Buddhists and western scholars and sympathizers. This process of reinterpretation has not only taken place within non-Buddhist cultures, but aspects of postmodern conjunctures of meditation can be seen globally through cultural flows of information.

Similar to Prothero's (1996) analysis of Henry Steel Olcott's interpretation of Buddhism as a 'creolization' of Buddhist terms with a Protestant grammar, today religious hybrids form through a diversity of interactions with other religions and secular discourses. There are three prominent ways in which religious hybrids of Buddhist meditation enter into the popular imagination. Hybrid religious memoirs, Asian Buddhist missionary writings, and the *vipassanā* meditation movement in North America all describe a hybrid practice of Buddhist meditation within theistic religious contexts. Because of the religious diversity and awareness of other religions through globalization, hybrid beliefs and practices are more common. Jeffrey Paine writes how one can practice "a second religion merely by being interested and understanding it, by reading about it and trying out a ritual or meditation they liked" (Paine 2004, 15). Wuthnow and Cadge also address this phenomenon, "As scholars of Buddhism often point out, however, Buddhism is not always an exclusive religion like Christianity, Judaism,

or Islam, meaning that people who do not consider themselves Buddhist may nevertheless be influenced by some of its teachings and practices” (Wuthnow & Cadge 2004, 364). Buddhist meditation can supplement other faiths because unlike faith-based religions, Buddhism is seen to have no formal initiation ceremony, making the Buddhist identity more fluid and flexible. Wuthnow and Cadge find that in a number of Buddhist communities meditation practices are appealing because of their inclusivity and flexibility so that practitioners do not have to give up any religious beliefs or participate in a conversion ceremony (Wuthnow & Cadge 2004, 366).

This inclusivity can be seen in the phenomenon of hybrid Buddhist religious identities. One incorporates select Buddhist beliefs and practices into one’s life in addition to one’s primary faith. This occurs especially within Buddhism because of the way it is perceived as a way of life, a science of the mind, or a philosophy— but most of all a practice of meditation from which anyone can learn and benefit from. These non-religious terms make it easy to add Buddhist practices as a support for one’s existing religious identity. This is how many international meditators in Thailand approach their meditation practice— incorporating the practice into their secular or religious frameworks. International meditators receive channels of knowledge and appropriation from three significant directions: memoirs of religious persons who mix Buddhist meditation with a theistic practice, internationally known Buddhist leaders’ interreligious dialogue writings, and the history of *vipassanā* meditation in North America.

*Memoirs of Hybrid Buddhist Religiosities*

After World War II and independence for the new nation-states of Southeast Asia, Buddhism and Christianity were no longer in direct competition. Because of this many modern Buddhists have entered into dialogue with Christians and Jews, creating a new theological subfield (McMahan 2008, 73). As well, a number of authors from theistic traditions have written about their dual religious identities that include Buddhism.<sup>41</sup> They believe that the Buddhist practice of meditation aids in the enhancement and understanding of their theistic faiths.<sup>42</sup> For those who identify as hybrid Buddhists, meditation offers a deeper connection to a Christian or Jewish God.<sup>43</sup> Much of the writing on this topic concerns the relationship between meditation and mysticism, as well as the lament that Judeo-Christian religions once had but have since lost their mystic traditions. Buddhist meditation is thought to signal a return to the contemplative side of these faith-based Judeo-Christian traditions. Christianity and Judaism are seen to

---

<sup>41</sup> What follows is not a theological comparison or exploration of the value or mismatch of combining religions.

<sup>42</sup> For Christian-Buddhist memoirs there are usually other issues about dual belonging such as comparisons between Jesus and Buddha, God and non-self; however, I am focusing on the nature of dual practice. Meditation is the most significant aspect of Buddhism that is appropriated and integrated into other religious frameworks, and this silent contemplative practice is seen to be lacking in theistic traditions.

<sup>43</sup> I am discussing a broad range of travelers and showing the examples and models they can draw upon for incorporating meditation into their own frameworks. There are a smaller number of committed 'dual believers' or people who self-identify as belonging to Buddhism and another theistic religion, but mostly the dialogue is with Christianity. Drew (2011) draws on interviews from six reflective dual believers who have a background in religious studies or theology.

lack silence, a priority on experience, and space for contemplation, while Buddhist meditation fills this gap.<sup>44</sup>

Sylvia Boorstein's (1996) *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist* is one of the first descriptions of a Jewish-Buddhist faith. In this memoir Boorstein reclaims her Jewish faith and identity by learning about Buddhism and meditation practice. She finds that Judaism lacks a meditative aspect (Boorstein 1996, 11), and proclaims that she is a devout Jew because she is a Buddhist—because of the meditation practice she learned (Boorstein 1996, 5). When asked why Jews are looking to Buddhism she responds, “It required practice, not affiliation. It was a great spiritual *path*. It promised transformation” (Boorstein 1996, 12). It is clear that her affiliation with Judaism provides her community and support but her Buddhist affiliation offers practice and silence.

Memoirs and autobiographies concerning hybrid religious identities are also written for the Christian audience. *Christian Zen* by William Johnston (1997 [1971]), is one of the first attempts at integrating Zen meditation into Christianity, but relates the same ideas as Boorstein's book about why Buddhist practice is needed within theistic faiths. Johnston writes that Christianity once had a tradition of contemplation like the one still existing strongly in Buddhism. He writes of Jesus as a master of prayer who taught others this practice, and cites Ignatius of Loyola as a meditation teacher. But Ignatius's method, Johnston believes, was misunderstood and became embroiled with reasoning and thinking, losing its

---

<sup>44</sup> I cannot go into detail about the numerous volumes written by Christians regarding their dialogue with Buddhists. In this section I focus on the appropriation of meditation, mixing the practice with theistic religions.



original mystical flavor. He asserts that young people are interested in Buddhism and Hinduism because they instinctively long for a mystical tradition. At the same time he finds that Christianity portrays itself as a churchgoing religion, with too much theology and not enough silence. He writes, “Perhaps this is why we need the blood transfusion from the East” (Johnston 1997 [1971], 20).

In Knitter’s (2009) more recent work on this topic, *Without Buddha, I Could Not be a Christian*, he echoes Johnston’s call for rejuvenation from Eastern traditions. Knitter calls for a new sacrament to incorporate meditation called the Sacrament of Silence. Although he acknowledges that Buddhists and Christians have different goals, Knitter finds that both seek a mystical experience (Knitter 2009, 155). He believes that these mystical experiences are at the core of all religions but expressed differently in each (Knitter 2009, 158). Knitter writes,

“ . . . such a use of meditative silence has certainly not been excluded from Christian practice, but neither, I believe, has it been sufficiently included. Nor has it been meaningfully and engagingly taught to the Christian faithful. Buddhism, I believe, can help Christians rediscover, or ‘re-member’ and reconstruct, neglected contemplative ingredients of their own tradition” (Knitter 2009, 154).

Along with supplementing faith-based religiosity, hybrid identities point to the postmodern trend of eclecticism. Buddhism is being added to religious identities but nothing is subtracted. Instead of a radical rupture and break with one’s native religion, it is becoming increasingly common to add practices and ideas from other religions as part of one’s encompassing religious worldview. Therefore hybrid religious identities focus on combination rather than conversion, challenging the traditional boundaries of religious identity. They show the

flexible, dynamic nature of postmodern religiosity. These religious memoirs serve as models or possibilities for international meditators in Thailand to incorporate meditation into their own religious or secular frameworks.

### *Asian Buddhist Missionaries*

Another significant component of the hybrid models that international meditators draw from is the perspectives of internationally known Buddhist leaders who advocate Buddhist hybridity. Using case studies of well-known contemporary Buddhist missionaries and leaders of interfaith dialogue, this section furthers my argument concerning the nature of hybrid mixtures with Buddhist meditation. Instead of broad historical trends, this section highlights notable actors who have influenced the incorporation of Buddhism into mainstream non-Buddhist cultures and the popularity of meditation.<sup>45</sup>

Thich Nhat Hanh<sup>46</sup> (1926-present) is an internationally known Vietnamese monk who has written a number of books on the relationship between Buddhism

---

<sup>45</sup> Chapter 5 in this dissertation delves into specific Buddhist missionizing practices in Thailand in relation to modern religious identities. In this section I focus on Buddhist missionary projects that demonstrate how Buddhism especially lends itself to the creation of hybrid religious formations. I offer examples of well-known missionaries to the West who adapted their presentation of Buddhism to this new audience through emphasizing meditation. Although there are many Buddhist missionaries throughout history I am focusing on these modern and contemporary leaders because of their popularity and to illustrate the adaptations they enacted.

<sup>46</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh led a nonviolent resistance movement in Vietnam during the 1960s and traveled internationally to raise awareness about the turmoil in his country. Martin Luther King, Jr. nominated Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. He has established a retreat center, Plum Village, in France and founded

and Christianity (Nhat Hanh 1975; 1995; 1999).<sup>47</sup> Nhat Hanh asserts that Buddhists and Christians are essentially similar and the boundaries between the traditions are artificial (Nhat Hanh 1995, 197). He finds that Buddhists and Christians reach the same truth when they transcend the concepts of the ultimate (Nhat Hanh 1995, 140). This focus on experience allows Nhat Hanh to assert that truth has a common core of which all religions express in different ways.<sup>48</sup> He writes, “I do not think there is that much difference between Christians and Buddhists. Most of the boundaries we have created between our two traditions are artificial. Truth has no boundaries. Our differences may be mostly differences in emphasis” (Nhat Hanh 1995, 154). He also affirms that Buddhists can have Jesus as their teacher and Christians can have the Buddha as their teacher—opening up their religious worldview without conflict (Nhat Hanh 1995, 100).

---

an order in Vietnam named the Order of Interbeing. In his teaching he stresses mindfulness in daily life and the connection between inner peace and world peace. He is considered to be one of the founders of the Engaged Buddhist movement. Through his travels Nhat Hanh became friends with many Christians and grew to have an appreciation for this tradition (Kiblinger 2005, 93).

<sup>47</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh’s *The Raft is not the Shore* (1975) is a dialogue between a Jesuit priest, Daniel Berrigan, and Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh. They discuss the situation of the world at that time such as the Vietnam War and topics such as the relationship between economics, government, and religion. *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (1995) describes Thich Nhat Hanh’s respect and appreciation for Christianity and offers a theological comparison between the two religions. *Going Home, Jesus and Buddha as Brothers* continues Nhat Hanh’s dialogue with Christianity and addresses how both traditions can help to renew and strengthen the other.

<sup>48</sup> These Buddhist leaders often utilize a ‘common core theory’ to dismiss the distinctions between religions and focus on a core, foundational experience that is common for all religions. Kiblinger defines the common core strategy as “the move to see religions as varying manifestations of a common essence or experience” (Kiblinger 2005, 64).

He finds that Buddhist meditation, as many Buddhist-Christians feel, can help them understand their own tradition. He writes:

“ . . . I always urged my Western friends to go back to their own traditions and rediscover the values that are there, those values they have not been able to touch before. The practice of Buddhist meditation can help them do so, and many have succeeded. Buddhism is made of non-Buddhist elements. Buddhism has no separate self. When you are a truly happy Christian, you are also a Buddhist. And vice versa” (Nhat Hanh 1995, 197).

His writings depict a place for Christians within Buddhist practice and they show Buddhist doctrines and beliefs as flexible because they can be shaped by experience. Kiblinger notes that Nhat Hanh’s emphasis on experience complements the idea that all religions have a common core, even though they express this core in different ways. Although Nhat Hanh points out some differences, he dismisses these as superficial, generalizing the Buddhist conception of non-self to conclude that there is no singular Christianity or Buddhism (Kiblinger 2005, 94). Despite his generalizations, this well-known monastic teacher has been influential in the West, with Buddhist magazines featuring his image on the covers selling many copies.<sup>49</sup> His inclusivism and exchange between Buddhism and Christianity has certainly been a model for many practitioners.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama (1935-present) is one of the most influential and important Buddhist leaders within the Western popular imagination. His

---

<sup>49</sup> Shambhala Sun is one of the most widely read Buddhist magazines. Shambhala Sun magazine featured Thich Nhat Hanh on its cover in 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2011, and 2012. This, along with many of his prolific writings making the New York Times bestsellers’ list, testifies to his long-term popularity in North America.

advocacy of hybrid religious formations is demonstrated most significantly in his book *The Good Heart* (1998). In this book he comments on the four gospels of the New Testament from a Buddhist perspective. In the preface Kiely writes of the Dalai Lama's participation in the conference:

“From the outset, he gently and quietly reassured his listeners that the last thing he had come to do was ‘sow seeds of doubt’ among Christians about their own faith. Again and again, he counseled people to deepen their understanding and appreciation of their own traditions, pointing out that human sensibilities and cultures are too varied to justify a single ‘way’ to the Truth . . . But inasmuch as Buddhism does not recognize a Creator God or a personal Savior, he cautioned against people calling themselves ‘Buddhist-Christians,’ just as one should not try ‘to put a yak’s head on a sheep’s body’” (Kiely 1996, xii).

Although the Dalai Lama warns against mixing faith in a God with Buddhism, he is participating in this interfaith dialogue and interpreting Jesus's life through Buddhist teachings. The Dalai Lama specifically notes that identifying as a Christian-Buddhist is analogous to mixing parts of two animals. However, he upholds the belief that meditation can be useful for Christians and others. He describes meditation, specifically the one-pointed concentration of *samādhi*, as necessary for all religions, and a universal practice one can use as a base before following the dictates of one's own tradition. He said:

“Traditionally in India, there is *samādhi* meditation, ‘stilling the mind,’ which is common to all the Indian religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. And in many of these traditions, certain types of *vipasyana*, ‘analytical meditation,’ are common as well . . . *samādhi* is considered to be an essential part of spiritual practice in *all* the major religious traditions of India because it provides the possibility to channel all one's mental energy and the ability to direct the mind to a particular object in a single-pointed way” (Dalai Lama 1996, 40).

Meditation here becomes the key that links Indian religions and can be used to deepen all religious faiths. Particularly *samādhi* meditation is used as a more broad, universal practice because it does not aim to realize the Buddhist truths of suffering, impermanence, and non-self. In his *Spiritual Advice for Buddhists and Christians* the Dalai Lama explains a Christian form of meditation where Christians use *vipassanā* to think about “How great God is, how merciful God is” (Dalai Lama 1998, 33). Because the Dalai Lama recommends meditation as an interfaith practice— this is influential for mainstream ideas about the nature of Buddhist meditation. Through these two well-known missionaries and their interfaith dialogue, spaces have been opened for the creation of hybrid religious formations, especially drawing on the practice of meditation. These Buddhist leaders find in meditation a universal practice that can be used toward the aims of other religious traditions.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906-1993)<sup>50</sup> is well-known for his reflections on Buddhism and Christianity, in which his goal is to “create an atmosphere of mutual understanding among the followers of both Christianity and Buddhism . . . .” (Buddhadasa 1977, 1). Swearer asserts that Christians in Thailand should reflect on his ideas in the creation of an indigenous Christian theology (Swearer 1968, 16), and calls Buddhadasa’s dialogue with other religions ‘an ecumenical vision’ (Swearer 2006: 271). Religion, for Buddhadasa, is the path to experiencing freedom from attachment to the world through knowledge about the truth of reality. It is a change in orientation from suffering and attachment, to a

---

<sup>50</sup> For biographical information see Chapter 3 in this dissertation.

new existence without bonds to self or others. For Buddhadasa, Christianity and Buddhism can be pathways to this rebirth as both God and the Dhamma represent ultimate reality.

Buddhadasa begins with the religious man and his struggle to live within the mundane while seeking the supermundane. He uses the categories of ordinary language (*phasa khon*) and dhamma language (*phasa dham*) to understand the religious man and be able to talk about him in a number of religious contexts. Therefore at the highest level, *phasa dham*, all religions are similar but because most religious people are not at this level we must engage in interreligious dialogue using *phasa khon*. Buddhadasa asserts that true religion is universal in application, although religions have different outer coverings to the ordinary man, those who understand will see the similarities (Buddhadasa 1968, 1). Kiblinger labels this distinction between conventional and ultimate as a common core theory of religions where differences only occur at a conventional level (Kiblinger 2005, 50). Because of this common core, Buddhadasa says “we can be both Christians and Buddhists at the same time” (Buddhadasa 1968, 38). A significant way to create these dual identities is through the practice of meditation.

Swearer asserts that the Theravāda tradition presents a path to this fundamental change in orientation through practice of morality and meditation, and that this kind of method “has not been entirely foreign to the Christian tradition but has been largely peripheral” (Swearer 1971, 26). He finds that the methods of Theravāda tradition could be used in the Christian tradition and that any individual would benefit from mindfulness practice (Swearer 1971, 26).

Buddhadasa's teachings on interreligious dialogue have reached an international audience through translations of his teachings and his international meditation center in the south of Thailand.<sup>51</sup> These writings of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, the Dalai Lama, and Thich Nhat Hanh express the proliferation of interreligious dialogue, which utilizes Buddhist meditation as a universal practice that can be applied to other religious contexts. The North American *vipassanā* movement conveys similar sentiments regarding hybrid religious formations.

#### *North American Vipassanā Movement*

Another venue through which international meditators receive cues to create hybrid religious formations is the *vipassanā* meditation movement in North America.<sup>52</sup> McMahan finds that North America has been the site

“where European, American, and Asian Buddhists alike have launched representations of Buddhism gauged to western sensibilities but reverberating back to Asia and around the world, becoming forces that have shaped Buddhism globally . . . that country {United States} has played a key role as an incubator of new Buddhist representations and realities for Asians as well as Americans and Europeans” (McMahan 2008, 22).

---

<sup>51</sup> For more information see Chapter 3 in this dissertation.

<sup>52</sup> The *vipassanā* movement in North America is a popular venue through which information about Buddhist meditation is disseminated. Other famous teachers' movements, of course, exist such as Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing and those of Tibetan Buddhist teachers such as Pema Chödrön and Lama Surya Das. However, the *vipassanā* movement in North America was transmitted largely without the aid of Asian Buddhist missionaries, making it one of the least traditional, most liberal, and accommodating to western culture among the schools of Buddhism which have been transmitted abroad. Despite the presence of American teachers, this movement is also a continuation of the lay *vipassanā* movement in Thailand and Burma.



Therefore the North American *vipassanā* movement, although originating in one locale, has had global implications.<sup>53</sup> This *vipassanā* movement began in 1975 when meditation teachers Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, and Sharon Salzberg returned from their study of meditation in India, Burma, and Thailand, and purchased land for the construction of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts. In 1988 Kornfield founded the Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, California, where today most of the teachers are trained psychotherapists. These two centers have led the development of *vipassanā* in the United States, with a primary interest being adapting the teachings for a lay western audience.<sup>54</sup> Seager characterizes this movement as “among the most powerful and popular forms of convert Buddhism in the United States” (Seager 1999, 147). The meditation practices taught here represent a middle ground between Buddhist temples and mindfulness practices taught in secular contexts.

Popular books by the founders and leading teachers of this *vipassanā* movement attest to its popularity and significance among English-readers.

Kornfield’s (1993) *A Path with Heart* and *After the Ecstasy, The Laundry* (2001)

---

<sup>53</sup> Theravāda Buddhism in North America has a diverse history including both Buddhist temples established by Southeast Asians as well as meditation centers founded by lay American meditation teachers. For this section, I am only considering the latter history because the now well-known teachers within this movement have had global impact on the understanding of *vipassanā* meditation for international meditators to Thailand.

<sup>54</sup> Fronsdal writing on this movement takes the teachers associated with Spirit Rock and the Insight Meditation Society to represent the mainstream of this movement in North America because of the widespread influence of their books and teachings. However, independent, unaffiliated teachers demonstrate the openness and amorphous quality of this movement (Fronsdal 1998, 165).

both describe how one can bring spiritual insights into one's life and relationships. Goldstein's *One Dharma* (2003) envisions a way to unite all Buddhist traditions. Salzberg's books, such as *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (2002) and *A Heart as Wide as the World* (1999), focus on *metta* or loving-kindness meditation.<sup>55</sup> Boorstein, a popular teacher at both Insight Meditation Society and Spirit Rock has written accessible introductions to Buddhist meditation, *It's Easier Than You Think* (1997) and *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There* (1996), among others. These are all widely known and bestselling books within this movement (Seager 1999, 150). Kornfield especially has had wide-ranging appeal with many of his books selling more than a million copies in twenty languages.<sup>56</sup> These popular books are all written in an accessible style and are infused with psychological wisdom for the busy, lay, non-Buddhist.

Teachers of Kornfield, Goldstein and Salzberg, such as Mahāsī Sayadaw and U Ba Khin<sup>57</sup> for the most part, stripped down the teachings of the Buddha to focus exclusively on meditation. These teachers in Burma and Thailand had no interest in converting Westerners to Buddhism, as they offered the meditation teachings to people of all religious faiths (Cheah 2004, 94). Cheah argues, however, that the “pioneers of American *vipassanā* movement went further than their own Asian teachers in conceiving *vipassanā* meditation outside of the

---

<sup>55</sup> This is a concentration meditation technique where one repeats mantras of loving-kindness to oneself and others. In the North American *vipassanā* movement, this practice has become a therapeutic technique to boost self-esteem.

<sup>56</sup> For more information see [www.jackkornfield.com](http://www.jackkornfield.com).

<sup>57</sup> For more information on these two teachers see Chapter 3 in this dissertation.

cultural and religious context which it emerged” (Cheah 2004, 101). Indeed Coleman notes that “[t]he approach of most *Vipassanā* students is more like a client visiting a psychotherapist than a parishioner at a church service” (Coleman 2001, 110). In contrast to building a religious community, the North American *vipassanā* movement has focused on individual meditative experience and personal transformation. As such Fronsdal writes, “Thus, with no required commitment to an organization, a teacher, or Buddhist teachings, even the most active *vipassanā* students may retain their preexisting lifestyles, religious affiliations, and political, philosophical, and cultural points of view without conflict” (Fronsdal 1998, 170). This movement is therefore characterized by secular humanism and psychotherapy, and is divorced from traditional elements of Theravāda Buddhist communities with little reference to monasticism except when monks are invited as meditation teachers (Seager 1999, 137). *Vipassanā* meditation in the United States retains the presentation of a universal, transcultural practice. Indeed, the Insight Meditation Society website describes their teaching as seated within the context of Buddhism, although it also states that the practices are universal.<sup>58</sup>

Many insight meditation teachers adapt and present the teachings in a secular way so that practitioners often call themselves insight meditation students rather than students of Theravāda Buddhism (Fronsdal 1998, 164). In the North American *vipassanā* movement teachers remove the Theravāda framework of karma and rebirth, merit making, and non-self in order to place their teachings

---

<sup>58</sup> See the Insight Meditation Society website here: [www.dharma.org](http://www.dharma.org).

within pragmatic, humanistic goals of self-improvement (Fronsdal 1998, 172). *Vipassanā* teachers in North America pull from other schools of Buddhism, religions, and psychology in order to make their teachings attractive. This *vipassanā* movement is therefore not rooted within Theravāda Buddhism. This feature has helped *vipassanā* to assimilate into new contexts. Emphasizing hybridity through mixing *vipassanā* with other religions and self-transformation techniques has entered into the ethos of the American mainstream and further into global discourses of meditation.

The engagement with *vipassanā* meditation by non-Buddhists has been characterized by hybridity because of the missionizing practices of Buddhists, prominent leaders' interreligious dialogue, as well as the phenomenon of hybrid Buddhist religiosities. These teachings presented through memoirs, missionization, and transmission to non-Buddhist cultures constitute models from where international meditators draw. International meditation center teachers, through dialogue and feedback, replicate these models with their international students.

## **Conclusion**

Postmodern conjunctures reveal new Buddhist responses to globalization, expose new frameworks such as science, psychology, theistic faiths, and secularism, with which to analyze the components of hybridity, as well as reveal continuities with Orientalism and modern Buddhist discourses. I have shown that the discourses of modern Buddhism are deeply entangled within the historical

interpretation and scholarship of Buddhism. These discourses are historically embedded within this process of interpretation and continue to be reproduced and rearticulated in the present. As we will see, the use of modern Buddhist discourses within Thailand's international meditation centers is a recent iteration within this genealogy. Through the models of hybrid religious formations in memoirs and appropriation of secular and other religious discourses within the foreign engagement with *vipassanā* meditation, international meditators in Thailand are likely to incorporate meditation retreat experiences into their own belief systems instead of the Buddhist context.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> This is especially true within American Buddhism. Scholars demonstrate the self-authoritative attitude Americans direct toward Buddhism in the person of well-known author and pioneer of American Buddhism, Jack Kerouac (1922-1969). Kovacic writes that Kerouac created his own personal understanding of Buddhism through selectively choosing from popular culture those elements he deemed important to his life (Kovacic 2004: 86).

## Chapter 3

### THERAVĀDA MEDITATION AND THE HISTORY OF MODERN

#### *VIPASSANĀ*

The modern history of *vipassanā* meditation illustrates the processes through which this practice has produced new spaces for international travelers to engage with Thai Buddhist culture. *Vipassanā* meditation, through the discourses of modern Buddhism, has become one of the most significant pathways to communicate Buddhist teachings to an international audience. Traditionally, *vipassanā* meditation had been taught exclusively within monastic institutions. Within its modern history, the practice has spread to Buddhist laity, and most recently further expanded to reach an international audience of non-Buddhists. These trajectories of *vipassanā* meditation highlight the reimaginings of the practice, which have ultimately led to hybrid religious formations among international meditators. In this chapter I demonstrate the complexity of the spread of *vipassanā*. First I provide information on the practices, sources, and path to liberation of Theravāda meditation. Next I describe the history of modern *vipassanā* in Burma and Thailand. I pay special attention to the ways Thai Buddhists understand *vipassanā* meditation and contrast this with the decontextualized and hybrid perspectives held by international meditators. I also outline the main sites and meditation methods that international meditators engage with in Thailand. In order to understand the goals of *vipassanā* meditation I turn first to the Buddhist path to *nibbāna*.

## The Path to *Nibbāna*

The Eightfold Path is recognized by Theravāda Buddhists as articulating stages along the path to *nibbāna*.<sup>60</sup> These eight features can be divided into three main parts, morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*pañña*).

According to this path, morality must be cultivated first as the basis for other practices.<sup>61</sup> In meditation retreat settings, morality is cultivated by taking a series of precepts as a framework for the development of a pure mind.<sup>62</sup> *Samatha* (concentration) meditation is part of the second aspect of the path, which is concerned also with proper effort and mindfulness. These two aspects of the practice are performed in preparation for the cultivation of wisdom, which is to be

---

<sup>60</sup> The Four Noble Truths are the basic teachings of the Buddha, which establish the basis for a path out of suffering. These truths state that suffering in life is unavoidable, there is a cause to this suffering, this cause is attachment, and finally, there is a way to end this suffering. This way is described further in the Noble Eightfold Path: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. These are further classified within three groups, morality (speech, action, and livelihood), concentration (effort, mindfulness, and concentration), and wisdom (understanding and thought).

<sup>61</sup> Meditation teachers often emphasize that if one has lied or committed some other ethical misbehavior, it will be difficult to focus the mind in meditation as one's mind will continuously revert back to one's transgressions.

<sup>62</sup> Buddhist laity often receive the Five Precepts when visiting a temple. For retreats and holy days, three extra precepts are added. The Five Precepts include refraining from killing, stealing, sexual activity, lying, and intoxicants. In addition to these, the Eight Precepts include refraining from eating after noon each day, entertainment and beautification of the body, and sleeping in a luxurious bed.

achieved through *vipassanā* (insight) meditation.<sup>63</sup> Therefore *vipassanā* is widely seen to be a significant and final stage on the path to *nibbāna*.

Although there are different *vipassanā* methods, teachings, and teachers, there are two main meditation techniques used in Theravāda Buddhism,<sup>64</sup> *samatha* and *vipassanā*. *Samatha* is usually translated as concentration and has synonyms such as tranquility, one-pointedness of mind, unification of the mind, and a state of undistractedness, but I will refer to it here as concentration meditation. *Samatha* is often regarded as a state of mind, which either focuses exclusively on one object or consists of a state of awareness where the mind is steady, and one-pointed (Shankman 2008, 4). The purpose of *samatha* meditation is to train the mind to remain focused rather than distracted. This training allows meditators to pay attention to one object by continually bringing awareness back to that object when the mind wavers. This practice prepares one for perceiving reality directly through the practices of *vipassanā* meditation.<sup>65</sup>

One can develop extremely deep states of concentration, called *jhānas*, by focusing the mind on one object for an extended period of time (Shankman 2008,

---

<sup>63</sup> The parts of the path are not descriptions of personal experiences but are scholastic works by Buddhist monks (Lopez 1992, 148).

<sup>64</sup> Other branches of Buddhism use other systems such as Tibetan visualization, for example.

<sup>65</sup> It is important for Theravāda meditation that concentration practices be directed toward the goal of *nibbāna* and as preparation for *vipassanā* practice. Concentration meditation has also been known to aid in cultivating supernatural powers (*iddhis*), as well as extremely blissful states. These are thought to be unskillful motivations and dangerous detours along the path. By itself *samatha* practice is thought to lead to ‘mundane knowledge’ (*loki pañña*), while *vipassanā* meditation is dedicated toward ‘supermundane knowledge’ (*lokuttara pañña*).



32). The *jhānas* are defined as eight states of mental absorption that the Buddha learned from his teachers before attaining *nibbāna*.<sup>66</sup> After mastering these states, he found that insight gained in *jhānas* alone could not alleviate his suffering. Instead he perceived the *jhānas* as stepping-stones to liberation.<sup>67</sup> *Jhānas* have been a pillar of Buddhist practice since the tradition's inception. The first *jhāna* state arises as a result of one-pointed mind (*ekaggatā*) and is accompanied by mental factors such as applied (*vitakka*) and sustained (*vicāra*) attention as well as joy (*pīti*) and bliss (*sukha*). If the meditator continues this practice, one can continue to attain further *jhānas* until reaching the fourth *jhāna*, which is accompanied only by the mental factor of equanimity (*upekkhā*). The primary goal of *samatha*, therefore, is to attain the level of *jhāna* and increased purification of the mind, preferably up to the fourth out of eight succeeding stages.<sup>68</sup> The goal of insight is the attainment of the four stages of enlightenment (*ariya-magga*).

---

<sup>66</sup> There are four material and four immaterial *jhānas*.

<sup>67</sup> The *jhānas* were a part of the Buddha's path to enlightenment throughout his life. Buddhist texts record that the Buddha first experienced a *jhāna* state spontaneously as a young boy while sitting under a tree. During his search for *nibbāna* the Buddha entered the ascetic life and began a systematic training in the *jhānas* (Mahasaccaka Sutta MN 36). The night of the Buddha's enlightenment he entered the fourth *jhāna* before investigating the characteristics of reality (Ariyapariyesana Sutta, MN 26). It is also recorded that the Buddha's final act before death was to enter each of the *jhānas*, rising from the first to eighth, and back down to the first, settling back again at the fourth *jhāna* before dying (MahaParinibbāna Sutta, DN 16).

<sup>68</sup> There are competing claims regarding the amount of concentration necessary before proceeding to *vipassanā* meditation. Some teachers advocate attaining all eight *jhānas* before moving to *vipassanā* practices. Others assert that lesser forms of concentration such as momentary (*khanika-samādhi*) concentration and access

The four stages leading to the attainment of enlightenment are known as the *ariya-magga*, or the path of the Noble Ones. This is the supermundane (*lokuttara*) path of training that leads to *nibbāna*. Each attainment is achieved in succession and is accompanied by distinct transformations. The first path is the stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), who will take at maximum seven lifetimes to attain *nibbāna*. The second path is known as the once-returner (*sakadāgāmin*) who will be reborn only one more time before reaching liberation. The non-returner (*anāgāmin*) is the third stage of the noble path. This term refers to one who will not be reborn as a human but will either attain *nibbāna* in this lifetime or be reborn in one of the highest heavens and attain arhatship there.<sup>69</sup> The fourth noble person is the *arhat* who has reached *nibbāna*. Along the path of *ariya-magga*, defilements<sup>70</sup> are continually destroyed until one has completely eradicated them as an *arhat*. This is the culminating experience of the Buddhist path that includes cultivation of morality, concentration, and wisdom.

*Vipassanā* meditation, Buddhists hold, leads to enlightenment and the disappearance of defilements, through being aware of everything occurring around and inside the body and mind during the present moment. During this type of meditation there is no thinking or concentrating on one object— although

---

(*upacara-samādhi*) concentration provide a sufficient basis for *vipassanā*.

<sup>69</sup> Within Buddhist cosmology there are thirty-one realms of existence where beings can be reborn. These include realms of hell, ghosts, animals, humans, and gods.

<sup>70</sup> Defilements, known as *kilesas*, are the negative habits of the mind that hinder liberation from suffering. The three most basic defilements are greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*).

thoughts come, thinking is not encouraged. It is essential for insight meditation that one lets go of wandering thoughts. In this type of meditation the meditator is aware through direct experience. This is beyond conceptual, intellectual thinking—beyond the normal experience of daily life (Shankman 2008, 52). In *vipassanā* one moves from object to object, staying with what is most dominant (Shankman 2008, 56). The point of *vipassanā* meditation exercises is to comprehend the nature of *dukkha* (suffering), *anicca* (impermanence), and *anattā* (non-self). This is accomplished through awareness of one's reality; through applications of mindfulness to body, feelings, mind, and mind objects, one comes to perceive directly these characteristics of reality. One first understands the existence of suffering, impermanence, and non-self within oneself and then extends to other people to understand it as a general principle of reality.<sup>71</sup>

The wisdom gained from insight meditation aims to realize the true nature of reality. *Samatha* is used to gain peace of mind and tranquility so that when one practices insight meditation, the mind is clear and purified, and thus ready for insights into the present moment. *Vipassanā* meditation develops the direct experience of reality, which enables one to attain liberation from suffering. When a meditator contemplates the changing nature of some object, seeing its arising and dissolution, this is *vipassanā* meditation.<sup>72</sup> Even though the distinction

---

<sup>71</sup> U Sīlananda calls contemplating your own body 'direct *vipassanā*' and contemplating the experiences of others 'inferential *vipassanā*' (U Sīlananda 2002, 39).

<sup>72</sup> When one is able to see the rising and fading of objects one has reached a basic level of *vipassanā* knowledge from which it is thought one will inevitably continue until reaching the first path of stream-enterer.

between these two types of meditation may be clear in writing, in practice the two are quickly confused. Theravāda meditation is a collection of heterogeneous practices wherein *samatha* and *vipassanā* are descriptions of meditation experiences.

There is a range of practices and methods for producing mindfulness that do not always align. Debates still occur between meditation lineages concerning the amount of *samatha* necessary to practice before turning to *vipassanā*.

Teachers who favor cultivating the *jhānas* before insight, therefore, sometimes debate with teachers who begin with *vipassanā* practices. Because *vipassanā* is agreed to be the only practice that can lead to *nibbāna*, teachers often claim that their method is true *vipassanā* and other methods rely too much on *samatha*.

Another common disparagement critiques methods advocating low levels of *samatha* as ‘*sotāpanna*’ factories because after a beginning course many students are told they attained stream-entry.<sup>73</sup> The existence of these very real debates was apparent to me even before I began research. In talking to a Thai Buddhist in Arizona about my project and my previous experiences meditating in Chiangmai, she observed that I practice focusing on the rise and fall of the abdomen while she practices watching the breath move in and out of the nostril. She said this with an attitude that the nostril was a much superior point of attention. At the time I did not realize the implications of these distinct points of focus. After research on the various meditative techniques in Thailand, it is clear that this is a major point of

---

<sup>73</sup> These critics often conclude that the practitioner fell asleep or entered a *jhānic* state, and this experience of blackout or unconsciousness is confused with the experience of the first glimpse of *nibbāna* in stream-entry.

contention surrounding Theravāda meditation. The interesting feature here is that all the meditation methods within this study claim to derive from the authoritative canonical and commentarial texts of the Theravāda tradition.

### **Sources of Theravāda Meditation**

Meditation teachers often state that their meditation technique is reproduced directly from canonical Buddhist meditation texts. It is not within the purview of this dissertation to judge whether these attempts are successful but to point out that there can be no direct reproduction as interpretation is always involved. Additionally, the proliferation of diverse meditation methods that purport to be based on Buddhist texts attests to the great possibilities of ambiguous readings. Within Theravāda Buddhism, meditation teachers and their didactic methods draw from three authoritative documents that discuss meditation. These are two suttas of the Pāli Canon, called the Satipatthāna Sutta and the Ānāpānasati Sutta, which are treated by Buddhists as direct teachings of the Buddha, and the commentary by Buddhaghosa from the 8<sup>th</sup> century called the Visuddhimagga.

The most significant meditation teaching for the modern revival of *vipassanā* meditation is the Satipatthāna (The Four Foundations of Mindfulness) Sutta.<sup>74</sup> Many *vipassanā* meditation teachers assert that all instructions and

---

<sup>74</sup> This sutta is located in the Majjhima Nikāya, or Middle Length Discourses of the Pāli Canon (MN 10). The Maha Satipatthāna Sutta in the Dīgha Nikāya, or Collection of Long Discourses (DN 22), is identical except it contains a more detailed elucidation of the Four Noble Truths.

practices necessary for *vipassanā* meditation are contained in this sutta.<sup>75</sup> The Satipatthāna Sutta gives instruction on meditation by describing these four foundations of mindfulness: body, feelings, mind, and mind objects. Each of these foundations delineates a set of practices to follow with the aim of *nibbāna*. For some of the meditation practices described within this sutta it is unclear whether they should be performed as *samatha* or *vipassanā* meditation. The interpretation varies depending on the meditation teacher and method of practice, due to the lack of specific instructions.

With each of these applications of mindfulness the meditator progresses toward increased sensitivity and awareness. Although this is the case, each foundation of mindfulness continues to be relevant on the path towards *nibbāna* (Anālayo 2008, 21). The first practice delineated in this text is mindfulness of the body, where one contemplates one's own body through fourteen different applications. These include awareness of one's breath (whether its quality is long or short), the four postures of the body (sitting, laying, standing, walking), reflection on the repulsiveness of the body,<sup>76</sup> the four material elements in the

---

<sup>75</sup> Because of the relatively recent significance of the Satipatthāna Sutta within the modern *vipassanā* revitalization movement, a number of scholars and teachers have written both academic and more accessible commentaries of this text. See Anālayo (2008); U Silananda (2002), Soma Thera (1967), Nyanaponika Thera (1996 [1954]).

<sup>76</sup> According to the Satipatthāna Sutta there are thirty parts of the body. Within this reflection, meditators are asked to see one's hair, flesh, bones, organs, blood, sweat, etc. as repulsive in order to lessen attachment to oneself and one's body.

body (earth, water, fire, and air),<sup>77</sup> and nine cemetery contemplations.<sup>78</sup> These basic practices form the basis for contemplations of more abstract qualities such as feelings and states of the mind (Anālayo 2008, 19). Furthermore, different meditation methods within contemporary Thailand utilize different practices regarding contemplation of the body.<sup>79</sup> Since the sutta provides a variety of options instead of one standard program for all meditators, meditation teachers have selected the practices they find most suitable for themselves and their students.

The next two applications of mindfulness are associated with fewer practices. For mindfulness of feelings one notes three types of feelings (pleasant, unpleasant and neutral) that comprise one's experiences in the present moment. These practices emphasize the changing nature of one's feelings in order to understand them as impersonal and impermanent states. Practices associated with mindfulness of the mind include being aware of the state of the mind, if it is concentrated or distracted, and whether the qualities of greed, hatred, and delusion are present or absent. Similar to mindfulness of feelings, the practice of

---

<sup>77</sup> The purpose of this contemplation is to understand oneself not as a solid being one can identify with but as a process of four elements moving through space (Sīlananda 2002, 68).

<sup>78</sup> Similar to the reflection on the repulsiveness of the body, the nine cemetery contemplations are meant to develop detachment from the body. Meditators can practice this contemplation by intentionally visualizing a dead body or this vision may arise on its own. In either case the meditator investigates the repulsive nature of the image.

<sup>79</sup> For example, many techniques, such as Mahāsī Sayadaw's, stress the contemplation of breathing, while some others, such as the forest tradition of Thailand, focus on the repulsiveness of the body and cemetery contemplations.

mindfulness of the mind facilitates the perception of mind states as impermanent and not belonging to a self.

The fourth application of mindfulness, mind objects or *dhammas*, entails contemplating five sets of mental and material objects including the five hindrances, the five objects of clinging, the six internal and external sense-bases, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the Four Noble Truths (Shankman 2008, 21-22). Each of these contemplations is meant to remove attachment, craving, and wrong view. The Satipatthāna Sutta concludes with an assurance that through these practices successful meditators can expect to reach the level of non-returner or *arhat*. These practices associated with the Satipatthāna Sutta have developed into various meditation methods throughout the Buddhist world (Anālayo 2008, 22). There are many applications of mindfulness within the four foundations and different teachers emphasize certain practices while removing or deemphasizing others. For example, within contemporary meditation methods in Thailand, practices for the contemplation of the body occur much more frequently than those utilizing the last three foundations of mindfulness.

The Ānāpānasati (Mindfulness of Breathing) Sutta is the other important teaching in the Pāli Canon regarding meditation.<sup>80</sup> The instructions in this sutta have been used as preparatory practices in developing Satipatthāna practices, although the sutta itself claims that mindfulness of breathing alone can encompass all four foundations (Shankman 2008, 28). Like the Satipatthāna Sutta, this sutta also incorporates both *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation and does not clearly

---

<sup>80</sup> This sutta is located within the Majjhima Nikāya (MN 118).



state how much *samatha* should be developed at each stage. Here mindfulness of breathing is detailed in sixteen steps that follow a similar program to that of the Satipatthāna Sutta. Each of the four foundations of mindfulness in the Ānāpānasati Sutta is practiced through the awareness of breath. It begins with understanding that the duration of breath can vary. The next steps describe how, as one deepens in concentration, one trains the mind in experiencing the pleasant feelings that accompany this. In the final steps, the meditator directs this level of purification of the mind toward insight practice (Shankman 2008, 30). Therefore the first twelve steps are *samatha* practices and the last four are contemplations of *vipassanā* knowledges such as impermanence, fading away, cessation, and letting go. The Ānāpānasati Sutta shows how *vipassanā* practices build upon the foundation of *samatha* (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 2001, 83). This sutta offers a number of practices associated with the breath out of which meditation teachers have been able to establish a variety of methods. Within one interpretation of the Ānāpānasati Sutta, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu offers a number of practices, shortcuts, and tricks to progress.<sup>81</sup>

Both of these meditation suttas in the Pāli Canon<sup>82</sup> are open to a range of interpretations by contemporary teachers. These suttas were recited orally and

---

<sup>81</sup> For more information, see the section on Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's meditation method below.

<sup>82</sup> By Pāli Canon (following Collins 1990) I am referring to the historical collection of texts of Theravāda Buddhism rather than a religious conception of the 'origins' of an already defined Theravāda school. Collins argues that scholars should see the Pāli Canon from a historical perspective. This body of texts was meant as a strategy to legitimate the particular Buddhist communities in the first

contain many repeated phrases in order to aid in memorization. Since they were not intended as meditation manuals, the suttas do not impart the full practice, provide little descriptive detail, and are rather open to interpretation.<sup>83</sup> As a result, all meditation methods contain both *vipassanā* and *samatha*, but differ in the amount of each component. The suttas do not clearly distinguish between *samatha* and *vipassanā* practices because the two are not completely separated as they are in the later commentarial work of the *Visuddhimagga* (Shankman 2008, 101).

The *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification), written in the 5<sup>th</sup> century by Sri Lankan monk Buddhaghosa,<sup>84</sup> is another authoritative source that Theravāda Buddhists use to understand the practice of meditation. In contrast to the Pāli suttas it is a systematic presentation of the stages leading to liberation and is meant to be a meditation manual with detailed, practical instructions of the stages

---

centuries of the Common Era.

<sup>83</sup> The suttas are presented as records of the Buddha's teachings. Often the Buddha is teaching to a particular audience. Because of the contextual nature of the presentation, it is difficult to take the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and the *Satipatthāna Sutta* as detailed instructions for all meditators without allowing for further commentaries, teachings, or meditation teachers.

<sup>84</sup> This is a large work and the most influential postcanonical text. Although an independent composition, the *Visuddhimagga* takes as its framework the *Rathavināsa (Relay Chariots) Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 24). The text takes as its frame the tripartite path that leads to morality, concentration and wisdom. This is related through a series of seven purifications, purification of virtue, purification of mind, purification of view, purification of overcoming doubt, purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path, purification by knowledge and vision of the way, purification by knowledge and vision.

along the path to *nibbāna* (Shankman 2008, 54). Instead of using *samatha* and *vipassanā* practices within one discourse as in the Pāli suttas, the Visuddhimagga envisions two distinct paths. The first path uses *samatha* to a high degree without *vipassanā* and the second focuses almost exclusively on *vipassanā*. For the *samatha* path, Buddhaghosa introduces forty meditation objects that relate to the meditator's temperament in order to cultivate *jhāna* states. Once one emerges from the *jhāna* state, one begins practicing insight.

On the insight path, the first *jhāna* or lower levels of concentration may be attained, as one practices awareness of the changing nature of experience. Buddhaghosa introduced *vipassanā* practice without *jhāna* called 'dry insight' because there is no 'moisture' from the *jhānas* on this path (Shankman 2008, 55-56). The Visuddhimagga has significantly influenced the way *samatha* and *vipassanā* practices are taught and understood within Theravāda Buddhism and specifically in Thailand (Tambiah 1984, 28). This text has informed the ways recent *vipassanā* meditation teachers interpret the Pāli suttas, as contemporary methods often underscore a distinct separation between *samatha* and *vipassanā* practices.<sup>85</sup>

The Pāli suttas and the Visuddhimagga have been interpreted in various ways among contemporary *vipassanā* teachers, creating a multiplicity of methods. These methods include a range of *samatha* practices from minimal to experiencing *jhāna* states and *vipassanā* techniques using traditional objects such as the breath but also daily activities such as eating, or moving the body. To

---

<sup>85</sup> See the Mahāsī Sayadaw and Ajan Tong methods below.

greater and lesser degrees the modern *vipassanā* movements emphasize this distinction between *samatha* and *vipassanā* types of meditation that did not exist earlier. Both *samatha* and *vipassanā* practices are used within Thailand's international meditation centers, and all centers claim to use the same authoritative meditation sources described above. Before describing the *vipassanā* techniques that international meditators encounter in contemporary Thailand, one must understand the modern reinterpretation of *vipassanā* meditation. Only recently, with the rise of lay meditation for Southeast Asian Buddhists, have spaces been created for international meditators.

### **The History of Modern *Vipassanā* Meditation**

This section gives historical depth to *vipassanā* and its recent appeal to foreigners. I trace the trajectories of *vipassanā* meditation from a primarily monastic practice to a mass lay movement, from Burma to Thailand, and finally to international meditators. Each trajectory produces reimaginings of *vipassanā* meditation that have led to the hybrid religious formations of international meditators. Although there are two main forms of meditation, *samatha* and *vipassanā* (discussed above), *vipassanā* meditation has become especially dominant in the revival of interest in meditation in Theravāda Buddhist countries.<sup>86</sup> This rhetoric of meditation within modern Buddhism can be traced to twentieth century Asian Buddhist reforms, which were at least partly influenced

---

<sup>86</sup> However, many modern Hindus and Jains also practice *vipassanā* as it has become a marker of modern, cosmopolitan religiosity.

by developments in the West. The idea that meditation is the central practice of Buddhism can be found in the collaborations and dialogues between Asian religious leaders<sup>87</sup> and interested intellectual Westerners (Sharf 1998, 99). *Vipassanā* meditation techniques increased portability in part as standardized, repeatable techniques were developed along with lay urban meditation centers.<sup>88</sup> In this way *vipassanā* meditation, as part of the discourses of modern Buddhism, has been presented as a scientific tool for the mind, rather than as a component of a religion or even part of the path to *nibbāna*.

Historically, meditation has been the preserve of a few specialized meditation monks. There was a divide between monks whose primary practice was learning (*pariyatti*) or those whose ‘burden is the book’ (*ganthadhura*) and the practice of meditation (*patipatti*) or those whose ‘burden is meditation’ (*vipassanādhura*). The number of scholar-monks grew, as preserving knowledge of the textual tradition was deemed more critical. This rise in scholarship and division of labor was gradual, developing along with village temples (Carrithers 1983, 231). In this way town monks became more involved with scholarship and

---

<sup>87</sup> Sharf (1998) gives an example from Zen Buddhism of the well-known teacher and writer, D.T. Suzuki (1870-1996), and his apprenticeship under American academic Paul Carus (1852-1919). Sharf argues that their relationship helped to establish meditative experience as a significant aspect of Japanese religiosity. In Theravāda Buddhism, the collaboration of Anagarika Dharmapāla in Sri Lanka with Henry Steel Olcott and Helena Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society is also well documented (Prothero 1996).

<sup>88</sup> Two of the most well-known *vipassanā* meditation techniques are the Mahāṣī Sayadaw method (see Jordt 2007) and S.N. Goenka’s method (see Hart 1987). Both of these methods consist of a precise retreat format that is replicated identically in centers throughout the world.

a separate category developed for meditation monks who often wandered throughout forests (Ray 1994; Tambiah 1984).<sup>89</sup> Samuels writes of a commentary attributed to Buddhaghosa, which argues that learning preserves the *sasāna* (religion) while *vipassanā* alone cannot maintain knowledge of the path (Samuels 2003, 105).

Meditation monks were also scarce because it was believed that over time the Buddha's teaching will decline and the chances for liberation will be so low that *nibbāna* is not a reasonable goal even for monks.<sup>90</sup> Because *nibbāna* was seen as an impossible goal, meditation manuals such as the *Visuddhimagga* were not only used as guidebooks along the path but also as amulets (Sharf 1995, 241). One gained merit from interacting with the books themselves through copying, memorizing, chanting, or conducting various devotional activities.<sup>91</sup> In fact, Sharf states "the actual practice of what we would call meditation rarely played a major role in Buddhist monastic life" (Sharf 1995, 241). The closer ideal therefore, was rebirth in preferable conditions through merit making and studying scriptures. Meditation practices that scholars have found in premodern Buddhist societies are not *vipassanā* but *samatha* techniques of chanting Pāli texts which list the

---

<sup>89</sup> Tambiah notes that these two types are not mutually exclusive so that village monks have been known to be meditation masters and forest monk communities contain noted scholar-monks as well (Tambiah 1984, 53).

<sup>90</sup> This decline in the availability of the Buddha's teachings is asserted in one of the Pāli suttas (*Cakkavatti-Sihanada Sutta* DN 26). This sutta declares that there will be a future where the dhamma is so degenerate that *nibbāna* will no longer be possible.

<sup>91</sup> For more information on Buddhist manuscript cultures see Berkwitz, Schober & Brown (2009).

qualities of the Buddha or the thirty-two parts of the body (Sharf 1995, 242).

Together with chanting meditation practices, devotion also played a role in meditation. Crosby finds that in premodern Theravāda Buddhism, devotion and meditation are not located on opposite poles but “Devotion is advocated specifically for the religious specialist, the monk or layperson undertaking the more rigorous path of meditation practice aimed at Buddhahood” (Crosby 2005, 272). Using a survey of medieval meditation manuals, Crosby demonstrates that Buddha worship is advocated as preparation to meditation. Scholars observe that traditionally meditation began with these types of worship and that practice without these features is a modern phenomenon (Swearer 1995; Crosby 2005). But Crosby asserts that most scholars and meditation teachers have not considered the devotional aspects of Buddhism or meditation practice because as an atheistic religion, Buddhism has appeared to focus on self-reliance (Crosby 2005, 260). It was not *vipassanā*, therefore, but the first two stages of the path, *samatha* practices of chanting and devotion, along with the cultivation of proper morality through generosity and maintaining the Five Precepts, that were thought to be more appropriate Buddhist practices. Currently, Thailand’s international meditation center teachers do not generally discuss topics relating to the Buddha and morality with their international students.

In addition to the emphasis on study, devotion, and chanting, when meditation was practiced in premodern times, it was taught individually between a teacher and student, usually both monks, who had established a relationship. Following the *Visuddhimagga*, which lists forty meditation objects, a ‘Good

Friend' (*kalyana-mitra*) or meditation teacher who knows the student well, would be asked to assign one of these objects,<sup>92</sup> which would combat the defilements of that particular person (Shankman 2008, 59). Each meditation student needed to search for the right teacher who could select the correct method for that student's character, considering the student's past experiences with meditation and his temperament (Kornfield 2010, 276). For example, meditation that concentrates on repeating statements of loving-kindness to all beings is prescribed for people with a propensity toward anger, and contemplation on dead bodies aids in combating excessive lust (Carrithers 1983, 225).

Buddhists traditionally believed that meditation, because of its powerful mental techniques, should only be undertaken under the supervision of a monastic teacher who one knows well. *Vinaya*<sup>93</sup> observance was seen as a necessary condition for path-entry to be realized. Laity, without this disciplined practice of maintaining precepts, were not seen as eligible as monks for meditation.

Tiyavanich finds that occasionally in the North and Northeast of Thailand during the first half of the twentieth century, wandering monks would teach laypeople *samatha* meditation as well as expound the *dhamma* during their travels

(Tiyavanich 1997, 37). This kind of individual instruction still exists in some Buddhist communities within Thailand, Cambodia, and Burma. However, this

---

<sup>92</sup> Some examples of these forty objects are: the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air, the four colors of blue, yellow, red, and white, ten kinds of bodily decay such as different kinds of corpses, the ten recollections including the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, virtue, generosity, mindfulness of death, mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of breathing.

<sup>93</sup> The *Vinaya* is part of the Pāli Canon, which delineates the rules of the Buddhist monastic order.



personalized relationship contrasts greatly with the rationalized, one-size-fits-all approach of large urban lay meditation centers meant for the masses.

This focus on Buddhist scholarship and individual instruction changed through *vipassanā* reform movements that repositioned meditation in the forefront of Buddhist practice. *Vipassanā* meditation underwent a process of laicization that ultimately opened the cultural sphere so that *vipassanā* meditation became accessible to Buddhist laity as well as ‘spiritual travelers’ from abroad. Offering *vipassanā* meditation to laity on a large scale transformed the relationship of monastics to their lay students. Through these transfigurations, laity undertake steps toward liberation without taking up the vocation of a renouncer (Jordt 2007, 18). Monks are still teachers of the *dhamma* but the laity has become more monasticized—this has reconfigured Buddhist practice in Burma and Thailand, as well as created openings for international meditators.<sup>94</sup>

Famous monks in Thailand, such as Ajan Mun (1870-1949), and Burma, such as Mahāsi Sayadaw (1904-1982), and their successors, centralized meditation, making it a primary focus. Theravāda *vipassanā* reform movements, above all, emphasized the importance of meditation and offered this practice and its goal of *nibbāna* as a possibility for both laity and monastics. These reform movements, it must be remembered, took place amidst the backdrop of modernization and colonialism. Through these processes a new elite class emerged with Western-style educations and a need to align themselves with their national culture and religion. Because of these societal changes, Theravāda

---

<sup>94</sup> The extent and conditions of these transfigurations are considered below.

Buddhism resembled less the traditional village practices and more the ideals of modernity such as individualism, rationality, and universalism (See Bond 1988; Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988). These reform movements, especially the one propagated by Mahāsī Sayadaw, stress the speed and accessibility of *nibbāna*. Remembering that *nibbāna* was seen as an almost impossible ideal traditionally, even for monks, and that scholarship was deemed more appropriate, it is remarkable that Mahāsī Sayadaw's courses, which last over one month, are aimed at attaining the first stage of enlightenment (*sottāpana*).

The ability for laity to undertake meditation practice could not occur without the new institution of the urban lay meditation center. The meditation center is different from any other Buddhist institution in history (Jordt 2007, 15). This is because the center is not a monastery but a place where both monks and laity practice meditation together.<sup>95</sup> This is a new type of institution in that it is preoccupied with a universalizing ideal about the possibility of enlightenment for anyone, whether Buddhist or not. This institution is designed for temporary meditation practice usually for large numbers of people. In addition to the core buildings of any monastery the meditation center has ample facilities for the temporary resident meditators such as accommodation, assembly halls, dining halls, kitchens, administrative offices, etc.<sup>96</sup> The large administrative complex

---

<sup>95</sup> Mixing of monastics and laity is not as strict in meditation centers as in temple environments. Temples are places for monastics to study and observe the *Vinaya* while living with other monastics. The modern institution of the meditation centers is meant for lay people.

<sup>96</sup> This is in contrast to solitary meditation locations within huts and caves.

needed to coordinate the large turnover of meditators on a daily basis is not normally needed for routine monastic life.<sup>97</sup> The daily routine of the meditation center is extremely regimented and revolves almost exclusively around the practice of meditation.<sup>98</sup>

This new institution began in Burma and transformed the laity's relationship with Buddhist practice. The Burmese meditation center model and meditation methods spread to Thailand and beyond. This institution constitutes a reinterpretation of *vipassanā* meditation, which not only led to lay Buddhist practice, but also to opportunities for international meditators to engage with meditation in hybrid ways. In what follows I first describe the history and main actors of this transformation in Burma, then Thailand, considering Thai Buddhist understandings of meditation practice.

### *Vipassanā Meditation in Burma*

The simplified methods of influential Burmese meditation masters Mahāsi Sayadaw and U Ba Khin enabled the laity to participate in *vipassanā* meditation,

---

<sup>97</sup> The meditation center can be contrasted with the typical monastery in many ways. Monasteries provide for the residence of a limited number of monks. Some have spare accommodation available but few possess the large number of facilities of meditation centers. The monastery serves many functions and so there is more freedom within the daily schedule. Besides the morning almsround, morning and evening chanting, and meals, monastics carry out a number of duties. Novices have to memorize passages and carry out duties like sweeping the floors, cleaning, and preparing offerings at the Buddha statue. More senior monks often conduct ceremonies away from the temple or for visitors to the monastery.

<sup>98</sup> For descriptions of meditation centers in Burma see Houtman (1990) and Jordt (2007). For Thailand see Cook (2010) as well as Chapters 5 and 6 of this dissertation.

without having to attain the high levels of concentration associated with *samatha* meditation, and thus endorsed them to strive for the goal of *nibbāna*. The lay meditation movement began in Burma within the context of modernizing reforms of Theravāda Buddhism, influenced by the threat of colonialism. The British colonial administration dismantled the kingship and sought to create a rational bureaucratized state. Because the monarchical state, which had protected Buddhism, no longer existed, Burmese teachers sought to lessen this degeneration through purifying the laity (Jordt 2007, 25). To this end, the well-known teacher, Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923), expanded Buddhist teaching and especially meditation beyond the monastic tradition during the colonial period. He was known for his ability and interest in making Buddhist scriptures, especially the philosophical section of the canon called the Abhidhamma, comprehensible to the laity (Braun 2008). Ledi Sayadaw's scholarly work achieved recognition among Europeans during his lifetime (Mendelson 1975, 283). Through this accessibility of Buddhist teachings, more possibilities opened for the availability of Buddhist practice.

Mahāsī Sayadaw (1904-1982), a student of the Mingun Jetavana Sayadaw, or U Narada, took these new possibilities for the laity still further. U Narada developed his method through study of the Satipatthāna Sutta,<sup>99</sup> which Mahāsī Sayadaw popularized. Mahāsī Sayadaw studied the Mahā Satipatthāna Sutta thoroughly as well as practiced intensely under his teacher's guidance. Mahāsī's

---

<sup>99</sup> U Narada is reported to have discovered the importance of the Satipatthāna Sutta from discussions with a meditating monk in a cave in the Sagaing Hills (Van Esterik 1977, 53; Nyanaponika 1996 [1954], 85).

method is also based on his own subcommentary of Bhuddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga, for which Mahāsi elaborated on the stages of insight, creating a more simplified and practical system (Jordt 2007, 65). His reputation spread within Burma because of his authoritative combination of study and practice. It was during the era of U Nu (1907-1995), the country's first democratic prime minister who led from 1948-1962, that meditation became a popular movement for laity. U Nu actively promoted mass meditation as a basis for nation-building and as part of a multifaceted program to revitalize Buddhism in Burma (Mendelson 1975, 263).

U Nu, along with Mahāsi Sayadaw, worked together to establish first the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha and then a network of meditation centers for laity within Burma. These branch centers soon extended to Sri Lanka and Thailand as well. There were also visitors from the West coming to practice at the Mahasi Thathana Yaiktha so that *vipassanā* meditation linked Burma with the international community, and meditation was famously hailed as the country's leading export (Jordt 2007, 55). English-speaking meditators first arrived at the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha in the late 1950s, creating missionizing possibilities abroad (Jordt 2007, 37).<sup>100</sup> However, visa restrictions on foreigners have made it difficult to maintain steady practice in Burma (Kornfield 2010, 53). Perhaps because of this, the method circulated further so that there are now centers

---

<sup>100</sup> Jordt relates that often an invitation for a monk teacher to visit international meditators' home countries ultimately generated construction of new branch centers abroad (Jordt 2007, 37).

throughout the world.<sup>101</sup> Therefore Mahāsī Sayadaw not only spread this replicable method of meditation, he also disseminated a model for an urban lay meditation center.<sup>102</sup>

Mahāsī Sayadaw's technique is unique because it does not rely on the charisma of the teacher but can be replicated and expanded through this prescribed rationalized method (Jordt 2007, 32). His method is also unique within Theravāda Buddhism because the object of concentration is the rise and fall of the abdomen, as Mahāsī argued that it is easier to detect the physical experience of rising and falling than abstract mental states (Jordt 2007, 65).<sup>103</sup> Mahāsī Sayadaw based his method on the idea that it would take the average person two months to achieve the first stage of enlightenment. This span of two months was based on observation of many thousands of practitioners (Jordt 2007, 33).

The framework for Mahāsī Sayadaw's method is a series of *vipassanā* knowledges taken from Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* as well as a chapter in the

---

<sup>101</sup> There are centers using the Mahasi method in the USA, United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Sweden, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Korea. Mahāsī Sayadaw chose his disciple, Sayadaw U Sīlananda (1927-2005), to teach in America and be responsible for spreading the dhamma in the West. He arrived in America in 1979.

<sup>102</sup> Mahāsī also developed a program certifying the attainments of meditators as well as public lists where one can view the names of people who have attained *nibbāna* in the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha.

<sup>103</sup> Meditation teachers who promote the tip of the nostril as the focal point of the breath have questioned Mahāsī's focus on the abdomen, as the abdomen is not listed as one of the Satipatthāna practices of the body. Mahāsī justifies his choice in his *Practical Insight Meditation* by stating that the rise and fall of the breath in the abdomen constitutes wind element, which is part of the four elements meditation recommended in the Satipatthāna Sutta (Mahāsī 1972, 59).

Abhidhamma titled *Vipassanā-kammatthana* (Jordt 2007, 64). He expands in his *Progress of Insight* on Buddhaghosa's framework of seven stages of purification and sixteen stages of *vipassanā* knowledge that lead to liberation.<sup>104</sup> The practice begins with contemplation of the body that ultimately leads to the direct experience of impermanence, suffering, and non-self. Mahāsi Sayadaw expanded on the contemplation of the postures of the body by including other small movements such as bending, stretching, and other minimal postures (Sīlananda 2002, 31). The technique remains the same as the meditator reaches new stages of insight and even the first paths of *nibbāna*. Meditators only deepen their understanding of impermanence, non-self, and suffering through increasing recognition of previously held wrong views.

The Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha and each branch meditation center uses the same technique developed by Mahāsi Sayadaw. The practice begins as a 'dry' *vipassanā* practice without *samatha* practice as preparation. The *vipassanā* practice is facilitated through periods of sitting and walking throughout the day while noting one's present experience in detail. The constant noting practice is meant to remind the meditator to maintain awareness but not to become interested in the content of one's experiences. The main practice in formal sitting meditation

---

<sup>104</sup> The sixteen stages of the progress of insight are named as follows: knowledge that distinguishes between mind and matter, knowledge that distinguishes between cause and effect, investigative knowledge, knowledge that is aware of the arising and passing away of phenomena, knowledge that is aware of dissolution, knowledge of awareness of fearfulness, knowledge of misery, knowledge of disgust, knowledge of the desire for deliverance, knowledge of reobservation, knowledge of equanimity about formations, insight leading to emergence, knowledge of adaptation, maturity knowledge, path knowledge, and fruition knowledge. For an explanation of each stage see Jordt (2007, 76-83).

is to be aware of the rise and fall of the abdomen as one's central meditation object. Between the rise and fall of the breath, other thoughts will enter, each of which should be noted as well. One should be aware, or note, each activity one performs during the day from the moment one wakes up.<sup>105</sup> This method has spread throughout the Theravādin world as *vipassanā* revitalization movements unfolded throughout South and Southeast Asia, along with a proliferation of other methods for lay practitioners. Consequently, it is common for lay meditators to dedicate themselves to a particular meditation teacher and his particular practice.

Besides Mahāsī Sayadaw, the second most influential Burmese teacher for the *vipassanā* revitalization movement is U Ba Khin (1899-1971). U Ba Khin, a lay government official under Prime Minister U Nu, whose interest in *vipassanā* meditation began late in life, founded the International Meditation Centre in Rangoon in 1952. His primary teacher was Saya U Thet, who taught meditation during the first half of the twentieth century and was authorized to teach by well-known monk, Webu Sayadaw (Houtman 1997, 312). U Ba Khin developed his technique based on his own experience as well as the Satipatthāna Sutta. Instead of the rising and falling of the abdomen and the practice of noting, U Ba Khin's method involves sweeping the mind through the body,<sup>106</sup> noticing every sensation

---

<sup>105</sup> As the beginning meditator progresses, the noting of concepts drops as physical experience becomes primary and the meditator is aware of the four elements such as heat (fire), breath (wind), etc. (Jordt 2007, 65).

<sup>106</sup> The sweeping method is performed by paying attention to the body part by part, noticing impermanence of all sensations. As one progresses the sweeping becomes more rapid because energy flows in the body become unblocked. This develops until one experiences one's mind, body, and the world as a series of



in order to realize impermanence. In U Ba Khin's method, one practices this particular *vipassanā* technique after developing a certain level of concentration by focusing on the upper lip and feeling the in and out breath at this point. U Ba Khin chose to focus mainly on the body because this is the most accessible for beginning students (Kornfield 2010, 235). With his international meditation center and his international students, the influence of U Ba Khin constitutes another lineage of *vipassanā* meditation that has spread globally.

U Ba Khin himself was important because he developed a distinct, replicable method, but it was his student, S.N. Goenka, who has more significantly propagated U Ba Khin's technique in the format of ten-day courses. Goenka was authorized to teach *vipassanā* by U Ba Khin in 1969, when he left Burma to bring this teaching to his homeland of India. From here the Goenka method has become a worldwide phenomenon with centers in North America, Europe, Australia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Goenka centers have had widespread popularity in Thailand, with five centers often reaching capacity within a few days of announcing an upcoming meditation retreat.<sup>107</sup> As well, a center has opened in Battambang, Cambodia, where meditation is being used to relieve trauma in this post-conflict society. Like the Mahasi method, Goenka's courses are replicable and portable, with authorized

---

vibrations (Kornfield 2010, 251).

<sup>107</sup> In Thailand centers are located in Kanchanaburi and Phitsanulok in Central Thailand, Khon Kaen in Northeast Thailand, Lampun in Northern Thailand, and Prachinburi in Eastern Thailand.

teachers and volunteers facilitating and playing video tapes of Goenka's instructions each evening. Through these tapes, Goenka's courses are enacted in almost exactly the same ways in each retreat facility.

Both U Ba Khin and Mahāsī Sayadaw propagated meditation within Burma and abroad, initiating new trajectories and lineages<sup>108</sup> of *vipassanā* meditation. U Ba Khin's students include Ruth Denison who became an American *vipassanā* teacher.<sup>109</sup> Mahāsī Sayadaw as well influenced the *vipassanā* movement in North America.<sup>110</sup> Many international meditators have learned about *vipassanā* through the teachings and writings of these teachers. These transnational connections helped to create adaptations of *vipassanā* abroad (discussed in Chapter 2). The history of *vipassanā* meditation in Burma led to new reinterpretations in Thailand for both Thai Buddhist lay meditators and

---

<sup>108</sup> Within Theravāda Buddhist monasticism lineage is an important concept. It is the duty of Theravāda lineages to preserve the teachings of the Buddha, through proper monastic ordination. Theravāda ordination lineages historically relate to political power and royal alliances, reform movements, orthodoxy, and a concern for pure, unbroken lines. These lineages attempt to create the belief that the teachings have been preserved since the time of the Buddha, which legitimates contemporary Buddhist communities. Lineages based on the teachings of particular meditation masters link teachers, students, meditation and disciplinary practices over successive generations. Meditation teachers authorize particular students to teach in their lineage, ensuring continuity into the future. Within modern Buddhism, however, meditation lineages become less clear as teachers authorize both laity and monastics. As well increased value placed on Buddhist ecumenism creates more fluid affiliations.

<sup>109</sup> For a biography of Ruth Denison, which includes her period of study under U Ba Khin, see Boucher (2005).

<sup>110</sup> Each of these American *vipassanā* teachers studied under Mahāsī Sayadaw in Burma. For this reason, IMS still traces its lineage to Mahāsī Sayadaw (Cheah 2004, 91).

international meditators. The history of *vipassanā* in Thailand, as we will see, is linked to its emergence in Burma as a popular mass movement among urban and rural laypeople.

### *Vipassanā Meditation in Thailand*

In Thailand newly formed Thai Buddhist sects propagated *vipassanā* meditation. The two trajectories of *vipassanā* meditation that formed in Thailand are characterized by their relationship with two distinct sects, Mahanikai and Thammayut. The Mahanikai sect borrowed the Mahasi method from Burma, while the Thammayut branch utilized the charisma of the wandering, meditating, forest monks, in what has come to be called the Thai forest tradition. These two trajectories shaped the understanding and practice of *vipassanā* in Thailand and had implications for international meditators.

The history of the creation of the Thammayut and the division of Thai Buddhism into two sects has been covered by a number of studies (McDaniel 2006; Reynolds 1972; Tambiah 1984; Taylor 1993; Tiyanich 1997). In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, King Mongkut (1804-1868) and King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) of the Chakri dynasty sought to centralize and purify the sangha. As a monk, King Mongkut created a new sect in 1830 in response to what he thought were lax practices and to protect an ideal of ‘pure’ Buddhism (Reynolds 1972, 63).<sup>111</sup> Strict ordination and adherence to monastic rules at the

---

<sup>111</sup> It is not uncommon for Thai kings to be ordained for short periods of time. However, having a monastic career before ascending the throne is unusual. Due to

expense of meditation characterized his new sect. Mongkut regarded scholarship as central to his reforms in his pursuit to align Buddhism with rational doctrines that could cohere with empirical science (Tambiah 1984, 160). In this way Mongkut continued the traditional separation of scholarship and meditation, deeming the former more valuable. Tiyanich argues further that Mongkut considered the practice of meditation mystical, and that Christian missionaries influenced this attitude of denigrating magic and local traditions (Tiyavanich 1997, 7). Chulalongkorn furthered these reforms with his half-brother, Wachirayan, also a monk who became abbot of Wat Bovonniwet, the head temple of the Thammayut sect, and eventually Supreme Patriarch of the sangha. King Chulalongkorn and Wachirayan sought to educate the nation and centralize the sangha by creating a national sangha hierarchy (McDaniel 2006, 104). What had once been characterized by variation and decentralization became a rationalized order with its distinctive system of monastic education and ecclesiastical rank (Tiyavanich 1997, 9).

Because of this centralization, the leaders of both Mahanikai and Thammayut sects sought to be elected to the highest ranks by sponsoring and promoting meditation. Phra Phimolatham (1903-1989), of Wat Mahathat,<sup>112</sup> a Mahanikai temple, was the first to be successful in propagating meditation. Phra

---

royal politics and claims to the throne by his half-brother, King Mongkut remained in the sangha until the time was right for his ascension. For full information on this see Reynolds (1972, 66-80).

<sup>112</sup> The full name of this temple is Wat Mahathat Yuwarajarangsarit Rajaworamahavihara.

Phimolatham was able to establish *vipassanā* meditation branch centers in Mahanikai temples (Cook 2010, 30), based on that of Mahāsī Sayadaw. He brought teachers from outlying regions of Thailand to Bangkok to train as meditation teachers and sent monks from Bangkok to Burma in order to learn the Mahasi method. After one of his students, Maha Chodok Yanasithi, returned with two Burmese teachers, Phra Phimolatham introduced and developed this *vipassanā* technique to the laity in Wat Mahathat and founded many other meditation centers throughout Thailand (Tiyavanich 1997, 228).

The selection of Mahāsī Sayadaw's method was intentional for a number of reasons. Phra Phimolatham chose this method because it claimed to have roots in the Satipatthāna Sutta (Cook 2010, 27). He also preferred a generalized approach that didn't require a method specific to particular personality types, as was the traditional practice. Mahāsī Sayadaw's one-size-fits-all method also had the advantage of being a 'dry' *vipassanā* technique, which meant that there was no preparatory *samatha* practice. Phra Phimolatham thought *vipassanā* especially appropriate for laity because they could practice at home without supervision, unlike *samatha*. Practicing *samatha* without supervision, within Theravāda Buddhism, is thought to be dangerous because it is considered possible to attain supernatural powers through the deep absorption states. The status of *samatha* was denigrated because too much of this practice is still deemed suspicious today (Cook 2010, 32-33). In this way *vipassanā* meditation, and not *samatha*, fit the image of a rational religious practice.

In the 1970s, increased standards of literacy, education, the development of an urban middle class, and new media such as cassette tapes reproduced popular teachings on demand for a mass market. Before this time, meditation teaching was available only at monasteries with well-known meditation teachers. When those teachers passed away, so did the opportunity to learn meditation (Tambiah 1984, 168). This changed through the widespread dissemination program of Phra Phimolatham and his successor, Phra Thepsiddhimuni, which trained monks from all regions of the country to teach meditation. Courses at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Buddhist University, within the grounds of Wat Mahathat, in meditation and Abhidhamma added to the available options (Van Esterik 1977, 56). At this time, the Abhidhamma, the section of the Pāli Canon that presents a scholastic and detailed analysis of physical and mental processes, was linked with meditation as both studying the Abhidhamma and practicing meditation were seen as endeavors cohering with Western science for educated middle class urbanites. Through these transformations, once considered the preserve of specialized monks, meditation became a practice appropriate for a much larger audience that coincided with the newly rising urban middle class.

The popularity of *vipassanā* propagated by the Mahanikai sect in turn increased the reputation of the wandering *thudong* forest monks of the Thammayut sect.<sup>113</sup> Ajan Man Phurithatto initiated a revival of the forest tradition

---

<sup>113</sup> *Thudong* (Pāli, *dhutanga*) refers to thirteen austere practices fully described in the Visuddhimagga. In Thailand the word refers to those forest monks who leave the monastery and walk, dwelling in forests and other secluded places for the purpose of practicing meditation.

beginning in the 1920s.<sup>114</sup> In their rivalry, the Thammayut leaders co-opted the charisma of the forest meditation masters led by Ajan Man, who were also a part of this sect, in order to legitimate their reform movement.<sup>115</sup> Before the *vipassanā* movement, forest monk practices were viewed as peripheral and strange. Taylor argues that Ajan Man had informal links with ecclesiastical elite in the capital that eventually led to his lineage's incorporation within the Thammayut order (Taylor 1993, 37). Taylor writes that Ajan Man and his disciples “remained on the rim of the establishment for much of their lives—yet constituted the mystical core of orthodoxy, eventually recognized at the centre” (Taylor 1993, 1).

Ajan Man's meditation teachings did not reach the level of a mass lay meditation movement in Thailand as compared to the Mahasi method imported from Burma. Tambiah argues that amulets blessed by forest monks were the major source of the forest monks' charisma and lay following,<sup>116</sup> rather than the actual propagation of meditation. Strict ascetic practices established the forest monks as a great field of merit but their austere *thudong* practice did not encourage the formation of lay meditation centers. Therefore, the forest tradition's

---

<sup>114</sup> Because of the popularity of this lineage, forest monks today are treated as exemplary followers of the Buddha's path and have become famous nationally and internationally for their teachings. Originally comprised of individual wandering monks, the forest tradition eventually became institutionalized. This process is detailed in Taylor (1993).

<sup>115</sup> The forest monks' location in North and Northeastern Thailand also gave Thammayut administrators bases for the spread of their reforms.

<sup>116</sup> Amulets are meant to remind the practitioner of the Buddha and the charismatic monks depicted on them. Tambiah argues that in modern Thailand, amulets are used to increase one's power in worldly activities. For more information on the commodification of amulets, see Chapter 4 in this dissertation.

meditation practices do not have as much bearing on the rise of the lay modern mass meditation movement in Thailand as those shaped through Mahanikai schools and the teachings they adopted from Burma (Van Esterik 1977, 52).<sup>117</sup> Through the establishment of *vipassanā* within the Thai religious landscape, Thai meditation masters adapted the Mahasi method to various extents.

These adaptations within Thailand have created openness toward engaging meditation in hybrid ways. Through the history of *vipassanā* meditation it has been reimagined and reinterpreted first as a monastic practice, then a lay practice, and now is promoted as a universal practice for all religions and countries. Today international meditators encounter the Mahasi method and a multiplicity of similar *vipassanā* movements established in Thailand. Before describing these methods I turn to the ways *vipassanā* meditation is taught to and understood by Thai meditators.

### **Thai Buddhist Understandings of Vipassanā**

International and Thai meditators understand meditation in different ways. This difference can be encapsulated by the perception of *vipassanā* meditation as a means to construct perceptions of reality and gain merit versus that of *vipassanā* as a decontextualized practice that is reinterpreted into other worldviews.<sup>118</sup>

Scholars have noted the ways that Thai meditators understand the practice of

---

<sup>117</sup> As described below, forest teachings have been popular with Western international guests. The focus of this engagement mostly concerns monasticism, though, not exclusively meditation.

<sup>118</sup> I will discuss in detail in later chapters how *vipassanā* is decontextualized for international meditators.



*vipassanā*, both conceptually and practically. This section focuses on both the ideal and the real by describing the aims of *vipassanā* and the understandings of Thai Buddhists, historically and today, who practice *vipassanā*.

Many Thai Buddhists attend meditation retreats in order to gain merit. Within Theravāda Buddhism, one can gain merit in a number of ways by following the Buddhist path of morality, concentration, and wisdom. Therefore a primary reason for meditating is to gain merit for oneself or others. I encountered many examples of this during the course of my fieldwork. A Thai lay female meditator commented to me that she was attending a retreat for one week at Wat Prayong because her husband's business was starting a new venture. Her meditative performance therefore was not directed towards understanding reality but toward gaining merit that could be transferred to her husband for a specific purpose. On major Buddhist holidays many meditation centers are packed beyond capacity with meditators who believe that their practice on this important night will gain much merit.



Figure 2. Evening Chanting, Wat Umong, Chiangmai, Thailand

McMahan discusses meditation in traditional contexts, involving ritual, social, and magical dimensions. Meditation, as we have seen, can be used to produce supernatural powers, good karma, and better rebirths. People who gain these powers are important in Buddhist communities as sources of merit, providing knowledge about the future or even healing illnesses. Therefore, meditation is embedded in specific social, ethical, and cosmological frameworks (McMahan 2008, 209).

Within the Thai context, *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation are distinguished in complex ways. Van Esterik (1977), during his fieldwork in the 1970s, investigates the ways Thai village and urban people understand *vipassanā*

meditation. He finds that differences between the two groups lie in the perceived value of *samatha* and *vipassanā*. Before the lay *vipassanā* movement arrived in Thailand, the Thai monastic tradition emphasized *samatha* meditation and the attainment of *jhāna* states. The introduction of the Mahasi *vipassanā* method changed this focus through its promise of a shorter path to *nibbāna* without a need to develop *samatha*. Van Esterik argues that Bangkok meditators understood this change and valued *vipassanā* while villagers continued to find *samatha* practices valuable. He found that village meditators were interested in powers and encountering spirits during their practice while urban meditators attempted to realize *nibbāna*. Therefore, although some village Buddhists held that meditation was still the purview of monastics, the lay meditation movement had affected their understandings, and many stated that meditation was a way for laity to make merit and attain supernormal powers (Van Esterik 1977, 50). Yet urban Thais deny the attainment of supernatural powers through *samatha* meditation. Meditators in urban meditation movements often hold that *vipassanā* meditation is the only way toward *nibbāna* and is faster than practicing *samatha* first.

Cook (2010) updates Thai Buddhist understandings of *vipassanā* with her fieldwork among monastics in Northern Thailand. Cook's study is concerned with deep and long-term effects of meditation for monastics, and therefore represents the ideal goals of *vipassanā* practice. She argues that the practice of *vipassanā* is intended to bring about a change in perception in the meditator consistent with Buddhist ethical principles. Cook asserts that *vipassanā* entails close self-monitoring that generates specific knowledge of the self. In this way, through

*vipassanā* meditation monastics make themselves ethical subjects (Cook 2010, 95). As a result of the dedicated practice of meditation, each mental and physical movement becomes evidence of religious principles at the same time as one actively learns to interpret their subjectivity through such principles. Meditators engage in specific practices in order to change their experiences in relation to religious concepts, so that religious tenets become real. Practitioners are encouraged to interpret the everyday flow of their own awareness in terms of impermanence, suffering and non-self and to see in it evidence of these religious truths (Cook 2010, 2). Thus, people are encouraged to experience moments of their own subjectivity as illustrations of religious concepts. The goal of *vipassanā* meditation for these monastics is to achieve awareness of the tenets of Buddhism. Doctrines are transformed into experience through the practice of complete awareness of one's present moment and changing mental formations.

Considering the ideal or real Thai Buddhist understandings of meditation, the practice is in both cases embedded within Buddhist ethical and doctrinal frameworks. Whether one intends to gain merit, achieve supernatural power, or perceive directly the truth of suffering, non-self, and impermanence, Buddhist teachings and cosmological worldview support these traditional goals. This perspective contrasts with the decontextualized meditation of modern Buddhism discussed in Chapter 2. Before delineating the processes of adaptation for international meditators in the following chapters, I offer an overview of the sites where most international meditators engage with *vipassanā* meditation.

## **The Field of Meditative Engagement**

The field of engagement for foreign meditators in Thailand is diverse. There are many meditation centers in Thailand with varying meditation methods and modes of instruction. Only a small percentage of these centers are able to host international meditators consistently with instruction in English. These descriptions offer a background on the options available to English-speakers in Thailand. All of these international meditation centers are a consequence of the ‘universal’ discourse of modern Buddhism. These centers are made available to non-Buddhists because of the modern Buddhist idea that meditation can be lifted from its Buddhist origins and practiced by all. In the next chapters, I delineate the processes of reinterpretation, appropriation, and selective engagement within these international meditation centers, which form hybrid religiosities among international meditators.

### ***Meditation Practices of Thailand***

In order to understand the global cultural flows and constructions of hybrid religiosity surrounding discourses on meditation, I highlight the main actors and meditative practices that have contributed to Thai Buddhism’s status internationally. Monastics’ methods such as that of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Ajan Tong Srimangalo, as well as Dhammakaya meditation and the four foundations of mindfulness, are the most influential dynamics in the cultural exchange between Thai Buddhists and international meditators within an international meditation setting. Through a mix of charismatic teachers, tourist locations, teachings in

English, and accessibility to information about these sites, these meditation methods have emerged as the most well-known among international travelers to Thai international meditation centers. These methods and actors have gained popularity through various modes such as international disciples teaching abroad, translations of *dhamma* talks, English websites, and word of mouth of particular teachers' willingness and effectiveness in teaching meditation.

### *Buddhadasa Bkiihku*

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906-1993) was a famous Buddhist scholar and philosopher whose English writings cover many shelves on subjects such as comparative religion and Buddhist teachings for daily life.<sup>119</sup> He has many more publications available in Thai, and he is well-known among this audience for his interpretation of Buddhist teachings. Swearer (1989) and Jackson (2003) have written separate volumes on Buddhadasa. They are interested in his innovative ideas regarding Buddhist thought in the modern world.<sup>120</sup> Therefore Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's interests did not only relate to meditation, but to the whole of the Buddhist tradition. His concerns stretch to all religions as he believed all are

---

<sup>119</sup> Swearer notes that Buddhadasa's writings constitute "the largest corpus of thought ever published by a single Theravāda thinker in the entire history of the tradition" (Swearer 1989, 2).

<sup>120</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's important reinterpretations of dhamma include creating categories of everyday language and Dhamma language and envisioning *nibbāna* within everyday experience. Through these theoretical understandings, Buddhadasa built a framework for socially active Buddhist practices directed towards politics and socioeconomic development. For explications of his ideas see Swearer (1989) and Jackson (2003).

fundamentally similar in that they point to the same essential nature of self and reality, and teach an ethic of selflessness (Swearer 1989, 11). His original ideas, which can be contrasted with normative, orthodox Theravāda thought, and are in opposition to popular lay practices such as merit making, demonstrate his continued creative engagement with the teachings of the Buddha and his attempts to make them relevant to Thai society (Swearer 1989, 3-5).<sup>121</sup>

The temple Buddhadasa Bhikkhu founded, Wat Suan Mokkhabalarama, or Suan Mokkh (garden of liberation), in Chaiya, Southern Thailand, still bears his legacy. This is a meditation temple for the monks and *mae chii* in residence as well as lay visitors and meditators. Each area of Suan Mokkh is meant to teach its visitors about *nibbāna*, for example, the ‘spiritual theater’ inside the temple expresses Buddhist truths through art and sculpture from around the world. His legacy also includes the International Dhamma Hermitage, a meditation center he established.<sup>122</sup> Interest in Buddhadasa continues with another project in Bangkok called the Buddhadasa Indapanno Archives,<sup>123</sup> which has been created to preserve his teachings.

---

<sup>121</sup> Swearer specifically contrasts Buddhadasa with Buddhaghosa, author of the *Visuddhimagga*, and Wachirayan, the reformer of Thai Buddhism in the early twentieth century (Swearer 1989, 3).

<sup>122</sup> See website: [www.suanmokkh-idh.org/](http://www.suanmokkh-idh.org/).

<sup>123</sup> In August of 2010, the Buddhadasa Bhikkhu Archives (BIA) opened in Bangkok. The BIA’s mission is to uphold the three wishes of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: for people to understand their own religion, have mutual understanding for other religions, and for people to be able to remove themselves from the grips of consumerism and materialism. The BIA was set up as a new and separate foundation to maintain Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s writings and recordings. They



Figure 3. Meditation hall, International Dhamma Hermitage, Chaiya, Thailand

In addition to these teachings, he imparted a meditation method that is practiced today at his temple and meditation center. Similar to the Burmese methods, Buddhadasa's is a general method that can be used by all meditators. However, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu bases his meditation technique on the Ānāpānasati Sutta instead of the more popular Satipatthāna Sutta, with its delineation of the four foundations of mindfulness. He asserts that out of the many meditation methods and systems of *samatha* and *vipassanā* created by various

---

have the full support and cooperation of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's monastery, Wat Suan Mokkh, and the Dhammadana foundation. See website: [www.bia.or.th/](http://www.bia.or.th/).



teachers – *ānāpānasati*, or mindfulness of breathing, is the closest one to the Buddha’s teachings. Although the Satipatthāna Sutta has received much attention in scholarship and within meditation centers, Buddhadasa finds the text meandering, confusing, and vague. He asserts that there is no explanation of how to practice the four foundations of mindfulness as the sutta only lists the names of practices and fails to expand on how the meditator should progress (Santikaro 2001b, 126). Instead Buddhadasa recommends using the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* as a framework that offers complete and clear guidance. In his meditation instructions, Buddhadasa recommends following this sutta from beginning to end as one progresses on the path (Buddhadasa 2001, 18). He believes that this system “is simply the correct way as recommended by the Buddha” (Buddhadasa 2001, 17).

The meditation instruction of Ajan Buddhadasa Bhikkhu can be read in full in his *Mindfulness with Breathing* translated by Santikaro.<sup>124</sup> In this book Buddhadasa writes that the correct and complete practice of *ānāpānasati* is to take one truth or reality of nature and then observe, investigate, and scrutinize it in the mind with every inhalation and every exhalation (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 2001, 5). In order to begin on this journey, Buddhadasa writes that we need *sati* or awareness, and we find this by being mindful of each in and out breath. Ajan Buddhadasa Bhikkhu makes clear what this system of *ānāpānasati* is not in his *Mindfulness with Breathing*,

---

<sup>124</sup> Santikaro, known formerly as Santikaro Bhikkhu, was Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s main translator and author of a number of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s translated works. He has since disrobed and established a retreat center in Wisconsin, USA, called Liberation Park.

“This system is not the Burmese or Chinese or Sri Lankan style that some people are clinging to these days. Likewise, it is not the system of ‘achan this,’ ‘master that,’ ‘guru this,’ or ‘teacher that’ as others are so caught up in nowadays. Nor is it the style of Suan Mokhh or any other wat. Instead, this system is simply the correct way as recommended by the Buddha” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 2001, 17).

Thus he finds that these meditation instructions are the fundamentals of the practice without any additions. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu continues to detail practices for all of the sixteen stages of the Ānāpānasati Sutta, which he considers to be the complete path toward liberation. The program for English-speakers that began in 1989 is still a significant aspect of foreign engagement with meditation in Thailand today.

#### *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*

Many international meditators engage with some form of meditation method that is based on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. Since it uses the Satipatthāna Sutta as a basis for its practices, this is the type of meditation that is explicitly similar to the Mahasi method. It is most often called the Burmese method or the method based on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

International meditators find this method at centers which typically cater to a small number of international meditators and a larger number of Thai meditators, through friends, websites, or by chance when passing by. These centers do not trace their lineage to a specific teacher like Ajan Tong or Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, or have charismatic meditation teachers. Instead they utilize teaching practices from the Satipatthāna Sutta. From my experience, this usually means teachers instruct

on some form of contemplation of the body, such as the breath, recollection of death, or observation of the thirty parts of the body, for example.

*Ajan Tong Srimangalo*

Phrakhru Phiphat Khanaphiban, or Ajan Tong Srimangalo (1923-present), is known for promoting an adapted version of the *vipassanā* technique of Burmese teacher Mahāsī Sayadaw.<sup>125</sup> Many Thai and international meditators have participated in Ajan Tong's 20+ day meditation courses in the numerous temples that utilize his method, mostly within Northern Thailand. Kathryn Chindaporn translated into English Ajan Tong's (2004) most extensive book on his meditation method, *The Only Way: An Introduction to Vipassanā Meditation*. *The Only Way* describes the precise method of meditation Ajan Tong created. It lists the exercises of prostration, standing, walking, sitting, lying, and minor positions. These exercises are all explicitly connected to the four foundations of mindfulness of the Satipatthāna Sutta.

Ajan Tong was able to spread *vipassanā* meditation within Northern Thailand because of opportunities to study in Bangkok and Burma. The abbot of Wat Phra Singh Voravihara in Chiangmai selected Ajan Tong as the Northern

---

<sup>125</sup> The two techniques use the same basic practices of sitting and walking meditation with a focus on the rise and fall of one's abdomen. However, international meditation center teachers at Wat Chom Tong explained to me that Ajan Tong's basic retreat course is over a month shorter than Mahāsī Sayadaw's recommended basic course. As well Ajan Tong's recommended speed for walking meditation and daily activities while in retreat is relatively quicker than Mahāsī Sayadaw's method.

Thailand representative to study *vipassanā* meditation at Wat Mahathat in 1952. He also researched *vipassanā* meditation for over two years in Yangon through the connections already made in Bangkok by Phra Phimolatham (Tambiah 1984, 172). Upon Ajan Tong's return to Chiangmai, he established one of the first satellite monasteries, Wat Mueang Mang, to adopt the meditation program propagated by Wat Mahathat.<sup>126</sup> He continued to institute a number of meditation centers throughout the region, of which three have become popular international centers. Through increased foreign tourism and interest in meditation as well as granting authorization to foreign, English-speaking teachers, Ajan Tong meditation centers in the Chiangmai area became international meditation centers.<sup>127</sup> International meditators have practiced this method in Thailand and in his centers throughout the world in Germany, Israel, Mexico, and Canada.

### *Dhammakaya Meditation*

A number of scholars have written about the unique visualization method known as Dhammakaya meditation (Newell 2008; Bowers 1996). As well, temples that teach Dhammakaya meditation, such as Wat Luang Por Sot, have published their own materials, which describe the meditation technique

---

<sup>126</sup> An early example of foreign participation in an Ajan Tong retreat is a memoir called *A Meditator's Diary* by Hamilton-Merrit (1986). In the 1970s, an international meditator was a rare site. The situation transformed within the next twenty years as international meditation centers developed along with tourism and international interest in meditation.

<sup>127</sup> These international meditation centers and the retreat practices are described more fully below under 'Sites Descriptions.'

(Rajyanvisith 2009). Although its meditation teachers claim this method is based on the same Satipathāna Sutta, this technique differs from traditional meditation methods.<sup>128</sup> This exemplifies the variety of ways the practices of the Satipathāna Sutta have been interpreted.

Dhammakaya meditation and the temples that use this technique owe their existence to the famous monk known by both his monastic name Luang Por Sot Chandassaro (1885-1959), and Luang Por Wat Paknam, after the temple he came to be most closely associated with. This meditation technique contains many levels and becomes increasingly complex as one progresses, but the beginning stages are meant for everyone. There are three main temples that offer instruction in Dhammakaya meditation: Wat Dhammakaya, Wat Luang Por Sot, and Wat Paknam. Wat Dhammakaya, outside of Bangkok, is the largest temple in Thailand and was founded after Luang Por Sot's death. Other disciples founded Wat Luang Por Sot, another temple teaching Dhammakaya meditation in Ratburi province. In Thonburi, across the river from Bangkok, is Wat Paknam, the temple where Luang Por Sot was abbot, and where many people still come to pay respects to him.<sup>129</sup>

Dhammakaya meditation, unlike other Thai meditation practices, is usually conducted in groups and utilizes visualization. When one begins this

---

<sup>128</sup> Some scholars have argued (Crosby 2000; Newell 2008) that Dhammakaya meditation takes as its origin *yogāvacara* (known as a form of Tantric Theravāda) meditation techniques. This is one of the reasons why Dhammakaya meditation has many features that are different from other forms of Theravāda meditation.

<sup>129</sup> See Newell (2008) for more information on Dhammakaya temple networks.

practice, one first uses three techniques: concentration on the breath, the repetition of a mantra (*samma araham*), and concentration on a bright object. As the meditator repeats the mantra, she/he will also visualize a sphere of light or crystal ball that moves through seven bases within the body, starting at the nostril and moving down to the center of the body. The meditator takes these steps before initiating concentration on the light object in the center of the body, which is considered to be about two finger-widths above the navel. Focusing on this sphere (*pathama-magga*) will eventually produce the first image in a series of spheres. For intermediate and advanced meditators there is a series of further spheres and bodies that arise as one's concentration deepens (Rajyanvisith 2009, 72-84). On most beginner retreats though, this high-level meditation is not discussed. For most people Dhammakaya meditation is promoted as simple and effective, and something that can change one's life without much effort. Another point of difference between Dhammakaya meditation and other Thai forms is the focal point of the concentration. Instead of at the nostril or abdomen, Dhammakaya meditation focuses on the center of the body. And instead of the breath, the meditator concentrates on the imagined bright object.

The methods discussed above are those most popular and available for English-speakers. Some international meditation centers teach a variety of methods and it is up to the student to choose which one works for her or him. The Thai forest tradition is also known among international travelers through two of the famous disciples of Ajan Man, Ajan Chah and Luangta Mahabua, who founded large forest monasteries in Northeast Thailand. International networks of

Ajan Chah's branch temples<sup>130</sup> as well as translated books of Ajan Chah's and Luangta Mahabua's teachings,<sup>131</sup> represent another trajectory of foreign engagement with Thai Buddhism, one based partly on meditation but mostly on monasticism. However, these forest tradition teachers are not included here because they do not have retreat programs for lay meditators and their methods are not taught in the systematic, regimented way of guided retreats at international meditation centers.<sup>132</sup> Other teachers such as Ajan Naeb<sup>133</sup> and Luangpor Teean<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> Main international monasteries of the Ajan Chah lineage are located in the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Switzerland, and Italy. For a complete list of monasteries see [forestsangha.org](http://forestsangha.org).

<sup>131</sup> For a list of books by and about Luangta Mahabua see [forestdhamma.org](http://forestdhamma.org). Books relating to the Ajan Chah tradition can be found at [forestsanghapublications.org](http://forestsanghapublications.org). Although both Luangta Mahabua and Ajan Chah consider themselves disciples of Ajan Man, they have different groups of disciples who manage the memory of each teacher and disseminate their teachings in English through separate venues.

<sup>132</sup> In fact the abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat, the international forest monastery founded by Ajan Chah, recommends that visitors participate in a meditation retreat based on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, or the Goenka method, before arriving for a stay at Wat Pah Nanachat. Because this temple offers no meditation instruction, a retreat experience will give the meditator a method to follow independently.

<sup>133</sup> Ajan Naeb (1897-1983) studied meditation under Ajan Pathunta U Visala, a Burmese teacher at Wat Prog in Bangkok. She then studied the Abhidhamma and taught meditation and Buddhist philosophy in Thailand for many years. Naeb's (1982) book *The Development of Insight* deals with awareness of the body in the four major postures, walking, sitting, standing, and lying down as they relate to the characteristics of suffering, impermanence, and non-self. Through this focus, she wants students to see the inevitable suffering that comes with having a body.

<sup>134</sup> Luangpor Theean Jittasubho's (1911-1988) method of meditation is characterized as a dynamic rather than static sitting meditation. The system is based on the mindful action of the hands in a set pattern. This method is popular

also have distinct methods; however, these are not widely available in English and so are not well-known among international meditators in Thailand. Therefore, my discussion does not provide a comprehensive list of Thai meditation practices, but instead focuses on those practices international meditators are most likely to encounter at international meditation centers.

### **Sites Descriptions**

The popular appeal of meditation leads many international travelers to explore opportunities to practice in Asian Buddhist countries. With the rise of lay meditation and many meditation centers already catering to Thais, some temples and meditation centers have sought to accommodate an international audience by providing English instruction. This shift has created the need for separate English-speaking teachers to manage the international groups while physically separating international meditators from the Thai meditators. The language barrier is not the only reason to separate international meditators; since their cultural frameworks are different from Thai meditators, international meditators receive separate, decontextualized teachings.<sup>135</sup>

This phenomenon is evident throughout different regions of Thailand. I am taking a regional approach because each region developed international meditation centers in different ways that were similar to tourist patterns.

---

with monks and laypeople and has no direct connection with canonical texts. He identifies it as new and it became popular because it was perceived as effective.

<sup>135</sup> This issue of cultural frameworks and decontextualized teachings is addressed in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6 in this dissertation.



International meditation teachings began in Central Thailand along with tourism, as Bangkok has been a hub for international travel. When tourists arrived in large numbers to Southern Thailand in the 1970s and 1980s group retreats developed in that region. And when tourists discovered the 'Lanna' culture of Northern Thailand via tourism promotion for Thai tourists in the 1980s (Evrard & Leepreecha 2009, 244), meditation centers for Thais using the method of Ajan Tong transformed to become international centers soon afterward. Cohen (2001, 7) has identified the three main areas where tourism is located: Bangkok, Chiangmai, Northern Thailand, and Phuket, Southern Thailand (tourism in these regions also includes areas beyond Chiangmai in Northern Thailand such as Pai and MaeHongSon as well as southern islands on the Gulf of Thailand such as Ko Samui and Ko Phangngan). The following describes the most well-known and well-attended international meditation centers.



Figure 4. Meditation hall, Wat Doi Suthep, Chiangmai, Thailand

### *Northern Thailand*

#### *Ajan Tong Method Temples*

The famous meditation teacher Ajan Tong introduced his method of meditation in the north of Thailand. The popularity of his method led to the creation of many meditation centers throughout northern Thailand, first for Thais, and then for international meditators. Currently, there are three popular international centers in the region: Wat Prathat Doi Suthep, Wat Prathat Sri Chom

Tong,<sup>136</sup> and Wat Rampoeng Tapotaram.<sup>137</sup> All of them practice the Ajan Tong method and welcome foreigners with instruction in English. Wat Chom Tong and Wat Rampoeng opened their doors to foreigners in the early 1990s and Wat Doi Suthep did the same in 2006. I gathered the information below about these three sites by participating in ten-day retreats and interviewing teachers and international meditators during my field research period.

### *Daily Life at Ajan Tong Meditation Centers*

The three Ajan Tong international meditation centers within Northern Thailand are among the most popular meditation retreat sites for foreigners. They are all easily accessible from the city of Chiangmai and have a large amount of space to accommodate many meditators. However, these are intense retreats with a minimum commitment of 10 days and a preferred beginner retreat of 21-26 days (depending on the center) culminating in a ‘determination’ period when one meditates for 72 straight hours. These centers operate on a system of rolling enrollments with students beginning and ending retreats on any given day.

The retreat program consists of a difficult schedule of increasing amounts of meditation starting at 7-8 hours per day and ending at 24. Nightly sleep is minimal and decreases as one progresses in order to create space for more meditation. Aside from the daily individual interview with the meditation teacher,

---

<sup>136</sup> For Wat Chom Tong’s website see: [www.northernvipassana.org](http://www.northernvipassana.org).

<sup>137</sup> For Wat Rampoeng’s website see:  
[www.Pālikanon.com/vipassana/tapotaram/tapotaram.htm](http://www.Pālikanon.com/vipassana/tapotaram/tapotaram.htm).

silence is mandatory. No one monitors the individual meditation practice so meditators are free to practice in their rooms or anywhere else within the temple compound. At the daily interview, one reports to the teacher the number of hours spent in meditation and one's meditative experiences. At Wat Rampoeng, there is minimal instruction about Buddhism except a few key meditation terms presented by the abbot in the opening ceremony; at Wat Chom Tong there is usually one dhamma talk concerning the Five Hindrances; and at Wat Prathat Doi Suthep the daily dhamma talk usually deals with the monastic life and aspects of Thai Buddhist culture. These meditation centers are housed within or adjacent to temple compounds which hold festivals, ordinations, and ceremonies. Except for the weekly *wan phra* holy day, teachers do not usually explain the meaning of Buddhist holy days, unless one asks in the interview.

### *Wat Umong*

Wat Umong is an individual retreat site similar to the temples using the Ajan Tong method, where the meditators come and go according to their own schedules. There are usually a small number of both Thai and foreign meditators at this temple. Through fieldwork visits and stays at Wat Umong in March 2010, as well as interviews with the abbot and international meditation teacher, I learned that, unlike the temples that teach the Ajan Tong method, at Wat Umong there is no set program so that international meditators could stay for as short as three days or as long as a few months. This International Meditation Center opened in 2007 and is expanding with new meditation halls, dormitories, and a meditation

office for the monk teachers. There are several teachers for the Thai meditators and three monks can teach in English for the foreigners. The meditation method usually taught here is one based on the four foundations of mindfulness and consists of periods of sitting and walking meditation, adapted from the Mahasi method.

### ***Central Thailand***

One of the first programs for international visitors interested in meditation was developed at Wat Mahathat and the Buddhist university it houses, Mahachulalongkorn (MCU), in Bangkok. From speaking with British lay teacher Ajan Helen,<sup>138</sup> I learned that she was instrumental in the creation of this program, which began soon after she arrived in Thailand in the mid-1970s. She worked for more than 20 years with the monks at MCU to provide *vipassanā* meditation instruction and information about Buddhism in English to interested foreigners in Bangkok. In 1974, she co-founded the International Buddhist Meditation Centre (IBMC) that is now part of MCU. It organized talks, lectures, discussions, and weekend retreats in English. In 1994, she converted her residence into a private meditation center called The House of Dhamma.<sup>139</sup> This center provides private and group instruction throughout the year in the north of Bangkok.

---

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Ajan Helen, House of Dhamma, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>139</sup> For the House of Dhamma's website see: [www.houseofdhamma.com/](http://www.houseofdhamma.com/).

### *Wat Mahathat Section 5*

Section 5 of Wat Mahathat has a long history of offering a practice space and instruction to both Thai and foreign meditators that begins with Phra Phimolatham's propagation of meditation in the 1950s. Currently at Section 5 there is a program titled 'The Insight Meditation Practice Program for a Good Life,'<sup>140</sup> which utilizes *vipassanā* meditation based on the four foundations of mindfulness. The goals of the program as stated in the brochure are to lead life according to Buddha's teachings, cultivate the mind, be familiar with roles of Thai Buddhist monks in society, and lead one's life toward the cessation of suffering. The schedule consists of three practice times of 3 hours in the morning (7-10am), afternoon (1-4pm), and two hours in the evening (6-8pm). There is an opening instruction conducted in Thai, which begins each meditation session, and a closing chanting of spreading loving-kindness and sharing the merit of the meditation with others. International meditators receive separate instruction from the English-speaking person designated to take care of the foreigners, usually Ajan Suputh Kosalo.<sup>141</sup> During the times when there is a break from the meditation the small hall remains empty until the next period. Meditators enter

---

<sup>140</sup> I collected this brochure during my stay at Wat Mahathat, Section 5, from June 13-15, 2010.

<sup>141</sup> Venerable Phra Suputh Kosalo (Ajan Suphat), Section 5, Wat Mahathat, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

and depart this center as they wish, staying for one or several nights or practicing for just a day.<sup>142</sup>

### *Wat Prayong Gittivararam*

Mae Chii Brigitte from Austria recently established the international meditation center at Wat Prayong in April of 2009. Through my fieldwork at Wat Prayong and conversations with Mae Chii Brigitte,<sup>143</sup> I learned that she found Wat Prayong through the advice of a taxi driver.<sup>144</sup> Upon her first visit the abbot impressed her because he could tell her things about her past. Because of this she came for a personal retreat and later moved in to establish the lay center, where she teaches both Thais and foreigners in Thai, English, and German. Many German meditators come to Wat Prayong to receive instruction in their native language. At this temple Mae Chii Brigitte offers group meditation in the morning and meditation instruction and discussion in the evening. Mae Chii Brigitte has practiced in many styles but usually teaches the Burmese method based on the four foundations of mindfulness. This is a new center with developing facilities that offers opportunities for both guided and group practice as well as individual periods of meditation. Additionally, it is a place where Thai and international

---

<sup>142</sup> More information can be found here:  
[www.centermeditation.com/english\\_version\\_mainpage.php](http://www.centermeditation.com/english_version_mainpage.php)

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Mae Chii Brigitte, Wat Prayong Gittivararam, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Fieldwork conducted from March 9-11, 2010.

<sup>144</sup> More information about Mae Chii Brigitte's life can be found here:  
[www.meditationthailand.com/maechee\\_index.htm](http://www.meditationthailand.com/maechee_index.htm).

meditators can learn about each other and practice together. This is one of the only centers that allows for this kind of retreat experience.

#### *Wat Dhammakaya's Middle Way Retreat*

The Middle Way retreat began in Thailand in 2004, making it one of the newer international meditation centers. Unlike the individual meditation retreats discussed above, this is a retreat where a group practices meditation and conducts all activities together for a predetermined length of time. This retreat began as a way to introduce the meditation techniques of Dhammakaya to a foreign audience and is unique because the focus is largely *samatha* rather than *vipassanā*, and because participants are encouraged to talk and get to know one another. The retreat currently takes place at a center in Loei, Northeast Thailand, about once per month. The retreat participants gather at Wat Dhammakaya in Bangkok and are transported together to the retreat site. After the 7-day retreat, participants are provided with transportation back to Wat Dhammakaya and are offered opportunities to tour the temple and to stay overnight at hotels nearby. International meditators usually discover this retreat from the Middle Way's extensive English website.<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> For more information see: [www.mdwmeditation.org/meditationthai.php](http://www.mdwmeditation.org/meditationthai.php).



### *Wat Luang Por Sot Buddhist Meditation Institute*

Wat Luang Por Sot's Buddhist Meditation Institute (BMI)<sup>146</sup> in Ratburi, Central Thailand, was created through the efforts of the late Khru Baitika Dr. Barton Yanathiro, or Phra Bart, and the abbot of the temple, Dr. Phra Rajanvisith. Through my stay here and conversations with Phra Bart<sup>147</sup> I learned that instruction of Dhammakaya meditation takes place mainly through guided meditations, 3-4 times a day for hour-long sessions. International meditators can stay at BMI for any length of time, but Phra Bart recommended two weeks. BMI also hosts two-week intensive retreats, three times a year, for foreigners and Thais together. At these retreats foreigners can have more access to instruction from the abbot, Dr. Phra Rajanvisith. There is slightly more intensive training during this time as well in the form of group meditation and activities. Many participants come to BMI through volunteer exchange programs such as Global Service Corps, and in addition to learning meditation they also teach English to the many monks and novices residing at this temple.

### *Southern Thailand*

In the south of Thailand, most international meditators attend one of two large group retreats. The first international retreat site was Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's Wat Suan Mokhh, which began in 1985. Starting in 1990, through the enthusiasm

---

<sup>146</sup> See BMI's website:  
[www.dhammacenter.org/retreat/monastery/buddhist\\_meditation\\_institute](http://www.dhammacenter.org/retreat/monastery/buddhist_meditation_institute).

<sup>147</sup> Interviews with Phra Bart took place at Wat Luang Por Sot on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010, and June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

and encouragement of the present abbot, Ajan Bodhi Buddhaddhammo, or Ajan Poh as he is called, the International Dhamma Hermitage was built across the street from the temple.<sup>148</sup> In addition, Ajan Poh also established a similar retreat on the island of Koh Samui. The large numbers of travelers interested in meditation in the touristy beach region led to a second group retreat in the south, Wat Kow Tahm International Meditation Center on Koh Phangnan.

### *The International Dhamma Hermitage*

During the course of my fieldwork, I conducted a number of interviews with teachers and volunteers in order to learn the history of the International Dhamma Hermitage and the reasoning behind their retreat program.<sup>149</sup> Since 1990 this retreat center has received foreigners each month and has averaged 1000 participants yearly for over twenty years.<sup>150</sup> The ten-day retreat program for foreigners is conducted in English in a large group beginning on the first of every month.

All meditation here is done with a group, and everyone follows the same schedule. Instead of mandatory daily interviews with a teacher, there are optional ones toward the middle of the retreat. One can sign up to meet with one of the

---

<sup>148</sup> For information on Wat Suan Mokkh see: [www.suanmokkh.org/](http://www.suanmokkh.org/).

<sup>149</sup> Interviews conducted at the International Dhamma Hermitage include Mae Chii Aree February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010; Than Medhi, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010; Ajan Poh, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010; Than Dhammavidu, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010; Reinhard, International Dhamma Hermitage, via email, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010.

<sup>150</sup> See the website for more information: [www.suanmokkh-idh.org/suanmokkh-idh.html](http://www.suanmokkh-idh.org/suanmokkh-idh.html).

volunteers, or dhamma friends, who help to run the retreat. Replacing daily interviews are dhamma talks throughout the day by volunteer dhamma friends as well as teachings about basic Buddhist concepts and the thought of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu by British monk, Than Dhammavidu. Meditators also have the option to participate in a daily one-hour chanting session, which is another opportunity to learn about Buddhism. Foreigners chant in both Pāli and English and are given explanations about the meanings of each chant.

Perhaps because there are very few Thai meditators participating in these group retreats, for the most part this experience is secular with no Buddha statues, no ceremonies, and no bowing to the monk teacher while sitting in a meditation interview. Even with the more familiar environment and explanations in English, this retreat is still difficult and surprising for many participants. It has a rigorous schedule with few comforts.

#### *Dipabhavan Meditation Center*

Through interviews and observations during my stay at Dipabhavan Meditation Center,<sup>151</sup> I learned that Ajan Poh, abbot of Wat Suan Mokhh who was born on the island of Koh Samui, had a long-time wish to start a retreat center there. He had seen the arrival of tourism on the island and felt that Thailand had more to offer than sun and sand. Thirty years ago he attempted to establish a group retreat on Koh Samui with limited success. The retreat at Wat Suan Mokhh

---

<sup>151</sup> I attended the retreat at Dipabhavan Meditation Center from June 20-27, 2010.

became popular because the well-known teacher Ajan Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was able to teach the foreigners at that time. Only recently in 2006, through the donation of land by a Thai lay female follower, Ajan Poh was able to realize his dream of a meditation center on his homeland, with separate retreats each month for English-speaking and Thai meditators. The Dipabhavan Meditation Center program is based on the twenty years of retreat experience at the International Dhamma Hermitage. The retreat schedule is less strict as well with more sleep and fewer hours meditating.<sup>152</sup>

---

<sup>152</sup> For more information see: [www.dipabhavan.org/](http://www.dipabhavan.org/).



Figure 5. Meditators, Dipabhavan Meditation Center, Koh Samui, Thailand

*Wat Kow Tahm International Meditation Center*

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, many tourists would take the hike from Baan Thai Beach up the hill to the temple called Wat Kow Tahm and ask the head nun there, Mae Chii Ahmon, how they could learn meditation. She discovered a way to share the practice of meditation in the forms of two experienced meditators who also happened to stumble upon her monastery. Married couple

Rosemary and Steve Weissman arrived in 1987 when they were soon asked to lead retreats.<sup>153</sup>

During my fieldwork and interviews at this site,<sup>154</sup> I learned that this center was established based on location rather than within a particular Thai lineage. This is a unique situation for Buddhism in Thailand. Most of the foreign international meditation center teachers in Thailand are affiliated with a Thai meditation master and lineage. Although Rosemary and Steve have studied with many Thai and non-Thai teachers, they do not connect their teachings within any one lineage. A majority of international meditation center teachers thus carry on a Thai lineage but adapt it for English-speakers and bring this particular lineage to other countries. Steve and Rosemary represent a possible future for the transmission of the Dhamma; one which has no lineage but that begins anew from a mixed lineage, with methods developed and adapted from many years of teaching retreats.

Each day of the retreat is filled with sitting, walking, and standing meditation periods, meditation exercises, mindful chores, mindfulness activities, teachings by Rosemary and/or Steve, three vegetarian meals and post-meal breaks. There are also three interview opportunities for each international meditator, the only allowances for speech during the retreat. The retreat is interspersed with guided meditations in order to learn how to practice

---

<sup>153</sup> For more information see: [www.watkovtahm.org/data/watmain.htm](http://www.watkovtahm.org/data/watmain.htm).

<sup>154</sup> I attended the retreat at Wat Kow Tahm from January 9-January 18, 2010, and conducted an interview with Steve Weissman on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

compassion/loving-kindness meditation, as well as meditation on sympathetic joy and wise-reflection meditation.<sup>155</sup>

Although during the course of my research I visited more sites, the ones described above are the international meditation centers I will refer to throughout this dissertation. These are also the sites which host the largest numbers of international meditators and are the most well-known among travelers. Most of these centers have websites and other promotional material to welcome foreign meditators. As well, word of mouth and Internet discussion forums spread information concerning the styles and qualities of each retreat center.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the outline of the Theravāda Buddhist meditation path along with the history of modern *vipassanā* in Southeast Asia. Starting in Burma with urban lay meditation centers, the *vipassanā* reinterpretations have affected not only Asian Buddhists, but also created an opportunity for foreign meditators to enter meditation retreats. Through the modern Buddhist discourses of the ‘universal’ practice of meditation, retreats opened for English-speakers where teachers were available. In Thailand, international meditation centers have become popular within tourist destinations in Northern, Central, and Southern regions. The presence of a charismatic teacher, such as Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, can also be a factor in the establishment of an

---

<sup>155</sup> See Weissman and Weissman (1999) for more details on the content of their retreat program.

international meditation center. Including international meditators and drawing from modern Buddhist discourses resulted in a decontextualized meditation practice. This decontextualization in turn creates the necessity for adaptation and reinterpretation and leads to hybrid religiosity in which meditation practitioners mix the practice of meditation with their own secular and other religious frameworks. In the next chapter I turn to the specific ways that meditation is promoted for international meditators.



## Chapter 4

### MEDITATION AS COMMODITY, PROMOTING MEDITATION TO INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS IN THAILAND

The revival of *vipassanā* meditation, the influence of modern Buddhist discourses, as well as the significance of international tourism in Thailand has helped to create new cultural and social spaces for international meditators. This chapter introduces this third factor by illuminating postcolonial constructions of Thai Buddhism and meditation through a discourse analysis of tourism publications relating to meditation. I demonstrate how tourist materials draw on modern Buddhist discourses, popular ideas of meditation, and Romantic Orientalist conceptions of the exotic East to promote religious vacations in Thailand. I first outline the roles of consumerism and commodification within modern Buddhism and then analyze the circulation of these discourses within Thai tourism. Focusing on how these promotional materials signify new modes of religiosity, I demonstrate how meditation is conveyed as a product, which can be consumed in order to help escape modernity and the malaise associated with it. These tropes converge in materials created by Thai Buddhist institutions meant to create a perceived need for meditation.

Thailand is one of the few Asian countries that offers a range of possibilities to English-speakers interested in learning about Buddhism and experiencing meditation. Information on meditation sites in Thailand is increasingly easy to obtain through websites, guidebooks, and pamphlets promoting international meditation centers where English-speakers are welcome.

The way these meditation retreats are promoted reveals a consumerist discourse so that meditation becomes another aspect of Thai culture for tourists to learn, along with massage courses, cooking classes, and elephant conservation volunteer opportunities. Rather than the sale of tangible cultural artifacts, I examine outreach efforts to foreign travelers and how meditation emerges as Thailand's most important spiritual commodity. Described as both modern, with its rational and scientific approach, as well as rooted within the traditional Thai monastic setting, meditation provides an ideal commodity, which can be constructed and transformed in order to advertise a religious vacation.

Recently, religious tourism has become especially vibrant and dynamic in Thailand in part through promotion by Thai Buddhists. Joanna Cook in her book about Thai meditation practice, *Meditation in Modern Buddhism* (2010) writes,

“Buddhism, as well as being closely associated with Thai national identity in the minds of Thai people, is an important part of Thailand’s self-presentation to outsiders. Today meditation and Buddhism are incorporated into the tourism project of the Thai government as a presentation of the modern state and nationalism. Grounding the nation on the traditions and practices of Buddhism as signifiers of authenticity, meditation is presented as an attractive, accessible and authentically Thai experience for foreign and Thai tourists” (Cook 2010, 36-37).

Here Cook highlights how Buddhism in Thailand is a way for Thai people to present themselves to the international community. Meditation is depicted as an authentic practice that fits within the popular image of Buddhism as a non-violent religion. A popular image often involves Buddhist monks shown sitting peacefully with their eyes closed. The practice of meditation is promoted to encourage tourists to think of Thailand as a place that fits this idealized

portrayal.<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, the meditation retreat experience becomes the souvenir or marker of taking ‘the other’ back home or a story that tourists can relate to their families and friends as part of the symbolic capital of their ‘exotic’ participation in the culture of the East.<sup>157</sup> Practicing Buddhist meditation, with its referents to cosmopolitanism and immersion in ‘exotic’ locales, has symbolic value in showing one’s cultural knowledge, one’s ability to participate in a novel and unique experience, and one’s understanding of difference.<sup>158</sup> Meditation is one of the resources modern travelers can use to enhance their social position or reputation among likeminded groups of people. In conversations among tourists, meditation has a kind of prestige for international meditators who can talk of their experience as a kind of ‘adventure’ and ‘experimentation’ with this cosmopolitan practice of the religious other.

---

<sup>156</sup> This is an idealized, unrealistic portrayal of meditation in Thailand because traditionally most Thai Buddhist monastics or laity did not meditate. See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for the history of *vipassanā* meditation in Thailand.

<sup>157</sup> Symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984) refers to the displays of possessions and knowledge that can be exchanged for elevated social status. Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital is linked with his theorization of class. He identifies four dimensions of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic (Bourdieu 1984, 13). Symbolic capital, as distinct from economic capital, can be produced, consumed and converted into a form of power. Part of Bourdieu’s formulation concerns the collective recognition that is necessary to acquire symbolic power. Therefore symbolic capital creates distinctions between classes through mutual acknowledgement.

<sup>158</sup> Rocha (2006) has studied the relationship between Zen Buddhism and cosmopolitanism in Brazil. She finds that Brazilian elites have taken the practice of Zen as a symbol of cosmopolitan modernity. Modern Buddhist discourses that have aligned Buddhism with modernity have also given Buddhist practice a status of urbanity that can be seen in Thailand and other parts of the world.

These ideas about meditation originate from the media international meditators are exposed to before they travel to Thailand (Urry 2002). Tourist literature is constructed to fill the cultural imaginaries and fantastic ideas of each destination, drawing from a wide range of cultural imaginaries. These constructions offer a number of possibilities out of which tourists can create their own frameworks to experience the other culture, religion, people, etc. In this way tourist materials, through the many narratives constructed to fulfill a variety of fantasies, can be seen as a postmodern form of literature that matches the modern activity of tourism. Tourist publications then are produced through using common signs and symbols of the tourist site, in order to provide a structure within which tourists can form their engagements with the host cultures. Kendall's (2011) volume on Korean consumption of their tradition explores how traditions are produced and consumed in modern ways. "The promotion of these sites and the tourists' own understanding of their experiences conflate an essential 'Korea' with the traditions of a historical social class and a particular region" (Kendall 2011, 10). Like Kendall, I find that the tourism production of meditation in Thailand seeks to conflate 'meditation' into a singular experience despite its diversity of practice within Thailand, let alone other Buddhist practices of meditation. Thai 'traditional' meditation, therefore, gets consumed in modern ways through its promotion as a globally recognizable commodity.

The producers of these promotional materials, writers and staff of large institutions such as the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), as well as volunteers from international meditation

centers, are part of the production of meditation as a cultural commodity—this both empowers Thai Buddhists through their control over these discourses as well as reinforces the otherness of Thailand’s Buddhist practices.<sup>159</sup> I analyze these discourses through a close examination of text and images used in English language promotional materials about meditation. Investigating these materials through a postcolonial lens, I argue that Romantic, authentic, and scientific discourses of meditation serve to reinforce Orientalist ideas of an other.

### **Tourism as a Modern Phenomenon**

Tourism is a modern phenomenon that is often understood as a journey of self-discovery.<sup>160</sup> This search for the self can be characterized by commercial activity, cosmopolitanism, and an interest in the ‘exotic.’ Scholars such as

---

<sup>159</sup> As we will see, not only Thai Buddhists, but also foreign monastics and laity contribute to the production of promotional meditation materials. Even though this is the case, Thais make the ultimate decisions on what is published. As Ooi (2010, 83) has noted in Singapore, tourist institutions may attempt to self-Orientalize themselves in order to attract tourists through drawing on the Western imagination of ‘Asia.’ Thai tourist and Buddhist institutions attempt to self-Orientalize their portrayals of meditation through reinforcing the discourses of modern Buddhism and the perceptions of Buddhism in the West. Other possible motivations include countering negative images of Thailand through the proliferation of sex tourism. Meditation aids in providing this counter-discourse. As well, promoting and encouraging others to try meditation is a meritorious activity. All of these goals are likely at work together with economic motivations of increasing tourism.

<sup>160</sup> King summarizes the major theoretical conceptions of this idea: “‘imaginative pleasure-seeking’ and travel for leisure and enjoyment in the encounter with the ‘other’ and the ‘unfamiliar’ are translated into journeys of self-discovery, the quest for fulfillment, social status and mental and physical health” (King 2009, 48). However, it has also been noted that tourists mix pleasure-seeking with notions of discovery, and that tourists often have diverse motivations (Cohen 2001).

MacCannell (1976) theorize about the modernness of tourism. He writes, “‘The tourist’ is one of the best models available for modern-man-in-general . . . Our first apprehension of modern civilization, it seems to me, emerges in the mind of the tourist” (MacCannell 1976, 1). Tourists symbolize modern man through their activities, which focus on movement, consumerism, and authenticity. Urry writes, “The modern subject is a subject on the move. Central to the idea of modernity is that of movement, that modern societies have brought about striking changes in the nature and experience of motion or travel” (Urry 1995, 141). Rapid modes of transport, social networking tools, and global migration have brought previously unknown places to the tourist imagination. Tourists seek new experiences and windows into the lives and experiences of others.

Tourism is one of the punctuated periods in modern lives, characterized by freedom and individual choice, when one is separated for a short time from one’s mundane life. Urry writes, “It is a crucial element of modern life to feel that travel and holidays are necessary. ‘I need a holiday’ is the surest reflection of a modern discourse based on the idea that people’s physical and mental health will be restored if only they can ‘get away’ from time to time” (Urry 2002, 5). Therefore tourism is one of the signs of modernity through its isolation and separation from work. The tourist separates leisure and travel from work so that societies are organized into these separate social spheres (Urry 1995, 132).

Through the tourists’ escape from routine activities, they seek to appropriate alterity and bridge their distance to the other. Tourists pursue alterity because, as MacCannell (1976) argues, modern life is constituted by

inauthenticity. Tourism becomes a necessary search for the ‘authentic’ away from home. This search, Graburn asserts, “has a historical continuity with the exponents of the leading exploratory urges of the post-Renaissance Western world, who in order to more fully understand the world, bring parts of the experience home to understand it and make it safe” (Graburn 1983, 18). Modern tourism follows this exploratory attitude with a nostalgic desire to experience and discover sites untouched by modernity. However, as Urry (1997) argues, mass tourism is a particularly modern phenomenon that is understood through organized forms such as guidebooks and tour groups, forms that often appeal to nostalgia for premodern practices and cultures.

Modernity has created a desire for the anti-modern that lies beyond the tourist gaze<sup>161</sup> and the reach of consumerism. This is the inherent tension within modern tourism—that one cannot avoid modernity. Tourists seek out new experiences and consume elements of other cultures through sightseeing, purchasing clothes and souvenirs, and eating local cuisines (Graburn 1983, 20). In this way, tourism can be characterized as the commoditization of experience (Graburn 1983, 27), and tourist consumption as deriving from difference. The work of tourist publications is to frame cultural otherness as a commodity. Within Thailand’s promotional materials about meditation, the experience of the meditation retreat is commodified. Buddhist institutions present meditation as an

---

<sup>161</sup> The ‘tourist gaze’ is a term coined by Urry (2002) that scholars have used widely to describe the tourists’ visual consumption of other places and cultures. This term also refers to the processes of selection and representation of the nation’s identity meant to attract the tourist.

alternative tourist activity to experience Thailand. Focusing on the perceived calming effects of the practice, tourists are encouraged to leave their hectic modern lifestyles behind. This product of the meditation retreat, however, still implies modernity's ill effects. The same tension of the modern tourist exists here as the meditation retreat is part of the commodification of experience.

### **Consumerism and Modern Buddhism**

Discourses about meditation within publications from Thailand show how the product of meditation has been attuned to match the desires of international tourists. Gombrich (1983) has noted that the lay meditation center takes as its fundamental model the capitalist logic of supply and demand. He writes, "The meditation centre is thus in Weber's sense a 'rational' institution, based not on heredity, place of residence, or other ascription, but on the demand for and supply of a service, namely the teaching of meditation and opportunity for its practice under qualified supervision" (Gombrich 1983, 21). Through the emergence of the institution of the meditation center, meditation has become available to the masses rather than only monastics. Given this, Gombrich asks "whether the provision of any commodity previously reserved for an elite to a mass market can fail to affect the nature of the commodity—even if the commodity is meditation" (Gombrich 1983, 30). Certainly the nature of the commodity has changed as simplified,



easily replicable meditation methods were introduced to accommodate the new large number of participants.<sup>162</sup>

This change in the nature of meditation as a commodity is multiplied for a foreign audience, as seen in promotional materials from Thailand. Johnson finds that in Thailand tourism operators adapt their service to fit the image that tourists bring with them (Johnson 2007, 170). Beginning in the 1960s, especially American religiosity was depicted as an individual seeker journeying in search of new forms and ancient wisdom (Roof 1999). Through these images of the lone spiritual seeker and meditation as a ‘universal’ and ‘authentic’ practice, it becomes commodified and inserted into an eclectic religiosity of individual tourists. Advertisements for Thailand’s international meditation centers carve out a space for international meditators by tapping into their cultural and religious frameworks through various strategies delineated below. These changes demonstrate that meditation and the structure around learning it are commodified to meet the needs of this new audience.

These adaptations show how meditation is a unique commodity within Buddhism. Unlike Buddhist tourist site destinations such as Bodhgaya, the birthplace of the Buddha, or Tibetan Buddhist enclaves such as Dharamsala and Kathmandu,<sup>163</sup> where local businesses surrounding the site often capitalize on

---

<sup>162</sup> Mahāsī Sayadaw introduced replicable methods for teaching large numbers of Burmese Buddhist laity. International meditation centers teaching his method can be found throughout the world. For more information about the Mahāsī Sayadaw method see Chapter 3 in this dissertation. See Appendix 2 for statistics on the numbers of participants in international meditation centers in Thailand.

<sup>163</sup> For an analysis of Buddhist commodification practices in Kathmandu see

foreign income, Thailand's international meditation centers are diffuse and often not located within or near large tourist areas. Therefore almost exclusively meditation is the commodity, rather than the attendant souvenirs, guesthouses, and restaurants that often take advantage of tourism near famous Buddhist sites. International meditation centers themselves do not significantly increase their funds by providing instruction for foreigners. Tourism organizations in Thailand promote meditation vacations in order to boost the economy in general through spending on airfare, food, and lodging before and after retreat stays. Therefore international meditation centers help to bring in revenue throughout Thailand but because the retreat centers often operate on a donation-based structure, the centers themselves do not often benefit directly from the meditation experience provided. But through the promotion of meditation in a variety of publications for foreigners, the practice is treated as a consumer item meant to appeal to the largest number of people.

A number of international meditation center teachers commented to me that international meditators are not known for their generosity. It is the Thai meditators who are distinguished for their large donations because they are accustomed to the practice of donation.<sup>164</sup> Although international meditators

---

Moran (2004), and in Bodhgaya see Geary (2008).

<sup>164</sup> Moran (2004) has found similarly among Western patrons of Tibetan Buddhism in his study of Bodhanath, Kathmandu. From speaking with Tibetan teachers he has found that Western people rarely give large sums of money to support the monasteries. However, Taiwanese patrons are known among Tibetan lamas for their large donations toward monastic building projects.

themselves do not often understand the practice of giving and merit making in a Buddhist context, international visitors become a status symbol for the Thai Buddhist community in that they add to the reputation and prestige of a meditation center. Meditation is offered, as it was told to me by many international meditation center teachers, to all out of compassion to help end human suffering. Along with the motivation of compassion and missionization, having an international center with foreign meditators increases the reputation and thereby the funds from Thai Buddhist laity.<sup>165</sup> This was evident when, writing my name in Thai in a meditation center guestbook, I was instructed instead to use Roman letters so that the Thai Buddhists would know there are visitors from around the world. There is symbolic capital to having foreigners meditate at a center and their mere presence often generates offerings from Thai Buddhists. This practice of donation and merit making has a long history within Thai Buddhism. Recently, new modern trajectories have emerged out of these contexts to reveal possibilities for the commercialization of Thai Buddhism.

---

<sup>165</sup> Donating to an international meditation center is considered *dāna*. This is a practice of generosity in Buddhism where laity give to the monastic community in various ways, from offering food in monks' almsbowls every morning to sponsoring the construction of a temple—there are many ways to practice *dāna*. *Dāna* is part of the core social practice of Buddhism called the economy of merit. This practice of *dāna* helps lay people acquire spiritual rewards or merit when monastics ritually receive their donations. Monastics do not themselves give the merit but this transference is thought to occur as a natural result of the good act through the impersonal process of *kamma*. The benefits of this merit are manifested in higher social status or monetary rewards in this life or in future lifetimes.

## Commercialization of Thai Buddhism

The trajectory of meditation advertised for tourists builds on phenomenon already taking place in Thai society. The emergence of new religious movements, such as the Dhammakaya, demonstrates that a model has already been in place for commodifying Buddhist practice for Thais. International meditation centers and institutions promoting them would not have had such an immediate place within Thai Buddhist meditation practices if aspects of Thai Buddhism were not already commodified. In the case of Thailand's international meditation centers, market forces and the promotion of meditation are aligned. In Thailand, with cases such as the amulets trade (Tambiah 1984) and Wat Dhammakaya,<sup>166</sup> there is a clear connection between consumerism and religion.

Tambiah (1984) discusses the belief in and trade of amulets within Thai Buddhist society. He argues that for Thai Buddhists amulets hold the power and charisma of the monk or holy figure depicted. The amulet represents a materialization of the ascetic monks' discipline. Amulets, in this context, do not only act as reminders of the Buddha and influential monks but also are used pragmatically in order to influence mundane (*lokiya*) activities of everyday life (Tambiah 1984, 335-336). The transmission and objectification of the monks' religious powers then is directed toward the material world. Tambiah writes, "It is inevitable in the Thai case that this process of vulgar materialization, this law of gravity, should have further consequences. One is that the amulet moves from a

---

<sup>166</sup> Many scholars have investigated the link between Dhammakaya and commodification. See Fuengsakul (1993); Rory (2007); Satha-Anan (1990); Scott (2009); Taylor (2008).

context of donation and love (*metta*) to a context of trade and profit. It is converted into a highly salable good and enters the bazaar and marketplace” (Tambiah 1984, 336). This leads to the creation of imitation amulets and the deterioration of their effective powers. In this consumerist cycle, more and newer amulets are desired and old ones are considered less valuable. Since Tambiah’s important study, the amulet industry in Thailand has increased further with amulet stalls now in modern shopping complexes. The proliferation of amulet magazines attests to the material culture that exists around Buddhist objects (Soontravanich 2004). Similarly the meditation retreat is commodified in promotional materials as the marker of an ‘exotic’ cultural experience.

The Dhammakaya movement is a significant example of the commodification of Thai Buddhism that has created a place for the commodification of meditation for international tourists. The movement’s leader, Phra Dhammachayo, outwardly uses the resources and commodities of capitalism to further Dhammakaya’s reach (Taylor 2008, 39). Dhammakaya embraces the logic of modern capitalism through its appeal to the urban Bangkok elite in its extreme orderliness, and promises of wealth and happiness in exchange for donations (Taylor 2008, 41). The movement holds that merit accumulation as well as its particular visualization meditation technique constitutes the path to world peace. Taylor notes that one of the issues worrying Thai state Buddhism about the Dhammakaya movement is their commercialized merit making incentive programs which link supernatural rewards with large donations (Taylor 2008, 56). Phra Dhammachayo specifically links the process of merit making with

consumerism asserting that more donations have a direct correlation to the accrual of greater material benefits (Rory 2007, 59).<sup>167</sup> Along with the discussion of merit making as an investment that will bear a return in this or future lives, the movement markets its form of meditation practice as practical, accessible and suitable for everyone in the context of modern life (Scott 2009, 86). This market place terminology, that merit making and its distinctive meditation practice will lead to success in business and personal life, is the reinterpretation that Dhammakaya sets forth (Taylor 2008, 59).<sup>168</sup> Because of Dhammakaya's commodification of merit and meditation, connecting Thai Buddhist practices to capitalist logic is not new or unexpected.<sup>169</sup>

The commodification of meditation for international tourists, therefore, is another instantiation of the possibilities of Thai Buddhism in modernity.

Meditation promoted for international travelers is a new trajectory that is contextualized within the revitalizing tendencies inherent within Thai Buddhism.

This commodification of meditation, however, would only be possible because of

---

<sup>167</sup> While the Dhammakaya Temple has embraced modernity and prosperity, other new religious movements, such as Santi Asok and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's Wat Suan Mokkh, instead advocate simplicity and financial moderation (Scott 2009, 52).

<sup>168</sup> Wat Dhammakaya's innovations are taken from the context of traditional Thai Buddhism. Merit making has been one of the most significant practices of lay Buddhism which the Dhammakaya Temple transformed into a transaction of donations into specific material benefits. In the same way, especially *samatha* (concentration) meditation has been known to generate power (See Chapter 3 in this dissertation). Wat Dhammakaya draws on this in their descriptions of more practical benefits from meditation one can use in daily life.

<sup>169</sup> Kitiarsa argues that Thai Buddhism has turned into a prosperity religion because it has embraced modernizing forces and has aligned with materialistic and worldly goals (Kitiarsa 2007, 120-121).

the history of Thailand as a tourist destination. This history reveals Thai tourist promoters' capitalization on fantastic images for international travelers including sun, sand, and sex, as well as creative engagement with new themes in Western culture such as the positive images of meditation and Buddhism.

### **History of Tourism in Thailand**

According to Kontogeorgopoulos (1998) and Meyer (1988), the foundations for tourism in Thailand were laid in the second half of the nineteenth century through the modernization efforts of King Mongkut (Rama IV) and King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). These kings both participated in international relations by visiting foreign countries and inviting foreign diplomats to Bangkok. Reform efforts, new European cruise liners, and opportunities for business and leisure travel created a limited amount of international travel to the capital from the 1930s to the 1950s (Meyer 1988). The tourist industry in Thailand grew substantially through the administration of Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat (1957-1963). He promoted tourism by setting the institutional and organizational tourist infrastructure as well as strengthening the international impression of Thailand (Meyer 1988, 59). Therefore both royal and government support contributed to the development of tourism in Thailand.

International tourism began on a large scale in Thailand in the early 1960s and then surged again in 1970. Since this time Thailand has increasingly been known as an international destination, and tourism has been one of the most important income generators in the country. Starting with American soldiers in

the wake of the Vietnam War, tourism increased in Thailand. During the beginning of the Cold War Thailand became more widely known internationally on account of its proximity to Vietnam. Thailand's support for US policy in the Vietnam War included providing bases for troops and airfields for strikes. During this time Thailand became the most popular destination for American GIs on R&R trips. Because of this, foundations were laid for tourism development as well as the sex industry in Thailand. The withdrawal of troops in 1969 did not lead to a reduction of foreign income, but instead cleared the way for international tourists, with the female escort business remaining the number one attraction. Prostitution may have made Thailand famous but it was also films and movies that attracted the attention of global travellers. The 1974 film *The Man With the Golden Gun* made Phang-Nga National Park and Koh Tapu, the so-called 'James Bond Island,' a tourist destination. This film, along with the backpackers' movie, *The Beach*, based on the book of the same title (Garland 1996), set near Phuket starring Leonardo DiCaprio, portrayed travel to Thailand as exotic, desirable, inexpensive, and created interest in visiting the southern islands.

Early in the development of tourism in Thailand, tourists stayed within Bangkok visiting its famous temples and floating markets, but by the mid-1970s they ventured to the northern city of Chiangmai and the islands of the south (Triolo & Lewis 1998, 30). In his ethnography, Westerhausen (2002, 22-23) details the change from 'drifter-style' travelers, consisting mostly of youth searching for spontaneity and adventure over a 3-month period, to families and vacationers visiting Thailand for the more standard 2-4 week period. The earlier



style of travel and travelers, Westerhausen finds, were usually at a crossroads in their lives, along with those who were interested in dropping out of mainstream culture. Current travel patterns indicate a diverse demographic is interested in pursuing a counter-cultural trend or a 'rite of passage' in Southeast Asia. By the 1990s in addition to backpackers, wealthy and middle-class tourists were welcomed for their contribution to the tourist economy. Since this time the country has been recognized for its beaches, sex industry, recreation, and more recently, religious vacations. Along with changing types of travelers and styles of travel, the global context in which the international community perceives and locates Thailand has evolved as well. Increasingly it is not only Bangkok and the beaches which have attracted attention but also the country's spiritual offerings.

These iconic moments of 'Thailand' for an international audience live on in the tourist imaginaries. Thai tourist promoters use these popular associations to attract tourists to each region of Thailand. The 'traditional' Northern Thai culture called Lanna is promoted in this region, especially the city of Chiangmai; excitement and adventure in Thailand's southern beaches are advertised while mimicking well-known movie scenes. This commodification of culture and landscape has proliferated into commodification of other kinds of experiences. Along with sex tourism, 'traditional' Thai culture, and images of sun and beaches, Thailand's tourist industry has capitalized on the positive image of Buddhism internationally. When advertising about meditation, tourist publications attempt to provide a framework through which international meditators will experience the Thai Buddhist meditation retreat.

## **Institutions Promoting Thai Buddhism**

In conjunction with international meditation centers, two institutions have emerged which represent the majority of work in promoting meditation to foreign travelers, the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). These institutions have shaped the presentation and image of meditation to international tourists. Since its inaugural meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1950, the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) has sought to propagate the Dhamma and promote solidarity and unity of Buddhists all over the world. Founded by Dr. Malalasekera, a well-known Sri Lankan Pāli scholar, the WFB has over 140 Regional Centers in 37 countries around the world. Regional centers carry on “various activities based on propagation and practice of the Dhamma for securing peace and happiness of humankind” (World Fellowship of Buddhists Website, no date). Currently, the headquarters of the WFB is located in Bangkok. The WFB began its contribution to the history of international meditators’ engagement with Thai Buddhism in the late 1970s by sponsoring a series of editions of meditation guides. Through this project the WFB can be seen as a modern Buddhist organization that has taken upon itself to missionize Buddhism and become an important interlocutor in this wider discourse.

In order to promote and develop the tourism industry, The Tourism Organization of Thailand (TOT) was established in 1960 as a government agency. The name was changed in 1979 to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). Today, the TAT has offices throughout Thailand with its main branch in Bangkok as well as overseas offices. In order to counter the sexual image of Thai tourism,

the TAT concentrates its publicity on other activities (Meyer 1988, 92). The TAT produces promotional materials about tourist destinations, holidays and festivals, as well as recreational and spiritual themes (Tourism Authority of Thailand Website, no date).

The TAT has published three glossy booklets,<sup>170</sup> which highlight a number of international meditation centers throughout Thailand as well as offer basic information about Buddhism and meditation. In 2010, the TAT published and distributed 10,000 booklets.<sup>171</sup> The target markets for these booklets are America, Europe and Australia; and the secondary market is Asia, which includes China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, India, Chinese Malaysia, and Israel. The TAT began publishing and creating these booklets because they believe religious tourism, especially meditation, is widely popular. In Thailand, religious tourism has shown rapid growth and an increasing amount of foreign tourists are becoming interested in this kind of tourism every year.

Both the WFB and the TAT have created a series of publications on meditation in Thailand. This large amount of content points to the intentionality of these institutions to commoditize meditation in particular ways. These materials point to the ways that Buddhist and tourist institutions “draw upon

---

<sup>170</sup> “Meditation in Thailand, Learn and Practice Buddhist Meditation in the Traditional Thai Surroundings” (2010); “Meditation in Thailand, The Path to Inner Peace and Well-Being” (2008); “Experience Buddhist Meditation; “TAT E-Magazine is titled “Thailand, Center of Buddhist Learning and Traditions” (no date).

<sup>171</sup> This information was obtained through email correspondence with one of the organizers of the 2010 TAT project, on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

wider cultural imaginaries” (Salazar 2010, 48) as they target the English-speaker’s vision of a meditation retreat. The remainder of this section addresses the content of the material publications of these institutions. Along with international meditation centers, the TAT and the WFB figure prominently in the creation, proliferation, and dissemination of information about meditation in Thailand. Below I address how their publications intend to create a desire for meditation and incorporate the practice into the process of commodification.

### *Promoting Meditation Through Guidebooks*

Moran writes that the “function of any tour book is to explain the unfamiliar, to feed the desire among a great many travelers to make the Other familiar, to domesticate alterity” (Moran 2004, 35). The meditation guidebook serves a similar function of offering information and making intelligible the uncommon setting of Buddhist meditation temples in Thailand. The history and development of the meditation guidebook for foreign visitors illuminates how individuals and institutions present meditation as the antidote for chaotic modern living, and Thailand specifically as the place to find such a practice. Authors of these guidebooks describe how meditation practices promise a positive change to one’s life. They do this primarily through drawing on notions of the premodern East and nostalgia for a supposedly enchanted past. In this section I discuss the intent and proliferation of guidebooks and their role in the creation of a demand by supplying a commodity.

Based on the research of then monk, Sunno Bhikkhu, but now well-known as Jack Kornfield (1978),<sup>172</sup> *A Brief Guide to Meditation Temples of Thailand* was published. This guide was an important early document and the first of its kind to help foreigners learn and practice meditation in Thailand.<sup>173</sup> Kornfield undertook this publication because he found that the large numbers of Buddhist temples and teachers had left spiritual seekers confused as to the best places to learn and practice meditation. As a longtime student of Thai Buddhist meditation and a former monk, his familiarity with Thailand made him an important interlocutor who could understand both international meditators' needs and the possibilities available to them. To this end, Kornfield's guide offers a selection of temples, which have with reputable instructors with previous experience teaching foreigners. These temples transmit the teachings in English or through an interpreter, and offer a suitable diet and accommodations for foreigners' needs. In this way Kornfield helped foreigners understand the opportunities open to them and also provided a guidebook to select meditation temples that were receptive to the habits and practices of international visitors. Through the selective choices of

---

<sup>172</sup> Jack Kornfield found his way to Thailand through the Peace Corps. In 1972, after five years of meditating with teachers throughout India and Southeast Asia, he returned to America. He became a graduate student in clinical psychology and today teaches a merging of psychology and Buddhist meditation. Kornfield is known as one of the key figures in bringing *vipassanā* to America and the West. He is one of the founders of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts and founded and currently teaches at Spirit Rock Insight Meditation Center in Woodacre, California.

<sup>173</sup> The possibility of practicing *vipassanā* meditation in Thailand for foreigners was only possible at this moment because the practice had already undergone laicization among Thai middle class urbanites.

meditation centers that were deemed appropriate for foreign visitors, the guidebook format lends itself to commercial practices. Because of the increased demand for this information about meditation, an information system developed to disseminate this material. In this way guidebooks shaped the ways meditation as a commodity created a perceived demand among spiritual travelers. This guidebook was the first to contribute to the consumption and commoditization of meditation.

A committee of the National Identity Board<sup>174</sup> (1988) authored a second edition of the book under the title, *A Brief Guide to Buddhist Meditation Centres in Thailand*. The ‘Preface’ of this book explains that this revised edition of the guidebook was necessary in response to the needs of increasing numbers of foreigners seeking meditation instruction in Thailand (National Identity Board 1998, no page). The ‘Preface’ goes on to present the meditation as an ideal practice for combating modernity:

“As the world rushes towards the 21st century and the stress and strain of daily life become greater, more and more people are looking for ways to bring peace and tranquility into their lives. For some years now the trend has been to turn towards Eastern philosophies, and while many people have already found the answer in Buddhism, others are beginning to recognize that the path of the Buddha can lead them to what they are seeking. This quest for a peaceful existence has resulted in an influx in the number of foreigners visiting Thailand in spiritual pursuit” (National Identity Board 1998, no page).

---

<sup>174</sup> The Office of the National Identity Board (NIB) is a subset of the Office of the Prime Minister. It aims to promote knowledge of and interest in Thailand's history, culture, and current affairs. The NIB has published a series of books outlining Thailand's development. It has also sponsored projects such as *A Brief Guide to Buddhist Meditation Centres in Thailand* (1998) and other promotional works.

This quote speaks to the disenchantment of modern society by promoting Orientalist imagery of meditation, as well as the search for wisdom in the East.<sup>175</sup> The guidebook authors here assert that the stresses of modern living cause spiritual seekers to look to the past, to an ancient practice of peace, identified here as meditation. These benefits attributed to meditation add to the value of the commodity and contribute to the conception of meditation as an experience to be consumed.<sup>176</sup>

Since this edition, opportunities for foreigners changed as new monasteries and meditation centers became popular and others were no longer able to host foreigners.<sup>177</sup> For this reason a third edition by Bill Weir<sup>178</sup> appeared

---

<sup>175</sup> This quote recognizes a particular kind of Western engagement with Buddhism, the Romantic perspective. Tweed (1992) characterizes this type of interest in Buddhism as an attraction and attachment to Buddhist culture (Tweed 1992, 69). Some international meditators are attracted to all things ‘Asian,’ and meditation, through its mainstream popularity, is certainly a part of this.

<sup>176</sup> This development in Thailand is not a unique occurrence. There is a precedent for this association of modern disenchantment and *vipassanā* meditation in Burma (Houtman 1990; Braun 2008). The institutions seen here therefore take advantage of a trend already underway.

<sup>177</sup> Often, if the abbot or Thai monk meditation teacher does not speak English, the meditation center will rely on an English translator. Translators, either lay or ordained, are often young and do not permanently reside in a given center. Because of this flux of translators many meditation centers are only able to host international visitors on an irregular basis.

<sup>178</sup> Bill Weir began his writing career for Moon Handbooks after embarking on a series of long-distance cycles. He has written several titles for Moon including *Arizona, Utah and the Grand Canyon*. Weir contributed text to *National Geographic Traveler, Arizona* along with updating the third edition of *A Guide to Buddhist Monasteries and Meditation Centers in Thailand* in 1991.

in print in 1991 and online in 1994.<sup>179</sup> Another guide was needed ten years later as the number of foreigners and demand for knowledge about meditation centers continued to increase. The fourth edition of the WFB guide, titled *A Guide to Buddhist Monasteries and Meditation Centres in Thailand* by Pataraporn Sirikanchana, was published in 2004. The ‘Foreword,’ written by WFB president Phan Wannamethee,<sup>180</sup> states that there are many guidebooks to Thailand that give information on famous temples but this book “is meant to meet the needs of those seeking knowledge about reliable places in Thailand where meditation is taught according to Buddhist traditions” (Phan Wannamethee 2004, no page). Thus conceptualizing meditation as part of an economic model where there is a demand to be met continues in this new edition. Phan Wannamethee also asserts that the popularity of this guide shows the growing interest in meditation centers among international visitors and ways to achieve peace in the modern world. Again meditation is presented as the antidote for chaotic modern living, and Thailand is the place to find such a practice. Like most consumer items, meditation practices promise a positive change to one’s life. The proliferation and consumption of guidebooks increase the desire to experience meditation.

---

<sup>179</sup> For the online edition see: [www.hdammm.de/buddha/mdtctr01.htm](http://www.hdammm.de/buddha/mdtctr01.htm).

<sup>180</sup> Phan Wannamethee was formerly a President and Rector of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. He oversaw publication of the fourth edition of *A Guide to Buddhist Monasteries and Meditation Centers in Thailand*, published by the WFB. He is currently the Secretary General of the Thai Red Cross Society, living in Bangkok.



In addition to the WFB guides, long-time Thailand resident, Joe Cummings (1991),<sup>181</sup> published *The Meditation Temples of Thailand, A Guide*. In his ‘Introduction’ Cummings describes why he decided to write this book:

“With the rising general interest in Theravāda Buddhism and in insight or mindfulness meditation in particular, the time seems right to make the study of Buddhism in Thailand even more accessible to westerners, if possible. This book was written to serve that purpose. In the past, many foreigners have arrived in Thailand with the name of one wat {temple} or none at all; it is hoped that this guide will alleviate some of the problems experienced by first-time visitors, as well as open up a wider range of possibilities for the serious student” (Cummings 1991, vii-viii).

Again the purpose of the book is primarily concerned with meeting a demand. As a Westerner fluent in Thai, Cummings, like Kornfield, is a significant interlocutor in transferring knowledge of meditation centers to international visitors. The demand shows the significance of the product for foreigners; and guidebooks enhance the nature of the commodity by describing its benefits as they facilitate the experience of a meditation retreat in Thailand. In all of these writings about the rising interest in meditation by foreigners—no mention is made of converting to Buddhism. It is assumed that the international meditators are interested in meditation for the benefits of peace and relaxation. The guidebooks target their writings to those with an interest in the practice— not budding Buddhists. Cummings also writes why in particular Thailand is appealing to meditators. He asserts that of the Theravāda Buddhist countries, Thailand is the most open to

---

<sup>181</sup> Joe Cummings was one of the first writers for *Lonely Planet Thailand*, which is regarded as one of the best guides about the country. He has been traveling the country for over 20 years. He has also written several other Lonely Planet guidebooks, Moon Handbooks, and a number of photography books. Cummings is also a correspondent for CPA Media and Hong Kong and Travel Intelligence.

foreigners, has a strong social and cultural support, the instruction is freely given, and the teachings are offered with no motive to convert practitioners (Cummings 1991, vi-vii). This particular commoditization, therefore, creates a desire not just for meditation but rather the experience of meditation practice as it is uniquely taught and experienced in Thailand.

The most recent guide, “Meditation Retreats in Southeast Asia,”<sup>182</sup> compiled by Dieter Baltruschat (2007) and translated by Katharina Titkemeyer, is published online. The information on retreats collected through the Members of the Munich Buddhist Society intentionally follows the format of the WFB guide publications.<sup>183</sup> In the ‘Introduction,’ the author lists the benefits of meditating in Thailand:

“It {Thailand} has some outstanding meditation teachers. Some monasteries have excellent conditions for practice. Thailand also offers a broad spectrum of retreats. Whether you are a beginner wishing to combine a beach holiday with a meditation course, a meditator who wishes to ordain in a forest monastery, or simply want to practise intensely, you will find a suitable place” (Baltruschat 2007, no page).

A particularly postmodern religiosity is implied here where all levels of engagement with Buddhist meditation are considered equivalent. One can be a tourist who mixes meditation with holiday-making, a serious practitioner who

---

<sup>182</sup>See [http://retreat-infos.de/Download/Retreats\\_in\\_Asia\\_Oct07.pdf](http://retreat-infos.de/Download/Retreats_in_Asia_Oct07.pdf).

<sup>183</sup> Because of their role in beginning the trend of meditation guidebooks for foreigners, the WFB format is considered the standard. For a sample list of categories and information provided for each listing see: [www.hdamm.de/buddha/mdtctr01.htm](http://www.hdamm.de/buddha/mdtctr01.htm). The standard format includes the meditation system, teaching method, teachers, language, description, size, daily routine, food, accommodations, possibility of ordination, and pertinent contact information.

primarily attends meditation retreats, or a regular meditator who focuses his time on how to become a monastic. These various levels of engagement create a desire for meditation through demonstrating the different avenues through which one can enter into meditation practice in Thailand.

These guides have been important sources for Buddhist travelers and the history of foreign meditation in Thailand. English-speakers interested in a meditation retreat who have never traveled to Thailand use this information to select a location and plan their trips. Many Buddhist travelers visit several of these spots over a long period of time, making personal meditation tours of Thailand. Foreign meditators were the impetus for the creation of these guides as their increasing numbers sparked a growth of international meditation centers in Thailand.<sup>184</sup> These meditation guidebooks both create desire for and provide opportunities for the commodification of meditation within a global religious tourism industry that promises the experience of escape from modernity. Dissemination of guidebooks is just one of the ways meditation is commodified. The creation and fulfillment of this demand is much larger, as the intersection of different networks, both in Thailand and abroad, is much wider than I can discuss here.

---

<sup>184</sup> International meditation centers usually establish themselves as meditation centers for Thais. When a center begins to host foreigners, the head of the center will often change the name to identify it as an international meditation center. For histories about how various international meditation centers were established see Chapters 5 and 6.

*Tourism Authority of Thailand's Advertising of Meditation*

The most overt advertising and promotion of meditation as a commodity comes from the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).<sup>185</sup> The TAT wants to be certain that Thailand is internationally known as a religious tourist destination with many meditation locations equipped with tourism facilities that are ready to accommodate international visitors. The Bangkok Post quotes director of the TAT's attractions promotion division, Kulpramote Wannalert, as saying, "As a Buddhist country, Thailand is one of the world's significant Buddhist centres where interested foreigners could study Buddhism and meditation . . . We see it as imperative to implement tourism packages for foreigners who are interested in Buddhism and meditation" (Bangkok Post 2009). Through this promotion, Buddhism becomes part of a marketing strategy to increase tourism in Thailand.

The ideas presented in the TAT's three meditation booklets and their E-magazine demonstrates the distinct ways discourses of meditation are presented to foreigners. The TAT promotes meditation through focusing on its mundane benefits of health and well-being, its appeal as a Romantic Orientalist practice, and themes that resonate with the characteristics of modern Buddhism. All these promotional strategies and tropes reveal meditation as a commodity—a consumer item that adds to the market value of Thailand as a tourist destination. Through this promotion, meditation becomes an extension of Thailand's public face to the international community—part of its tourist identity.

---

<sup>185</sup> For information on the TAT, see: [www.tourismthailand.org/about-tat/](http://www.tourismthailand.org/about-tat/).

TAT publications use modern Buddhist characteristics in order to appeal to an international audience. These themes include the atheistic and anti-dogmatic nature of Buddhism as well as its coherence with science. These discourses of Buddhism have long been used to contrast this tradition with Christianity as well as align it with secularism through demonstrating its rational and empirical nature. This angle shows how the TAT contradictorily appropriates positive aspects of modernity to promote meditation, while maintaining that the negative aspects of modernity are reversed by meditation.

The TAT promotes a secular Buddhism that appropriates these modern Buddhist discourses. In the 2010 publication, under the subheading of ‘What is Buddhism?’, Buddhism is discussed in contrast to theistic religions. “Buddhism, one of the major religions of the world, is a spiritual religion based on the teachings of the Buddha. In Buddhism there is no deity; Buddhism is focused on personal development and liberation from suffering through selflessness and self-mastery” (Tourism Authority of Thailand Booklet 2010, 5). This section claims that Buddhism does not teach belief or faith. The pamphlet attributes the Buddha as saying, “Believe no one, not even me, but discover the truth for yourselves” (Tourism Authority of Thailand Booklet 2010, 5).<sup>186</sup> Many of the characteristics noted by scholars about this phenomenon of modern Buddhism are replicated here, such as Buddhism as a non-theistic religion, an interest in the ‘original’ teachings of the Buddha, and the non-dogmatic nature of the tradition. These

---

<sup>186</sup> This quote refers to the Kalama Sutta (AN 3.65).

popular and positive conceptions of Buddhism are used to the advantage of advertising meditation retreats.

Buddhism's coherence with science is also a noted theme within the modern presentation of Buddhism. The TAT's 2010 booklet goes on to stress what they claim to be scientifically proven benefits one can experience from meditation.

“There is overwhelming evidence to show that cultivating mindfulness through meditation will help you enjoy life more, make it easier to cope with illness and stress, and even improve your physical and emotional health. Those who are more mindful are also more likely to be happier and more optimistic. They tend to be more open to new experiences and more satisfied with life” (Tourism Authority of Thailand Booklet 2010, 8).

The evidence referenced here discusses medical science's positive findings on meditation's benefits for one's health. Meditation is also advertised as cohering with scientific fact and common knowledge about health and well-being.

“There is an understanding around the world that meditation plays a role in sustaining a healthy lifestyle, with the practitioner seeking some degree of detachment from the material world, and drawing on inner peace for a sense of well-being. Meditation is a safe way of balancing one's physical, emotional, and mental states. Today, physicians recommend meditation as a way of relaxing from the stress of everyday life” (Tourism Authority of Thailand Booklet 2008, 5).

The physical benefits of meditation listed here, the TAT asserts, are internationally known. It is notable that science is used to support these claims.<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> There is a long-standing discourse about Buddhism and science (Cho 2012; Lopez 2008; Wallace 2003). This is another aspect of the conversation connecting science with modernity. Buddhist leaders have argued for their tradition's coherence with science, thus claiming modernity over theistic religions. Meditation has become a significant aspect of this dialogue as the practice has emerged as an object of scientific inquiry. For more on this dialogue see Chapter 2 in this dissertation.

This adds to the rational, modern aspect of discourses of meditation. The TAT promotes meditation through contextualizing Buddhism as an anti-dogmatic and scientific religion.

The TAT also uses discourses of Romanticism and anti-modernism in order to commodify meditation for international consumption. These discourses show how the past is constructed nostalgically so that although meditation is portrayed as a modern practice, it also evokes the ‘authentic’ and ‘exotic’ ideals of Eastern wisdom. In their 2008 booklet, the TAT asserts that visitors can search and explore Thailand to discover its hidden practices and techniques. They assert that “. . . Each year Thailand has attracted visitors from all over the world who wish to discover the secret of the peaceful and meditative lifestyle” (Tourism Authority of Thailand Booklet 2008, 5). Here meditation is seen as a mystical secret to uncover, which evokes a Romantic Orientalism where meditation is described as an ancient practice that the modern tourist, like the colonialist before him, can uncover.<sup>188</sup>

In these publications tourists are made to feel as though their present life circumstances are lacking something in their busyness and chaos as the relaxation of the meditation retreat provides the antidote for this modern affliction. Meditation therefore is described as both modern and an escape from modernity.

---

<sup>188</sup> Romantic Orientalists are related to the Romantic movement in Europe and North America. These movements were interested in the ‘exotic East’ and thus increased a popular interest in Asian cultures (Tweed 1992, 69). Romantic Orientalists understand Asian cultures as holding superior wisdom, spirituality, and mysticism. See Chapter 2’s discussion of Orientalism and Said (1976) and King (1999).

“Many of us have at one time or another found the toll of living in today’s world hard to bear. Stress, depression and disillusionment are some of the diseases of modern times that leave us yearning for a solution to or a cure for such negative emotions. And so, it is not surprising that more and more people are now turning to meditation as they fail to find answers through worldly paths” (Tourism Authority of Thailand Booklet 2003, 3).

Meditation provides an alternative to modern living and the symptoms of it manifested by mental illnesses and stress. Culler writes “one of the characteristics of modernity is the belief that authenticity has been lost and exists only in the past . . . or else in other regions or countries” (Culler 1981, 128). The TAT’s publications draw on these ideas of modernity to argue that meditation can provide the balance needed for hectic lives. This is seen in the TAT’s E-Magazine called “Thailand, Center of Buddhist Learning and Traditions,” where they write “The West is becoming increasingly enamored with the ways of the East. Early interest in martial arts like karate and tae-kwon-do has matured to embrace more peaceful practices such as tai chi, yoga, Ayurveda, Thai massage and, of course, meditation” (Tourism Authority of Thailand E-Magazine, no date),<sup>189</sup> The meditative practices of the East, therefore, are the solution to stressful living in the West and are seen to combat negativity created by worldly conflict and busy schedules.

Meditation publications portray Thailand’s international meditation centers as part of an unchanging, ancient practice that combats the effects of modern disenchantment and malaise. Tourist sites preserve this aura of authenticity through maintaining meditation’s connection to the indigenous and

---

<sup>189</sup> See: “Thailand, Centre of Buddhist Learning and Traditions.” [www.tatnews.org/emagazine/2146.asp](http://www.tatnews.org/emagazine/2146.asp).



keeping modernity at bay. Modern amenities or markings of consumerism often detract from the fantastic, authentic ideal. The international meditation center becomes a space apart with lush forests and freedom to explore the temple grounds as well as the meditation practice. This is, of course, in contrast to the reality of the meditation retreat, which allows for little comfort and freedom in order to aid in the progress of *vipassanā* meditation. These publications draw from cultural tropes of a disenchanted modern Western society so that instead of participating in physical commodity consumption to ease modern malaise, international tourists are offered an opportunity to consume the experience of meditation.

TAT meditation publications reveal that meditation as a path to *nibbāna* is not relevant for international meditators. An analysis of modern Buddhist practices of consumption illustrates that meditation in particular has become decontextualized from its traditional contexts. Sharf (1995) argues that the extension of meditation to Westernized middle-class elites within urban meditation centers was the first instantiation of this transformation of goals. Instead of seeking *nibbāna*, meditation was acknowledged to increase well-being and aid in daily life problems. This movement to mundane benefits is increased even more for international tourists,<sup>190</sup> including enhancements to daily life such as calmness, joyfulness, peace, and harmony.<sup>191</sup> The TAT writes, “Meditation is a

---

<sup>190</sup> For an extended analysis of reinterpretations of the meditation retreat for an international audience, see Chapter 6.

<sup>191</sup> Mundane benefits in Buddhism are known as *lokiya*. *Lokiya* concerns worldly

form of mind training that leads to a state of peace and calm, no matter where it is performed” (Tourism Authority of Thailand Booklet 2010, 8). Instead of a practice leading to the liberation from all suffering, meditation is depicted as a way to train the mind that can be applied to daily life through creating harmony within oneself (Tourism Authority of Thailand Booklet 2010, 8). The TAT continues to focus on these kinds of benefits that enhance one’s daily life, “Successful practice can lift depression, cure many stress-related illnesses and at the very least add a little joy to life” (Tourism Authority of Thailand Booklet 2010, 8). These benefits are important to emphasize for a group who might not understand the reasons for practicing meditation. These secular benefits also serve to reassure international meditators that meditation practice is not an exclusively Buddhist activity.

In addition to enhancing daily life, meditation is also explicitly linked with overall well-being. Meditation is described as one of the most popular and important aspects of Buddhism, which is regularly practiced by Thai people as a way to cultivate inner peace and happiness.

“Thailand is among the world’s premier travel destinations with the kingdom’s way of life, traditions and culture creating a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere for visitors. This, coupled with the country’s deep-

---

matters that arise in connection with non-religious activities. It refers to the world of unenlightened beings and practices not associated with *nibbāna*. *Lokuttara*, in contrast, relates to the supermundane or activities related to the quest for liberation. The term is used to describe the path of the noble ones, (*ariya-magga*), the four paths and the four fruits of these attainments. Thai Buddhists generally think of meditation as a productive and important activity, usually saying that anyone who has participated in a meditation retreat is *geng* (skillful). In talking with Thai meditators about my research they are generally aware of *lokiya* benefits but also of *lokuttara* ones as well.

rooted Buddhist faith, makes Thailand a perfect destination where one can relax and find inner peace and a healthy life for mind, body and spirit through Buddhist meditation . . . In such an atmosphere, it is never hard for the visitor to find his or her own key to the lasting benefits of Thai Buddhist meditation” (Tourism Authority of Thailand Booklet 2008, 7).

Thailand is presented here as a relaxing destination, and the meditation retreats available only add to this. Potential tourists are encouraged to indulge in the inner peace that Thailand offers. The benefits of meditation as described here do not read much differently than an advertisement for any spa or resort getaway.

The motivation of *nibbāna* is so removed that meditation can be practiced for both secular and other religious ends. The TAT’s E-Magazine highlights that meditation is open to all faiths, “Indeed, monks and meditation instructors note that meditation is non-denominational; by seeking to enhance concentration and mind-power, the technique can be used by anyone to enhance the practice of their own religion, whatever that may be” (Tourism Authority of Thailand E-Magazine, no date).<sup>192</sup> The possibility of these mundane benefits, therefore, opens the meditation practice to all international visitors regardless of their religious or other affiliations. International meditation centers often also have their own publications that commodify meditation in particular ways.

#### *International Meditation Center Retreat Pamphlets*

Another source of ephemeral literature advertising meditation is found within Thailand’s international meditation centers. While the TAT promotes

---

<sup>192</sup> See: “Thailand, Centre of Buddhist Learning and Traditions.” [www.tatnews.org/emagazine/2146.asp](http://www.tatnews.org/emagazine/2146.asp).

meditation as part of the larger tourist experience in Thailand, international meditation centers themselves provide information for tourists to choose a specific retreat center. Most meditation retreat centers have informational pamphlets for foreigners about what to expect when staying at a particular center or temple and detail the schedule and practice at a particular site. Therefore these are more realistic than the TAT's depiction of Thailand as a spiritual oasis but still show similar consumerist rhetoric that specifically targets the international audience.

Through commodifying intangible religious expressions, the meaning and intention of these practices may be altered. International meditation center brochures are often constructed to gloss over the disjunctures of cultural understandings of the self. These significant disjunctures are ignored because the promotional materials are directed to foreign communities with different cultural frameworks. Therefore these publications are not just selling a product but also ignoring cultural differences. In order to demonstrate this, it is instructive to compare Thai and English brochures for the same meditation center. The brochures in Thai and English of Diphabhavan Meditation Center in southern Thailand illustrate this. The brochure for Thai meditators refers to major Buddhist topics including suffering, the four path stages to *nibbāna*, the Four Noble Truths, *paticcasamupatta* (dependent co-origination), and *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing). There is no description of why the retreat would be beneficial or who should enter the retreat as presumably Thai Buddhists, whom the Thai brochures

target, would be familiar with this. The international brochure in English does not contain these teachings, as they would only be familiar to Thai Buddhists.

The English brochure, in contrast, highlights the benefits of this 6-day retreat at Dipabhavan. These include secular benefits regarding well-being such as ‘getting to know oneself,’ learning about one’s feelings, having a less scattered mind, letting go of worry, and applying these benefits to cope with daily life.<sup>193</sup> These tropes relate to the discourses we have already seen in other meditation promotion formats as the benefits point to a nostalgic longing for a time before stress and chaotic daily routines. However, the psychology of learning about oneself and one’s feelings takes this further. Travel is often constructed as a journey of self-discovery, so that only by leaving one’s familiar lifestyle can one come to find one’s ‘true’ self. Benefits of meditation like ‘getting to know oneself,’ tap into these ideas.

The brochure states that the meditation retreat is a special time to explore the inner side of oneself and to learn what one really wants in life and concludes, “This retreat might just be a start towards discovering such important things about oneself.” For Thai meditators, however, there is often a large difference between ‘knowing’ oneself, and ‘finding’ oneself. A traditional goal of meditation is to experience the reality of non-self—that there is no permanent entity or ‘soul.’ Therefore there is no self to discover or find, but there are qualities, tendencies, and habits one can come to know in order to understand how to overcome

---

<sup>193</sup> Dipabhavan Meditation Center Brochure for International Meditators, received June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010.

defilements and aid in cultivating the direct experience of reality. Another trope within this discourse concerns modernity and its distractions, which have caused people to lose connection with their own inner states. This focus aligns with the current trend of popular psychology and self-improvement publications and speakers, especially in America (Ehrenreich 2010). These pamphlets therefore are another instantiation of the interpretation that meditation can be consumed in order to help escape modernity and the malaise associated with it.

The Middle Way Meditation Retreat organized by Wat Dhammakaya takes these discourses of modern disenchantment further. As referred to above, Wat Dhammakaya is a significant piece of the commercialization of Thai Buddhism. As their strategies of commodification are taken to an international audience, the message is attuned to the cultural frameworks of English-speakers. The key tagline for the brochure is “Relax your body, rest your mind and find inner peace.” The brochure also describes the purpose and benefits of the Dhammakaya method. It states that the technique “is about self-discovery, relaxation and purification of the mind . . . The meditation cleanses your mind making you more gentle, kind, and unharmed, it helps to quit a bad habit and acquire good ones, helps with personal development and career progress.” It is particular to the Middle Way retreat to emphasize career progress, the formation of good habits, and personal development.

Meditation is depicted as a break from everyday life where one can ‘recharge’ and come back into the world with renewed energy and sense of purpose. The Middle Way Meditation Retreat brochure makes clear that this is

most easily achieved in nature. Drawing on modern Romantic discourses of nature, describing meditation in natural settings is evocative of this theme (Schedneck, forthcoming). Although Wat Dhammakaya is located in the outskirts of Bangkok, their retreat center is currently in Northeast Thailand, Loei province, in a mountainous locale. Their brochure emphasizes this location and creates desire for meditating in nature by stating, “As you breathe in the fresh air of the mountains and hear the birds sing in the morning, you will feel you are one with nature, peaceful, refreshed and ready to take on life’s challenges.” Meditation is linked with not only ‘mental peace,’ but also peace that comes from being in nature.<sup>194</sup>

Meditation and nature are depicted as antidotes to modernity’s effects and together serve to construct the retreat center as a place designed to experience the peace of meditation. The Middle Way Retreat brochure links the beauty of natural settings with the ability to listen to “your inner voice that might have been silenced by a hectic lifestyle, busy schedules and multiple responsibilities.” Therefore in advertising meditation for international meditators, evocative themes of nature, disenchantment, and self-discovery are all linked and drawn from the cultural frameworks of Western audiences.

Besides this discussion of ‘knowing’ or ‘finding’ oneself, the most prevalent statement that these brochures make clear is that meditation is for

---

<sup>194</sup> These discourses have a history in early European engagement with Buddhism. Carrithers (1983) discusses the connection between nature and Buddhism for early German monastics in Sri Lanka.

everyone. In answer to who meditation will benefit, the Dipabhavan brochure states:

“The retreat is open for people from all walks of life, races, ages, sexes, faiths, and beliefs without prejudice or discrimination. It is good for anyone who wants a happy life, a life that has an aim, a life that is full of meaning, a life that is free from all stresses, pressures, frustrations, and problems, a life that is beneficial to everyone and everything in this universe.”

The Middle Way Retreat brochure also describes meditation as something for everyone, “the practice of this technique is not in conflict with any religion or creed, and is open to anyone to try for themselves.” Again the idea that the benefits of meditation are available to all increases the potential participants and opens the commodity to the foreign audience of non-Buddhists.

Themes of disenchantment, the appeal of nature and finding oneself, and meditation for non-Buddhists all draw on subjects evocative for a Western audience. These selective themes reveal the ways meditation is advertised as a commodity meant to attract international tourists. It is not only the text in these brochures but also images that suggest an ideal, picturesque experience for an international audience

## **Images**

Diverse forms of media create impressions and assumptions of the tourist destination that connect with tourists’ fantasies, expectations, and nostalgic sensibilities (Salavar 2010, 22). A significant part of the commodification of meditation that tourists are presented with exists in carefully selected images.



Meditation retreat promotional materials utilize certain sets of imagery that the international market will respond to. The modern media world makes international meditation possible through the global cultural flows of Buddhism and meditation. Baudrillard asserts that commodities are not always linked to their precise function but appeal to the logic of desire (Baudrillard 1998, 77). Images of meditation retreats are not realistic depictions but connect with this social logic of international travelers and positive projections of Buddhism and meditation. Baudrillard argues that anything can become a consumer object and therefore culture can be commodified. Culture is used to satisfy demand just as any other consumer object. Baudrillard finds that “need is never so much the need for a particular object as the ‘need’ for difference (*the desire for the social meaning*) . . .” (Baudrillard 1998, 78). The images in meditation retreat advertisements serve as symbols of participation in religious Otherness.

Tourists are in search of viewing and experiencing the images of difference of their destination. Tourists perceive scenery, practices, objects, behaviors, buildings, etc., as symbols that typify the otherness of the region being toured. In this way traveling becomes a series of spectacles in which modern man grasps different cultures. What results is a desire to see, experience, and consume the cultural symbols (Urry 2002, 13). For Thailand one of these symbols is a quiet, natural setting inside a Buddhist temple with a person sitting peacefully meditating. Images depicting such scenes in meditation retreat advertisements provide these symbols and a desire to see and experience them in person as tourists come to see this practice as a cultural symbol of Thailand. Meditation

becomes a marker for tourists through these images, making the practice recognizable and an object of desire.

Through creating desire visually, images are another way that these promotional materials commodify meditation and create a consumerist logic around the practice and retreat center. These are utilized in both TAT publications and international meditation center pamphlets. The first way this is done is through Romantic pictures of foreign meditators, where a single international traveler is the focal point of the image. From images of an international meditator photoshopped onto a lotus flower to a tan woman meditating in a black bikini with the view of a temple in the background, some of these images show the extremes of advertising meditation. Both of these images portray a tourist meditating in an exotic, almost fantastic scene. The image of a young woman meditating on an enlarged lotus flower depicts the 'magic' that can occur within this practice. The woman in a black bikini, however, illustrates the association of beauty and well-being with meditation, that is only tangentially related to Buddhism, as a pagoda is only visible in the backdrop of the image. These images demonstrate the tropes of meditation present within the content of meditation retreat advertisements in a dramatic way. Other images of foreign meditators depict them alone, dressed properly, either in white clothing or loose-fitting multi-colored outfits, meditating in nature. These scenes of nature and Buddhist temples create a desire to experience this symbol of Thai culture and religion.

Thai meditators featured in these tourist materials are both part of the meditation retreat scenery as well as cultural markers, reminding the travelers that

they are in a different place (Dann 1996, 70). Images of a single Thai meditator within the backdrop of temple scenery evoke this difference of space. However Thai meditators are often not shown close-up as with international meditators. Having Thai meditators as a faraway focal point represents the ways international meditators engage with their Thai counterparts because of the language barrier and separation of the two groups at most centers. In these images Thai meditators add to the exotic and unfamiliarity of the meditation retreat.

The second main depiction of Thai meditators displays them in groups, always wearing the traditional white clothes. Foreign meditators usually enter a retreat alone and think about spirituality as an individual pursuit (Imamura 1998, 236). The relaxation of the retreat comes from being alone, away from others and in the beautiful natural surroundings. However, pictures of groups of Thai meditators seated in a meditation hall or practicing walking meditation in a long line together demonstrate how Thai people act as cultural markers of the host culture (Dann 1996, 70). This is how foreign meditators usually encounter Thai meditators—not as individuals but as groups, and again, as separate groups that foreign meditators do not interact with. Thai meditator groups represent the dynamism and vivacity of Thai Buddhism. This evokes a tradition that is alive and well and something that foreigners could join.

Buddhist images and photographs of people sitting serenely in natural settings play on the ‘Romantic’ gaze (Urry 1995) of the foreigners who are looking for peaceful, undisturbed settings that they consider ‘authentic’ or ‘real’ (Urry 1995, 138). Meditation retreat advertisements play on this Romantic gaze

through images that portray temple structures and nature within the meditation center. From the glistening heads of dozens of golden Buddha statues in a row to damp, lush forests, these images capture for the foreign meditator the idea of a Romantic and tranquil experience. Many images show sweeping landscapes of nature while others focus closely on bells, the hands of a Buddha statue, or a single flower. All of these express the natural beauty of the temple environment as well as the allure of the exotic Buddhist imagery.

## **Conclusion**

Meditation tourist materials draw on modern Buddhist discourses and show how global discourses of meditation affect tourism and can be capitalized on for an increase in religious or spiritual vacations. These three sets of sources, meditation guidebooks, TAT booklets, and international retreat center pamphlets, show the connection between global and local discourses of meditation. Global ideas of meditation as an antidote to modern malaise and disenchantment are used to promote participation in local meditation retreats. The pamphlets and brochures create a desire to experience and consume the practice of meditation within a Thai Buddhist temple environment. Guidebooks and TAT publications shape the experience of international meditators and their interactions with Thai Buddhists and international meditation center teachers. International meditators, through these publications, are attracted to this practice that is simultaneously modern and authentic, familiar and exotic.

These materials create binary oppositions between East and West as well as reinforce Orientalist ideas of an other. This otherness is not dispelled but taken advantage of in advertisements for tourists interested in meditation. Popular depictions of Thai Buddhists meditating and beautiful temple environments create a desire for the consumption of the other to take to one's home country. Meditation is part of the cultural consumption of the East that TAT staff, international meditation volunteers, and writers of guidebooks promote. When tourists arrive back home and share their experiences of travel, the meditation retreat manifests anew as a commodity.

The image of meditation and the reality, for international meditators, are expected to connect or at least resemble each other. But this is not always the case as we will see in the next chapters. Along with the production of a commodity, there always exists the actual consumption. Consumers and producers usually share a number of common discourses; however, tourists often create their own meanings and appropriate and engage with foreign cultures in distinct ways. The tourist is always measuring the actual meditation retreat experience with the symbol of the experience. The next chapter discusses how international meditators experience the reality of the meditation retreat and their selective appropriations that match some of the themes evoked in these meditation tourist materials.

## Chapter 5

### PORTRAITS OF INTERNATIONAL MEDITATORS' EXPERIENCES

The diversity of international meditators illustrates the various routes by which hybrid religiosities are created that mix Buddhist practice with tourism, therapy, health, and other religious practices. The portraits of international meditators discussed in this chapter show how much meditation has become divorced from the Thai Buddhist context. From travelers who mix meditation with a beach vacation to serious practitioners with hopes of becoming ordained, from accidental religious tourists to people who set out to change their lives, the experiences and responses to the meditation practice and lifestyle in the international meditation centers have many faces. International meditators appropriate aspects of the meditation retreat selectively according to their motivations and goals. Experiences of the exotic, a connection with nature, a way to recover from addiction, and therapeutic practices are all discourses that international meditators engage with when deciding to attend a meditation retreat, and these are all themes that resonate with the commodification of meditation and discourses of modern Buddhism. Some seek conversion and rejection of their own cultures while others select aspects most familiar to their way of life. One's specific motivation for travel and undertaking a meditation retreat leads to different trajectories of hybrid religiosities.

Along with having different motivations and reactions, interpretations of the meditation experience can also be varied. Some meditators interpret the experience as cathartic, relaxing, an engagement with a foreign culture and

practice, a religious experience, or a once in a lifetime opportunity. Some meditators discuss their experience of a meditation retreat in Thailand in terms of a tourist and cultural experience; for others it is a secular practice meant for therapeutic purposes with many variations in between. Using semi-structured interviews with international meditators during fieldwork, correspondence with former international meditators, writings from international meditators' travel blogs and participant-observation during fieldwork experiences, this chapter looks at the variety of these experiences toward understanding the nature of postmodern hybrid religiosity.

Many travelers have posted their experiences in blog format or on a website dedicated to their travels. It is clear from these sources that meditation is one part of a larger cultural experience of Thailand. Meditators often participate in meditation retreats alongside elephant training camps, massage courses, cooking classes, or even the all-night full moon party on Koh Phangan, one of the southern islands. Despite or even because of these various tourist activities, travel blogs document the experiences of modern international meditators and help to augment the participant-observation and semi-structured interviews I conducted with dozens of meditators at each site. It would be quite difficult to obtain a representative sample of international meditators through my individual research efforts, as there is such a variety of sites, large numbers and diversity of participants, and a long history of participation as well. Therefore, the information presented here is not comprehensive or exhaustive yet meaningfully speaks to the modern-day experiences of international travelers.

Through my conversations with international meditators I have found that some attend retreats because a friend recommended it or they have just experienced something difficult like a relationship breakup or the death of a loved one and believe this practice will help. Others have no particular reason other than the practice is part of the cultural zeitgeist. For some it seems a good way to begin or end a travel tour of Asia. As well, learning about meditation can be part of any tourist experience that searches for difference and the ‘exotic.’ Many international meditators begin the practice this way and for some it is transformative. The discourses and popular image of meditation and Buddhism motivated this trend of experimentation. In her memoir of a mid-life existential crisis called *Devotion*, Shapiro writes about her experimentation with meditation and defines her religious identity as a meditating, Jewish yogi. She writes, “For years, I had wanted to be someone who regularly meditates. I had a sense that sitting quietly—for five or two minutes everyday—was key to a sense of inner peace” (Shapiro 2010, 9). Her words demonstrate how far meditation has penetrated into the popular imagination as well as the possibility and ease of hybrid religiosity. Through the variety of ways to engage with the Buddhist tradition while participating in a retreat at an international meditation center, international meditators experience shifting religious identities. Before discussing the international meditators’ experiences in detail, I first relate the nature of modern religious identities, focusing on Buddhist missionizing practices.



## **Modern Religious Identities**

Modernity serves to create, define, and control choices as well as offers a variety of religious options and modes of exploration (Asad 1996, 263). The ability to select and integrate a plurality of religious elements is due to the opening of possibilities in modernity that was previously beyond the scope of religious imagination. Within this context dynamic hybrid forms emerge out of exploring religious practices. Significant work has been done to theorize the nature of religious identities and conversion (Keane 2007; Rafael 1998; Robbins, 2009, 2011). Tweed is one of the only scholars to theorize about Buddhist religious identification (Tweed 2002). His terms ‘night-stand Buddhists’ and ‘Buddhist sympathizers’ are helpful in understanding the nature of engagement with Buddhism in the contemporary world. Buddhist sympathizers and night-stand Buddhists are those who have an affinity toward the religion but do not identify with it fully or exclusively (Tweed 2002, 20). Most of the international meditators that participate in retreats in Thailand are at least sympathizers through their interest in meditation and living in a Buddhist temple.

Like Tweed, I am not interested in the normative view of religious identity that creates a binary distinction between adherents and non-adherents. I am also not concerned about the inner state of conversion as this is beyond my purview. For my purposes, conversion is not a radical rupture with one’s previous religion or secular beliefs and practices, and therefore religious identity cannot be clearly discerned. In contrast to theorizing about religious identity in a categorical way, I am investigating a subtler manifestation, which assumes a diversity of forms

because it is influenced by a multivalent interplay of history, exchange, and popular culture. Therefore I am not speculating on the religious identity of international meditators but instead analyze their engagement with Thai Buddhism within the particular religious and cultural context of the meditation retreat. Historically, Buddhist missionary practices in Thailand lend themselves to theorizing about religious identity in this way.

Missionizing practices in Thailand occurred in the 1960s when Buddhist monks, as part of a program created by the Thai Sangha and supported by the government, sought out tribal peoples and villages seeking to convert them to Buddhism. The Dhammacarik (wandering dhamma) Bhikkhu Program (DBP) began in 1964 with the aim to convert tribal groups outside of Central Thailand. These conversion efforts were aimed toward reigning in outside groups into the Thai national body. The purpose of the DBP was to integrate and enable hill tribe people to become Thai citizens, teach the dhamma and how to follow the Buddhist way of life (Wongprasert 1988, 127). The monks who took part in this program were asked to complete training before being assigned to a location of service where they would interact with and teach the hill tribe people. This was a program sponsored by the government, which was an obvious attempt at promoting national interests, however, it is still an example of Thai Buddhist conversion of non-Buddhists.

In addition to the DBP, wandering tudong monks of the forest tradition of Luangpu Man interacted with hill tribe non-Buddhists throughout the 1930s. Through their forest wandering they taught hill tribe people about offering food to

monks, meditation, and the Buddha's teachings (Tiyavanich 1997, 160-165). The wandering forest monks exposed hill tribe people to Buddhism but Tiyanich writes that they "made no attempt to change other people's convictions or convert them to their kind of Buddhism" (Tiyavanich 1997, 164). The tribal people were especially impressed with the discipline of the monastic lifestyle when they learned they did not drink, eat in the evening, or even touch women (Keyes 1993, 264). Keyes writes that in order for villagers to become Buddhist "they had to have more sustained contacts with monks and to accept that their lives could be made more meaningful by adopting a Buddhist worldview" (Keyes 1993, 266). In addition to this it was hoped that they could attend and participate in Buddhist rituals. The first step for the hill tribe people was to understand the Buddha as transcending all local spirits and then to follow the teachings of the Buddha (Keyes 1993, 267). Therefore conversion to Buddhism does not require a radical rejection of previous beliefs (Keyes 1993, 268).

Although both Buddhists and Christians participate in missionizing activities, the two groups enact this in differing ways. Kemper writes ". . . one thing 'Buddhist missionizing' did not borrow from Protestantism was its emphasis on conversion proper" (Kemper 2005, 27). He argues that the Sri Lankan Buddhist leader, Anagarika Dharmapāla, distinguished between conversion and bringing knowledge. Dharmapāla believed that this distinction made Buddhism more palatable to Westerners so that Buddhist practices did not require an exclusive commitment (Kemper 2005, 30). The strategy of modern Buddhist missionaries like Dharmapāla therefore aims not toward converting non-

Buddhists but leading meditation sessions and offering teachings to those interested. These Buddhist missionizing strategies lead to shifting, open-ended, hybrid religious identities among international meditators in Thailand's international meditation centers.

In the present time this strategy has continued for international meditators so that conversion is not openly discussed. International meditation center teachers emphasize that Buddhist meditation methods work no matter the religious status or non-religious status of the meditation enthusiast. Buddhist missionaries of the dhammacarika program (Keyes 1993, 264) and the wandering forest monks (Tiyavanich 1997, 164) did not require converts to abandon their beliefs in spirits and today international meditation center teachers do not require their students to give up their previously held religious or non-religious beliefs. The hybrid nature of hill tribe peoples' religiosity, through their exposure to Buddhist monks and their discipline, is akin to international meditators' religiosity when exposed to the Buddhist practice of meditation. The international meditation center can be considered as a contemporary means of propagating the dhamma.

Instead of a radical break with one's religious or non-religious beliefs or a statement of dissent and disengagement with one's culture, participating in a meditation retreat is considered a 'must do' on many travelers' itineraries. Because of these modern ideas, hybrid religiosities are possible and likely as meditation practice mixes with one's own cultural background and values. The hybrid religiosities that are formed illustrate the nature of modern religious

identities. Below I describe the selective appropriation and engagement that allows for hybrid formations.

### **Selective Appropriation and Engagement**

It is not only the international meditation center teachers and Buddhist missionizing strategies that create hybrid religiosities, but also the selective engagement and appropriation of the international meditators. Rafael's (1998) *Contracting Colonialism* explores the strategies of receiving the missionizing religion in the context of the early encounter between the Spanish and the Tagalogs in the Philippines from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. Rafael concludes that the Tagalogs were able to select their conversion, appropriating only fragments of the Christian teachings that were understood, and subverting others. For example, Rafael writes how the repetition of the term *JesusMaria* was turned into a protective phrase. He finds, "What this amounts to is a recasting of the Christian Sign into something that can be torn away from the linguistic commerce that originates from and returns to the Father. It is instead rendered into an amulet-like object that does not result in the subjection of the speaker to the language of God" (Rafael 1987, 328-329). In this context, the sacraments of confession and death rites, untranslatable terms, and translations into the vernacular show the Tagalogs' agency and the plurality of conversions that took place. Rafael argues that conversion happened rapidly because the Tagalogs did not fully understand the faith they were accepting; instead they

placed what they could comprehend into their own cultural framework. In a similar way it is the cultural backgrounds of international meditators that inform and create unique hybrids that recast the meditation practice into contexts outside of Buddhist contexts and goals. In order to understand the selective appropriation of international meditators, it is useful to take account of the diverse qualities of the travelers' experiences and the orientations people bring with them when they travel and engage in other cultures.

### *Nature and Tourism*

Adaptations are necessary as the depth and difficulty of a meditation retreat is often not part of the stock images and narrative tropes of meditation. Buddhism and its meditative practices become equated with nature and for some this is the primary impetus for attending a retreat. These Romantic ideas of meditation move to the forefront as Buddhist teachings and rituals become less prominent. In this context the feeling of being at peace in nature is the goal of the practice. Natural settings within a forest, along with ancient temple structures are part of the fascination and desirability surrounding meditation. These signs emerge when discussing with international meditators their initial motivation and choice to participate in a meditation retreat in a particular temple.

Tourism has fueled much of the development of international meditation centers. International meditators are attracted to those temples situated within tourist destinations both in the beaches of the south, and the scenic mountains of the north. My recordings of the histories of international meditation centers reveal

that through visiting a temple, often by chance, travelers become interested in staying and learning about meditation. The creation of international meditation centers often began with frequent inquiries about meditation from travelers inspired to practice in natural settings. This helped pave the way for international meditators today who are able to plan their retreats in advance. Nature and being within natural settings is an important discourse that connects meditation with tourism and shows the selective appropriation of spiritual tourists.

The connection with nature that meditation is commonly thought to provide is a noted theme in the appropriation of Buddhism by Euro-Americans<sup>195</sup> as well as a characteristic of modern Buddhism. McMahan argues that “many staples of Buddhist modernist literature—the exaltitude of nature, the idea of spiritual experience as identifying with the natural world or a universal spirit . . . owe much to the intertwining of Buddhism and Romanticist-Transcendentalist stream of thought” (McMahan 2008, 76). McMahan goes on to assert that modern Buddhist ideas have mixed with Romanticism so that society and nature have become opposed. In this discourse, the West becomes identified with consumerist city life and the East offers hope for a more natural lifestyle (McMahan 2008, 77). Therefore some modern Buddhists look to the East for a less artificial way of life, corresponding with Romantic thought. Carrithers argues that Romanticism influenced the well-known German forest-monk in Sri Lanka, Nyanatiloka (Carrithers 1983, 29). He finds that some European monks originally had an

---

<sup>195</sup> This theme is elaborated in Tweed (1992) in his typology of Euro-American Buddhist sympathizers and adherents that includes esoterics, rationalists, and most importantly here, romantics. See Chapter 3, pp. 48-77.

interest in German Romanticism, which later developed into an interest in Buddhism. The tropes of Romanticism and being ‘at one’ with nature continue into the present and can be seen especially when international meditators in Thailand decide to undertake a meditation retreat. In this context Buddhist teachings and meditation practices are placed within a framework of affection for nature as well as cultural exploration.

Many meditators report that a visit to the scenic temples of Thailand, often set on top of mountains with dramatic views, was not enough. This concern for nature is exemplified at the International Meditation Center at Wat Prathat Doi Suthep, where I attended a ten-day retreat in July 2009, and interviewed the international meditators there. Through this I learned that some meditators attend the retreat just for the experience of living in a temple and interacting with monks. These tourists wander into the International Meditation Office and make an appointment to return for the ten-day retreat. I spoke with a young Canadian female tourist who came to Thailand because she was inexplicably fascinated by the country, especially its Buddhist traditions. She had some meditation experience and enjoyed learning more about monks’ lifestyles and Buddhist teachings.

A young woman from Holland was traveling around Asia had just completed a yoga retreat in Bali and wanted to try a meditation retreat as well. Clearly meditation is seen as an essential part of an experience of ‘Eastern wisdom.’ A young Irishman had had enough of late nights drinking with his buddies and took this meditation retreat as a further symbol of his renunciation of



that lifestyle. These motivations and responses convey the discourse of looking to the East for answers in the face of modernity. For some the experience of living in a temple environment can inspire ordination, as one annual visitor, a Brazilian woman, told me she would like to take steps to be a *mae chii* at Wat Doi Suthep. The natural setting of this temple and desire for cultural exploration, despite the different motivations and levels of engagement, attracted these travelers to meditate in this location. The discourses of meditation as a quiet practice most suitably done within nature are both part of the motivation and formation of hybrid religiosities.

Meditation and nature are intertwined and semiotically linked for many international meditators. International meditators often seek centers located in forests and mountains and avoid busy city meditation temples. In response to my research website,<sup>196</sup> I have received many emails inquiring about which meditation retreat in Thailand to attend. The criteria given almost always includes a center in a quiet, natural setting. Another temple known for its scenic location is Wat Pah Tam Wua. Many visitors stumble upon this temple while visiting the touristy spots along the beautiful and windy scenic drive of Highway 1095 in Northern Thailand, the route that runs from Chiangmai to Pai, and through to Mae Hong Son. After some of these interested tourists stopped by, the abbot, Ajan Luangta, put up signs in English welcoming foreign tourists. Now many hear about this temple through word of mouth of its picturesque scenery as well as the charismatic Ajan Luangta, who has learned English from many of the tourists he

---

<sup>196</sup> See [wanderingdharma.org](http://wanderingdharma.org).

has taught. Since then, international meditators from over 100 countries have stayed to practice here. The tourist path along Highway 1095 also created a trail for international meditators looking to spend time in a scenic spot and converse with a Thai monk meditation teacher.



Figure 6. Sign outside of Wat Pah Tam Wua, Mae Hong Son, Thailand

International meditators often mix beach holidays with spiritual travel so that meditation is part of a broader context of the tourist experience. An increasing minority of beach travelers are not as interested in relaxing in a beach resort as they are in mental development. Some meditators relate that at the beginning of their retreats they felt they were missing out on more stimulating

activities such as recreation by the beach. However, others stated that they wanted to attend the retreat precisely because the beach and other tourist activities were ultimately unsatisfying. The International Meditation Center at Wat Kow Tahm on Koh Phangnan is another interesting example of tourism that leads to a spiritual vacation. Koh Phangnan has been known as a destination for backpacking with a reputation for social recreation, especially on full moon nights.

Before the meditation center at Wat Kow Tahm was established many tourists visited this temple on top of a hill near Baan Thai Beach to ask the head nun there, Mae Chii Ahmon, how they could learn meditation. She discovered a way to share the practice of meditation when Rosemary and Steve Weissman arrived in 1987 in order to visit Wat Kow Tahm and practice meditation. They were soon asked to lead retreats and they have continued to do so for over twenty years. The particular group of meditators that travel to Koh Phangnan are often used to bungalows, partying, and traveling, but not necessarily living in a temple. But after more than 20 years of running these retreats, the Weissmans know their audience well and have many warnings in the forms of notices that must be read before attending the retreat. Signs posted on the notice boards declare, “This is not a bungalow;” “You must be willing to work hard.” Steve Weissman likens the creation of the many rules for this center to the creation of the monastic rules by the Buddha, as situations arose, more rules were added. Therefore tourism created particular adaptations for this international meditation center where participants

learn how to behave in a temple and often combine this with beach holidays before or after the retreat.

Over a twenty year period of teaching in a ten-day retreat format, Steve and Rosemary have built their program in such a way that a large majority of participants complete the retreats, and many return multiple times. After a ten-day beginners' retreat in early January 2010, many international meditators said they were ready to leave after the first few days but it was always the evening talk that kept them motivated to stay. Each night the topic seemed to address the problems they were facing that day, such as tiredness, homesickness, doubt, and unpleasant physical sensations. The techniques and teachings offered the solutions as well as the knowledge that what each meditator was experiencing was typical. Often this information gives the beginner the confidence and motivation to complete the retreat.

These adaptations are necessary as for some meditators, being in nature is one of the main criteria for choosing an international retreat center. Much mental discipline is needed to complete a retreat, contrary to popular ideas of peacefully sitting among trees and viewing natural settings. Through these Romantic motivations, the feeling of peace is the goal of the practice, as Buddhist teachings and devotional activities are disregarded. Another prominent motivation for seeking out a meditation center is the goal of therapeutic healing and well-being.

*Therapy and Health*

For some international meditators to Thailand, the discourse between psychology and meditation has led to entering a meditation retreat as a means for therapy and healing. Many meditators arrive at an international meditation center not only because of its beauty or its convenient location within a tourist area, but in order to deal with a specific problem or difficult period in their lives. The idea that meditation can aid their problems leads international meditators to seek out a place with a recommended teacher, usually found through a friend or by word of mouth. One American meditator named Steve who I met at a meditation retreat at Wat Chom Tong, commented to me that he became interested in meditation while he was coming out of a long-term and difficult relationship and had lost his job. Because of this situation, he felt that there was nowhere else to go but a meditation retreat. In his state, he didn't have any expectations of the retreat, only hoping that the experience could be healing. Steve was trying to let go of some painful experiences and found that the meditation technique helped him to be less reactive and more detached from his thoughts. He attended a 21-day course and then a ten-day review retreat a few months later. He continues to meditate a short period every morning and goes back to the breathing technique every time he is stressed.

Some meditators use the practice as a way to deal with emotional trauma. After meeting Sally from Ireland at the Wat Kow Tahm meditation retreat, we communicated via email about her experiences. She first arrived at Wat Kow Tahm because she was deeply unhappy suffering periods of depression. She also had a drinking problem and was in an abusive relationship. Her first retreat and

experience meditating was transformative as she reports she was able to clearly see suffering in her own body. After this she attended many more retreats and became a teacher's assistant. Although moving back home to Ireland Sally still remains an enthusiastic meditator.

International visitors may also use the discipline of meditation as a substitute or complement to twelve-step programs to combat addiction. Paul Garrigan writes about his specific reason for wanting to practice meditation in Thailand, "My life had become unbearable because of an alcohol addiction, and it was my goal to beat it at this Thai temple" (Garrigan 2009, no page). He had read about *vipassanā* meditation but since Wat Rampoeng was his first retreat experience in Thailand, he did not know what to expect. He discusses his goals for the retreat writing, "At that time, I would have been ecstatic if they could just help me to get and remain sober—Enlightenment was far too ambitious a goal for me" (Garrigan 2010, 138). For those looking for therapy and recovery from addiction, the Buddhist goal of liberation from suffering is not considered. Garrigan, who is now a recovering alcoholic, writes of his experience after the retreat, "For the next few days my mind felt wonderful and free; the world was so much simpler. Unfortunately it didn't last as I once again began drinking . . . still I really give the meditation retreat in Chiang Mai a lot of credit. It created a taste in me for mental freedom that once tried could never be forgotten" (Garrigan 2009, no page). Those interested in therapy, healing, and recovery are searching for mental freedom and distance from their problems and addictions.



Figure 7. Meditators, Wat Rampoeng, Chiangmai, Thailand

Apart from recovering from addiction and learning how to deal with difficult personal relationships, meditation is also used to boost health. A significant discourse surrounding meditation is its ability to reduce stress and improve one's overall well-being and scientific studies are often cited. In a phone conversation with Al from America,<sup>197</sup> I learned that he is a frequent visitor to Wat Suan Mokkh's International Dhamma Hermitage, who practices the long-breathing technique taught there, strictly for health benefits. Being out of shape

---

<sup>197</sup> Through my contacts at the International Dhamma Hermitage I arranged an email correspondence and phone conversation with Al.

and overweight, Al first attended an International Dhamma Hermitage retreat through the recommendation of a friend as a way to detoxify. He did not find the retreat psychologically challenging; he simply followed the schedule and reaped the positive health benefits. His weight has reduced significantly, he incorporates the mostly vegetarian diet he learned from the retreat, and continues the long-breathing practice for at least a half hour each day. In six years he has gone on the retreat eight times and continues to use it as a time to detoxify, saying he is not interested in *nibbāna* or anything spiritual. He writes in a *Nation* article that “Three strengths of Buddhism stand out that no other religion or way of life offer collectively. They are deep mental meditation, extremely healthy long breathing exercises, and environmental awareness” (Eberhardt 2010, no page). Through medical tests he has found that he has improved liver function and lower cholesterol level. His main purpose in his first trips to the International Dhamma Hermitage was strictly for weight loss. The last five retreats Al attended he instead sought to explore his ‘inner self’ and the benefits of a spiritual vacation focused on the health aspects of long breathing. Al told me that he does not attend for the Buddhist teachings, as these are too complex for him. For health reasons, the meditation retreat lifestyle stands out as the most important part.

As seen from these international meditators, when the purpose of attending a retreat is for health, Buddhist goals such as *nibbāna* are not mentioned. The meditation practice is exclusively devoted toward aims of therapeutic or bodily well-being. Because of the discourses of meditation regarding these benefits of the practice, international meditators seek to meditate



in a secular way. Therefore international meditators select the parts of the meditation retreat that cohere with their goals and motivations. For those interested in health, the long-breathing and vegetarian food is appropriated and for those wishing to live in nature and explore the culture beyond the beaches, the natural settings of the temple and exotic experiences are most significant. Discourses of Romanticism create routes of hybridity which focus on natural settings and seeking out 'Eastern wisdom.' Selective engagement and appropriation melds secular, psychological discourses with Buddhist meditative practices. These are the avenues through which many international meditators come to Thailand's international meditation centers, showing the extent to which meditation has become divorced from its Thai Buddhist context. However for some the Buddhist teachings are also incorporated into one's religiosity, where a long-term engagement with meditation is formed.

### *Portraits of Long-Term International Meditators*

Long-term meditators have the most sustained engagement with Thai Buddhism. The roles they take on show the deep commitment possible for international meditators who engage with the practice over time. This section demonstrates how the same routes of tourism, cultural curiosity, and interest in meditation that lead to hybrid religiosity can also lead to a deep engagement with Thai Buddhism. In Thailand's international meditation centers, spaces have been created for long-term international meditators to volunteer and teach meditation. It is not only Thai monks who are authorized as meditation teachers but Thai

meditation teachers also allow foreigners to teach other foreigners hoping that the teaching will be well-suited to the audience of a similar cultural background and language. From recording the history of many international centers it is clear that when an experienced English-speaking teacher is available, Thai meditation leaders often ask them to teach or be in charge of the foreigners in some way. Whether these meditators choose ordination or remain lay Buddhists, it is possible to become meditation teachers within international meditation centers.<sup>198</sup> Others seek temporary sustained visits and become cultural brokers who return to the same temple and community each year. After one visit, some travelers now make the pilgrimage to Wat Pah Tam Wua through Highway 1095 every summer vacation in order to meditate with Ajan Luangta and teach English to him and the other Thai monks. It is the meditation that attracted them to Buddhism and their experience with the practice that led them to incorporate it into their lives in a significant way.

These long-term meditators sometimes began their practice as tourists interested in understanding the culture and people of their destinations. Phra Ofer, an Israeli monk,<sup>199</sup> has practiced meditation since 1983. He related to me that he first practiced at Wat Rampoeng in Chiangmai as a traveler.<sup>200</sup> Early on, he was not interested in meditation or the spiritual life; he was more interested in

---

<sup>198</sup> For a detailed consideration of foreign meditation teachers see Chapter 6 in this dissertation.

<sup>199</sup> See biography here: [www.vipassanā-dhammacari.com/weitere\\_eng.html](http://www.vipassanā-dhammacari.com/weitere_eng.html).

<sup>200</sup> Phra Ofer, Wat Chom Tong, Lineage of Ajan Tong, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010.

traveling and learning about other cultures. He found at Wat Rampoeng he could further this interest through observing Thai Buddhists and living in the temple with them. At some point Phra Ofer's interest in travel turned into a desire to learn meditation. Upon returning to his native Israel, he became sincerely interested in meditation and continued to practice. After this he started to take the practice of meditation more seriously, and practiced with Ajan Tong at Wat Chom Tong. After some time Ajan Tong gave him permission to teach and Phra Ofer started in Israel, still as a layman. He wanted to become a monk at that time but knew he needed permission from his parents and that it would be hard for them to understand his decision.

For international meditators from non-Buddhist countries ordination can be a difficult choice to explain to one's family and friends. In this social context renouncing the lay life and becoming part of a foreign religion is not usually met with joy as it would be in most Thai families. Phra Ofer temporarily ordained at first but after his father passed away his mother gave him permission to ordain fully. After his ordination he taught in Germany for several years and began teaching again in Israel in 2005. Since then he spends half the year in Germany and the other half in Israel fulfilling his duties as a meditation teacher. Therefore he is part of the movement and exchange of Thai Buddhist meditation to other parts of the world. Phra Ofer's case shows one of the avenues for international meditators. Arriving with an interest in Thai culture can transform into a desire to ordain and teach meditation.

Ordination was similarly a difficult choice for Austrian *mae chii* meditation teacher, Mae Chii Brigitte, most recently of Wat Prayong Gittavararam.<sup>201</sup> Mae Chii Brigitte was married while in her 20s, but because of a strong fear of death that emerged following the birth of her children, she started to explore ways to cope with this. She discovered meditation and completed her first two-month intensive retreat in 1989. But this wasn't enough for her and soon she was back, wanting to become a nun. She eventually decided to leave her children with her husband after they lived with her for a short time in Thailand. She did not want to disrobe and even though it was very difficult she felt it was the best decision for her life and her family. When I spoke with Mae Chii Brigitte, she related to me that since this time she has given her life to meditation and the monastic life.<sup>202</sup> Taking up the lifestyle of an ordained person and leaving family are evocative themes of the life of the Buddha. In the social context of her native Austria this was an unusual choice, which would have been viewed with suspicion and concern by her family. Foreign monastics usually face negative reactions from family because of the unfamiliar choice of becoming a renunciate. This emulates the Buddha's life story, as in both instances there is a high social cost to renunciation and conversion. In this case, Mae Chii Brigitte felt monasticism was a valuable choice as her commitment to meditation grew into a profound dedication to Thai Buddhism.

---

<sup>201</sup> For more of her biography see: [www.meditationthailand.com/](http://www.meditationthailand.com/).

<sup>202</sup> Mae Chii Brigitte, Wat Prayong Gittivararam, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

Some long-term meditators choose to move to Thailand and then become interested in its variety of Thai Buddhist practices. In speaking with Phra Frank,<sup>203</sup> an American monk, I learned that he came to the dhamma through teaching English in Thailand and meeting his first teacher, Ajan Helen of the House of Dhamma. Today he teaches the foreign meditators at Wat Sangathan in Bangkok. I also recorded the story of South African lay meditation teacher, Jonathan,<sup>204</sup> at Wat Chom Tong. He traveled to Bangkok in search of a master and at Bangkok's Wat Mahathat he was instructed to seek out Ajan Tong in Chiangmai. After he finished the basic course at Wat Chom Tong and then sat five more retreats he was asked to start teaching. It was through traveling to Thailand and first being an international meditator or working in Thailand that led these dedicated practitioners to stay and teach others.

Foreign meditators often experiment with different teachings, as sampling is the norm for long-term international meditators. In speaking with Luang Pi River,<sup>205</sup> a British monk at Wat Dhammakaya, during the Middle Way retreat, I learned his route to finding a temple where he wanted to ordain. He had tried a number of meditation methods prior to attending Wat Dhammakaya's Middle Way retreat. Luang Pi River attended two retreats at the International Dhamma Hermitage, taught at a spa in Koh Phangan, and sat an Ajan Tong retreat in Chiangmai during his travels. During this sampling, he heard of Wat

---

<sup>203</sup> Phra Frank, Wat Sangathan, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>204</sup> Jonathan, Wat Chom Tong, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>205</sup> Phra Luangpi River, The Middle Way Retreat, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

Dhammakaya and went there to practice. He attended the Middle Way retreat and this experience caused him to seek ordination at Wat Dhammakaya because he wanted to be a part of developing this retreat program. He has been teaching at Middle Way since October 2009. It is often the connection with a certain place, community, practice, or teaching method that leads to sustained engagement and participation.

But one does not have to ordain to teach meditation at Thailand's international meditation centers. Often international meditators who are frequent attendees are asked to volunteer to help manage group retreat centers that accommodate a large number of retreatants at once. Thus there are opportunities for further involvement and exchange, and a few international meditators take advantage of these roles. Reinhard,<sup>206</sup> a German layman, is an example of a meditator who contributed to a retreat center through volunteering and teaching. In my communication with him, I learned that he had been attending retreats each month at the International Dhamma Hermitage for a few years, and living at the main Suan Mokkh monastery between the ten-day retreats. In this way he became very familiar with the retreats and the people responsible for the organization. From 2004 to 2008 he lived permanently at the retreat center and was asked to take responsibility for the organization of the monthly foreigner retreats. Similarly a German laywoman, Nancy, had a transformative first experience<sup>207</sup> at the

---

<sup>206</sup> Reinhard, International Dhamma Hermitage, via email, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010.

<sup>207</sup> This is a shared trait of many long-term international meditators and demonstrates one of several avenues that create religious hybridity. For some this

International Dhamma Hermitage retreat and continued to participate in many of the following retreats. She related this story in a dhamma talk to the participants at the Dipabhavan Meditation Center retreat I attended,<sup>208</sup> in which she was a volunteer. Her first retreat experience caused her to reevaluate her life, which she changed to focus more on meditation and living a simpler life in Thailand.

These processes of selective appropriation illustrate the variety of motivations for undertaking a retreat as well as the new social spaces created for those long-term practitioners. Popular ideas of meditation connected with nature, healing, relaxation, as well as meditation's connection to the current cultural zeitgeist, have created the phenomenon of experimenting with Thai meditative practices while traveling, and engaging at various levels. For curious tourists, meditation can be a one-time trial or become a lifelong commitment. Some international meditators have made a life out of the practice, becoming ordained or full-time meditation teachers in Thailand, demonstrating that the same routes that lead to hybrid religiosities can also lead to a deep engagement with Thai Buddhism. It is the selective appropriation of the retreat experience, which leads to hybrid religiosity. Only the parts of the meditation retreat that cohere with the international meditator's goals and motivations are given value. As well some aspects of the retreat are intentionally avoided and questioned.

---

transformative experience entails an insight into one of the three characteristics of suffering, impermanence, or non-self. For others, as international meditation center teachers have related to me, this can be a spontaneous entrance into the first *jhāna*. This kind of initial attainment is motivation to continue to practice meditation in a serious and dedicated way.

<sup>208</sup> I attended the June 20<sup>th</sup>-June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010 retreat.

## **Subversion and Dissent**

Keane theorizes about Christian conversion in his ethnographic monograph, *Christian Moderns*. He defines semiotic ideology (Keane 2007, 16-18) as cultural concepts that mediate between selves and signs that contain moral and political assumptions. He shows how Calvinist missionaries and Sumbanese Indonesians have differing semiotic ideologies. The two groups have different assumptions about the moral and political aspects of their communicative acts, and about the relationship between self and signs, words and objects. Salazar finds similarly that travel destinations are places where multiple imaginaries clash. Tourism can help to shape the frameworks for these encounters yet cultural differences remain (Salazar 2010, 15). The issues highlighted in this section demonstrate the semiotic ideologies of international meditators, which are sometimes at odds with the purpose of the retreat center and international meditation center teachers.

There are small ways in which international meditators can dissent from the rules of the meditation retreat. In some centers meditators are watched closely and told that if they are caught using their phone they will be expelled from the retreat. But at other centers the meditation teacher is not always present and meditators have more time amongst themselves. In the latter situation, first-time international meditators who are not motivated often find other activities. One young Canadian woman confided to a small group of international meditators at Wat Doi Suthep that she found the meditation technique too difficult. Instead of practicing, she stayed in her room watching DVDs on her computer for a few



nights and left earlier than she had intended. The reality of a meditation schedule with 7-8 hours of meditation per day is too much for some international meditators. Some report feeling trapped on the monastery grounds and this is another reason for leaving the retreat early. In this way international meditators' ideas of personal freedom is in conflict with the meditation retreat structure, which has constraints in place for optimal meditation progress.

For international meditators, meditation often conjures images of a peaceful environment with the ability to relax and relieve stress. Even though some international meditators would like the ability to talk freely, they still seek a center that is quiet. This can be difficult at some of the busy temples that are also meditation centers. International meditators, to a large extent, enter the retreat in order to rest and clear the mind. Many expect silence and tranquility and are disappointed when distractions arise such as the noisiness of ceremonies and Buddhist holiday celebrations, as well as construction around the center. When the meditation center is not situated within an idyllic environment, spending ten days meditating is less appealing. Before each monthly ten-day retreat at the International Dhamma Hermitage foreign meditators are allowed to stay at Wat Suan Mokkh, the monastery adjacent to the retreat center. Some meditators use this as a time to consider whether they want to join the retreat or not, spending time at the temple for a night or two. In speaking with some travelers staying in Wat Suan Mokkh, I learned that some choose not to enter the retreat. The commerce they see around the temple detracts from the natural, ideal experience of meditation and relaxation international meditators often envision. The semiotic

linkages between meditation and relaxation are too strong for some international meditators to adjust their expectation of what a meditation retreat might entail.

Commodification of anything connected to the Buddhist temple or meditation center is in direct contrast to the international meditator's vision of an 'authentic' culture and religious tradition, which should be 'pure' and 'untainted' by commerce. The presence of market items such as amulets and even street food and drinks is seen by some international meditators to mark an inauthentic or unnatural space to practice meditation. Like Moran finds concerning Western travelers to Bodhanath's Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, international meditators in Thailand fear that meditation will become "yet another 'commodity' produced by the monstrous forces of modernity . . ." (Moran 2004, 58). Moran's study reveals that the presence of money was disturbing in contrast to the supposed spiritual ideals and the traditions of Tibetan Buddhists, and an imagined 'pure' Buddhism (Moran 2004, 78). The relationship of the economy and meditation are seen to be antithetical to some international meditators. Therefore the desire to experience meditation can easily become disillusionment when ideals do not match the expectations.

My discussions with international meditators revealed that many do not realize that monasteries are a social organization and part of a community that needs monetary funds in order to function. Temples are part of the surrounding community and abbots allow laypeople to sell food, drinks, lottery tickets, and sometimes massage within temple grounds. The meditation teaching within Thailand's international meditation centers is, for the most part, offered freely and

by donation. Meditation teaching by donation is a traditional aspect of Buddhist teaching. In Thailand and elsewhere in Theravādin Southeast Asia there is a history of monks acting in this role as a source of donation for the temple. Therefore the temple has its own economy and sources of income through the reciprocity of exchange and consumption. Through this lack of knowledge concerning the economic functioning of temples, some international meditators criticize temple practices among each other while attending a meditation retreat or decide not to engage at all, disenchanted by this seeming lack of authenticity.

Besides the external circumstances of the retreat center, some international meditators find it difficult to execute the rules and regulations one is required to follow in order to participate in a meditation retreat. Although it is not recommended that people talk during most of the popular international retreats in Thailand, this is often not observed fully. At international retreat centers some people come and go quickly, never speaking to anyone, but some collect everyone's email addresses, promising to keep in touch as if in summer camp. It is natural to be curious about the other meditators—to want to know their reasons for taking on a meditation retreat. Foreign tourists are often lonely and looking for others to travel with. At international retreat centers no one talks during meditation or in the meditation halls. Often, however, there are times when these rules are broken and meditators talk during afternoon tea breaks, at night before bed, or before leaving. These are times when international meditators discuss their motivations for coming, their backgrounds and their travels around Thailand and Southeast Asia. Foreign tourists are used to meeting other travelers and

conversing about their plans, and often do not understand the significance placed on remaining silent. Danny from Ireland discussed why he decided to speak during the retreat at Wat Doi Suthep. Here are his sentiments from my fieldnotes:

Danny told me that he could tell that talking affected his practice but the meditation was too boring and difficult to maintain throughout the evening. He also stated that he started to feel trapped in the temple. He was anxious to discuss this with the other meditators. He felt better knowing that many of the others felt the same way.

Depending on the meditation center, the response to talking can be silent disapproval, or a warning of expulsion from the retreat. It is clear from the orientation and written instructions that one of the rules of meditation centers is to remain silent. However some international meditators do not think this rule is significant and choose to ignore it. Others like Danny understand that silence aids one's concentration practice but still feel compelled to share one's experiences with others.

The lack of sleep is a particular problem for many travelers who attend the Ajan Tong retreats in Chiangmai, who are not expecting this aspect of their lives to be disrupted. One of the rules is to remain wakeful and in a meditative state throughout the day with decreasing hours of sleep as one progresses. International meditators dissent by waking up after the morning bell, and napping after breakfast and lunch. Lack of sleep is one problem that is often cited as a reason for leaving or causing difficulty with the practice. After talking with Paul at Wat Chom Tong, I wrote this in my fieldnotes:

Paul didn't know that a major challenge of this retreat for him would be the lack of sleep. This aspect of the rules was not explained to him in full

when he arrived. He was very surprised when the meditation teacher continually asked him to sleep less and less.

Although Paul obeyed the rules it is clear that some international meditators assume that certain aspects of the meditation retreat are not important, especially those that interfere with the freedoms they are more accustomed to.

Some aspects of the retreat are demanding for international meditators who did not expect this challenge involved in living in a Buddhist temple. This is a measure of the degree and quality of cultural communication. Points of subversion expose the semiotic ideologies of international meditators that have different assumptions and place importance on aspects of the retreat experience divergent from the design of the retreat program. These moments of dissent reveal hybrid spaces, as meditators not only participate in the practice but also the experience of living in a temple setting. The rules and regulations international meditation centers impose challenge international meditators' capacity for difference. The resulting dissent underscores selectivity and appropriation. International meditators then are not only appropriating Thai meditation techniques but also rejecting cultural settings with their statements of selectivity and refusal to participate in particular aspects of the retreat. This is part of the consequences that occur when the idealized version of meditation and Buddhism is encountered in reality.

## **International Meditators' Daily Practices**

Focusing more closely on the details of international meditators' experiences, I highlight two retreat centers with quite different programs designed for their international meditators. This section takes a close look at the schedules, practices and activities, ceremonies, meditation teachings, and daily living of international meditators at two of the most well-known retreat centers in Thailand.

### ***Wat Rampoeng***

Wat Rampoeng is one of the most popular meditation retreat sites for foreigners, especially in the North of Thailand. It is easily accessible from the city of Chiang Mai and it has a large amount of space to accommodate many meditators. However, this is an intense retreat that follows the method of Ajan Tong. Because of the strictness of this method, a popular idea exists that Wat Rampoeng is for serious practitioners and the retreats in the South, such as the International Dhamma Hermitage, are filled with retreat tourists or backpackers who are not serious. One discussion on the Thai Visa Forum sums up the opinions of these two popular options for retreat in Thailand, "I live not too far from Wat Rampoeng but the flower thing and other rituals really put me off. Wat Suan Mokkh {the International Dhamma Hermitage} could be a solution, but don't fancy sitting with half motivated backpackers" (Thai Visa Forum Website 2009, no page). In Wat Rampoeng foreigners are taught the basics of Thai Buddhist behavior but are often left confused and nervous about conducting themselves correctly. Through investigating the motivations, expectations, difficulties with

the practice, and reflections, I offer here a comprehensive view of international meditators' experiences.

### *Motivations and Expectations*

Many international meditators who attend the Wat Rampoeng retreat often don't know what the practice entails or its goals, but are convinced that it is something to try, at least once. Most international meditators stated that by the end of their experience at Wat Rampoeng they found some value in it. From learning a little about Thai culture to being able to sit still for more than fifteen minutes, there is usually something about the experience that makes it rewarding and that travelers do not regret.

One traveler who kept a blog about her experiences had some knowledge about meditation that she wanted to take further:

“About a year and half ago I came across a website for the Northern Insight Meditation Center in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Having dabbled in martial arts and meditation courses in the past, I was intrigued by the opportunity to take my practice even further and get the benefits I had seen in more dedicated meditators. While other wats like Suan Dok advertised three day courses, the Wat Rampoeng offered a 26 day beginner course . . . a year and a half later, we were walking through the front gates with packed bags, big smiles, a lot of optimism, and no idea of what we were getting ourselves into” (No Author 2008).

This highlights how international meditators are willing to try meditation because of its cache and positive cultural association, despite not knowing anything about the conditions, retreat center, or method of practice. Another traveler also went to Wat Rampoeng specifically for this intense 26-day course and also found it

difficult to handle. She describes the end period of the experience, called 'determination' when one meditates for three straight days:

“Food is brought to your room, but curtains are to be kept drawn, and escape is solely permitted for your daily visitation to the teacher. You aren't allowed to wash, you aren't allowed to change your clothes, and you aren't allowed to brush your teeth. This is hardcore. They just about stop at putting you under lock and key. I always knew it was coming. It had been my whole reason for going. The drama appealed. But on the first night reality overwhelmed me. What on earth was I doing? How could I possibly have the stamina, precious middle-class me, with my pre-requisite nine hours sleep a night? Did I really want to make myself terminally ill and incurably insane?” (Davies, no date).

The idea of meditation is exoticized but the practice and retreat experience itself does not convey the otherness imagined. Some are intrigued by the promise of this intense experience, but do not expect the amount of effort needed. Part of this might stem from the way meditation is situated within the tourist agenda. Another travel blogger writes, “On the morning after the mahout training we donned the all white clothes that we'd previously bought at the Chiang Mai night market, got in a songthaew (adapted pick up truck with benches in the back and used like a bus) and went to Wat Rampoeng for the toughest 10 days of our trip so far” (Garrett 2008). This shows the link between tourist experiences. Elephant training, learning massage, and Thai cooking are bundled together with learning meditation. This creates the idea that meditation is another fun activity to learn that reifies a Thai cultural artifact. Soon, however, travelers come to apprehend that meditation is qualitatively different from tourist activities. Early on within the retreat experience at Wat Rampoeng this difference is obvious.



### *Fear and Nervousness*

Many travelers do not know what to expect when entering a temple and beginning a meditation retreat. This is an unfamiliar environment with regulations of behavior unknown to newcomers. This traveler writes about her stressful preparation for the retreat and first day,

“We had signed up for 10 days of *vipassanā* meditation at the wat which is just outside Chiang Mai and were feeling quite nervous. The website we'd seen promised a wake up bell at 4am, no food after noon, 10 hours of meditation a day and no talking at all, amongst a host of other rules and regulations. We had visited the wat earlier in the week to sign up and the surprisingly hostile monk who took our details and put us through a rather difficult interview asking us why we wanted to undertake the course had only served to heighten our anxiety about how hard the 10 days would be” (Garrett 2008).

Wat Rampoeng is a dramatic example of the fear and nervousness that can accompany a meditation retreat because of the requisite bowing during the opening ceremony and for the interviews with the teacher. When new international meditators arrive, having just learned the multi-step process of bowing and not remembering the motions exactly, they often feel intimidated when called to enter the abbot's office. Sometimes meditators freeze and hesitate to enter while the abbot waits for them, continuing to call out to his new students that he is ready to meet them. When arriving in the office, many beginners bow incorrectly, or too many or too few times. Commenting about the initial instructions one traveler writes, “It's fast, intense, and serves to raise the nerves of everyone in the room. Heck, one girl was crying within the first few hours of arriving and I assured her that we all felt pretty much the same way” (No Author 2008).

The first meeting with the abbot also causes anxiety:

“The stress only grows as we are herded into the waiting room of Prah {sic} Adjarn Suphon’s office, the Abbot of Wat Rampoeng and our teacher for the meditation course. After a very quick run down of what we’re expected to do upon entrance and exit of his office, we feel very ill-equipped to face the big man and we whisper to each other trying to remember our lines and actions” (No Author 2008).

Another traveler finds that his nervousness was unnecessary. Intimidation and worry soon become relief that the abbot is not concerned about these minor gestures. The instruction was given in order for the meditators to pay proper respect to the abbot, who the meditators imagine will be watching them carefully, and if a mistake is made, will be unhappy.

“We waited outside the abbot’s room nervously until we were all ushered in and prostrated and greeted both the abbot and his translator. He then led us in the opening ceremony which involved following chants and offering up the lotus flowers, candles and incense sticks to Buddha . . . Far from being the intimidating, distant figure we had expected, he was actually very warm and friendly” (Garrett 2008).

This nervousness stems from the reality of their new and unfamiliar environment. The modes of behavior are quickly learned, but the practice of meditation remains another challenge.

### *Difficulties with the Practice*

Because of the lack of knowledge and in some cases exotic ideas about meditation, beginners often find the practice itself difficult. Even for those with some experience meditating for an hour or more each day, this does not replicate a retreat where one meditates anywhere from 7 or 8 to 24 hours per day. This is strenuous mentally as well as physically, often putting strain on one’s knees and

back. Because of the ideas of meditation as peaceful, relaxing and blissful, the hard work involved comes as even more of a shock. One traveler writes after a retreat how stressful the experience was, “You see, every time you meet with the teacher he gives you a new step or instruction, as well as an extra five minutes on your meditation sessions and increase in total hours. In no time, you’re logging 30 minute sessions for a total of ten hours a day” (No Author 2008). The amount of meditation expected in a retreat is known to those who do some reading and research about the program at Wat Rampoeng, but for many the reality of how challenging this will be is not understood.

The end of the retreat, the determination period, is especially challenging.

One traveler wrote about her experience:

“Twenty-four hours into the exercise, heart pounding down to my toes, I lay down on my bed and gave up. I wept with relief. I awoke an hour later, responding to some deep-buried pang of guilt. Excellent, I remembered, I was free. I could be in the glittering metropolis of Chiang Mai a whole two days earlier than planned” (Davies no date).

It is not only the meditation practice itself and the amount required each day but the fact that the international meditators are required to remain within the temple compound that is also demanding. After exploring many different places, the travelers on a meditation retreat are now asked to remain in a limited space for a period of no less than ten days. One traveler felt the rules were too demanding, “I was pretty sure I was in Buddhist hell. If the road to nirvana was paved with starvation, sleep deprivation, and painful body manipulations, how much worse could it be? It was as if the Christian missionaries came to Thailand and told the people about hell and the Buddhists started taking notes” (No Author 2008). This

lack of adjustment again points to the reasons why some international meditators engage in rule-breaking and dissent from the strict schedule.

### *Descriptions of Other Activities*

Living within a temple complex is often completely new to foreign meditators. Their reactions and responses to these daily temple activities illustrate this level of engagement and adjustment. Along with meditation throughout the day there are other activities such as the interview with the abbot, meal times, and ceremonies within the temple compound. The opening and closing ceremonies are usually something new and strange for international meditators. One informant commented “The opening /closing ceremony done by Ajarn Suphan was lots of chanting asking the gods for protection or something I guess and I’m fine with that, need all the help I can get.”<sup>209</sup> It is clear from this comment that not all of the procedures are fully understood by the international meditators.

One traveler describes the interview process:

“Every time we go to their room we had to kneel at the entrance, edge into the room on our knees and prostrate to the buddha statue in the room three times, then to Ajan Suphan (the abbot) three times, then to Bhikkhune Akayanee (the translator) three times. Then we must say hello to them both in Thai which is "Sawat de ka" for a woman, and "Sawat de krab" for a man. To prostrate you kneel, put your hands together in front of your chest, touch them to your forehead then lean forwards and place them on the ground. Then you touch your head to your hands, rise back up to your knees, put your hands together again and touch them to your chest, then forehead, then chest again. All this must be done slowly and with mindfulness {sic}” (Garrett 2008).

---

<sup>209</sup> This quote is from an email correspondence with Kleem on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011, an international meditator I have contacted via my research website.

The recounting of this procedure shows that the international meditators learn this well and that the interview process is part of their experience of the ‘other’ as evidenced by this meditator’s choice to write about this in detail. The dining hall experience is also a ritualized procedure new to most international travelers. Many are surprised that non-vegetarian food is an option, not realizing that Theravāda Buddhists do not maintain a vegetarian diet. This demonstrates how little is known about Buddhism despite the positive evaluation of its meditation practice. The chanting that precedes eating is also a new experience. Chanting with the monks in Pāli and Thai is necessary for all participants before eating the meal. Sometimes this process can take up to a half hour as everyone waits for all to be seated. For English-speaking meditators there is a separate sheet with a translation of the Pāli into English—however the English words are not spoken aloud and during the Thai part foreign meditators are told to read the words in English silently.

Some international meditators enjoy this process of being able to take the time to reflect on their meals before eating. But some are not as positive about the experience, “I say ‘endured’ the prayers and singing, as the difficulty – after the uncomfortable sitting and hunger – was the inaccessible ancient language of Buddhism used.” (Noz 2009). This can be an interesting experience at first but loses its exoticism quickly. One traveler writes:

“A shaven-headed nun with a microphone turned up much too loud would sing phrases we would try to repeat. Fun the first few times. Then the monks would chant a couple of primitive-sounding ditties, with stirring rhythms and eastern modes. The monks - about 50 or 60 of them, aged from ten to 70 - would then start to eat, having been served by the nuns.

We would then sing further songs to them about how we mustn't enjoy our food too much, and how suffering gave us 'bright skins', or so the translation read. It did seem an odd way to begin a meal, singing anti-gluttony propaganda songs to scoffing monks" (Noz 2009).

This again shows the lack of understanding concerning Thai Buddhist rituals and how the lure of the exotic can quickly fade. Also a lack of respect for the ritual and monasticism is seen here.

Most foreigners are able to experience the weekly Buddhist holiday, *wan phra*, at Wat Rampoeng. This is the only ceremony that is explained in any detail to the foreign meditators. Although the dhamma talk by the abbot is not translated, the English-speaking monks will explain the reason for the ceremony and how to participate. This is a positive experience for many participants and the only group activity they take part in with the Thai meditators. Although they cannot fully participate, the circumambulation around the stupa with only candlelight is a memorable experience. One traveler reveals, "Partly due to the fact the ceremony was carried out at night by candlelight, it was a very ethereal and beautiful hour or so and definitely one that neither of us will ever forget" (Garrett 2008). This ritual is often perceived as an 'authentic' Buddhist and Thai cultural experience. But this does not occur with every ritual aspect that international meditators comment on.

Another activity conducted during the rains retreat is an almsround ceremony inside the temple. Unlike *wan phra* in which foreigners are included, in this ceremony foreigners do not know this ceremony is taking place and when

they see it, are not sure what is happening. Therefore the confusion doesn't elicit the allure of the exotic, only negative aspects of the unfamiliar.

“One ceremony of the monks I didn't at first grasp was held at eight o'clock each morning. Some of the white-dressed students, shaven-headed nuns and assorted locals would line one side of the main thoroughfare through the temple, standing behind trestle tables laden with packaged food. At first it looked like they were having a cake stall; . . . Into these bowls {the monks' almsbowls} the stall holders would place various juice boxes, chocolates and sometimes money. I'm not sure what the monks then did with the food - hopefully not eat it all. I imagined that it went back to the shop for sale” (Noz 2009).

Because of the focus on meditation for the foreigners these confusions about temple life arise frequently. “We learned a lot about the religion of Buddhism and about the Thai culture, though we had to learn it all through observation as nothing is explained when you can't talk and everything is in Thai.” (No Author 2008) These activities are interesting and produce much speculation and chatter by the foreign meditators. These are exotic moments for international meditators that can also be met with discomfort and criticism.

### *Reflections on the Retreat Experience*

Meditators often reflect back on their retreat experience, soon after its over, in a positive way. After the retreat meditators may resolve to integrate their meditative practice in their home countries or while continuing their travels. But the idea of going to another retreat is not as interesting as incorporating the meditation in smaller ways. One traveler writes, “At the closing ceremony Ajarn Suphan said that he hoped we would continue with our meditation in our daily lives and we have both agreed that we will try. It is an excellent way to clear your

mind, even if we only manage half an hour after work when we get home.” (Garrett 2008). In addition to wanting to continue meditating and giving the practice value, many meditators recommend it to anyone who would like to have less stress and learn about their minds.

Travelers often go abroad at some kind of impasse in their lives.

Meditation is seen as a way to aid in this process and some meditators say it helps to make difficult decisions for the next stage of their lives,

“While I was in the retreat I felt myself becoming more focused, and really believed I had more control over my thoughts. I also felt I very quickly gained an improved perspective on my life, and especially about what I hoped to do once my current trip had ended . . . I hope the mindfulness will continue to be a part of my life, but perhaps in more subtle ways than the leg-breaking meditation” (Noz 2009).

Other travelers sum up their experience by talking about their states of mind. They say it is more clear and focused and that they understand the suffering of an impatient mind. However, they also know that this is difficult to maintain. One traveler writes, “We came away with strong backs and more focused minds . . . I now know more than ever that meditation can clear the mind, help me to live in the moment, and to focus.” (No Author 2008). Many international meditators have a positive experience when they leave the temple, feeling balanced and happy for the time spent there. They are grateful to Ajan Suphan for his teaching and some who have done the ten-day retreat are inspired to go back for the 26-day full course. The confusion and disorientation of living in a Buddhist temple and difficult aspects of the practice are forgotten and for the most part, fond memories and benefits from the experience remain.





Figure 8. Typical meditator's room, Wat Prayong, Bangkok, Thailand

### *International Dhamma Hermitage*

Wat Suan Mokkh's International Dhamma Hermitage presents a marked contrast from the meditation retreat at Wat Rampoeng. In addition to being a group retreat where all meditation is practiced with all the attendees, this retreat is quite secular, with no Buddha statues or ceremonies. There are no daily interviews and there are many more teachings about Buddhism and the thought of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. The disciplined nature of the retreat are common factors of Wat Rampoeng and the International Dhamma Hermitage. In both cases the idealized version of meditation is in stark contrast to the realities of the retreat

experience. Longtime volunteer and manager of the retreat center, Reinhard, states this about the motivations of participants at the International Dhamma Hermitage:

“From the interviews on registration day one can get the impression, that most beginners to meditation (which are about 70-80%) of the participants come out of curiosity. Many have no idea at all why they did come – it’s just on their agenda while traveling in South East Asia- and this is why about 25% drop out. We always tell the participants that the best attitude to attend the retreat is to have no expectation at all, but they have and will not tell us – may be some fantasies about supernatural powers originating from hearsay from India. But this is my speculation, no facts. Unfortunately meditation is very much misunderstood in the West.”<sup>210</sup>

### *Nature and Surroundings*

As described above, a significant trope for international meditators is the connection between meditation and nature. A striking feature commented on by many international meditators attending this retreat is the importance of nature. Compared with Wat Rampoeng, international meditators who choose the International Dhamma Hermitage hardly ever comment on the orientation or the management of the retreat. Instead, as demonstrated from the comment book and the insight sharing that takes place in the evening on Day 10, what is most significant for these foreign meditators is the environment of the hermitage. One international meditator described water as a significant part of his retreat experience. At the International Dhamma Hermitage the retreatants have communal wells of water for showering and separate ones for laundry, as well as the use of hot springs during breaks and foot baths to wash off one’s feet. Also the

---

<sup>210</sup> Email correspondence with Reinhard on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

meditation hall is filled with sand and is located in an open sala—this adds to the natural feeling. The retreat center is designed this way because this is what the founder, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, advocated. However, this spartan lifestyle is both praised and criticized as extreme by foreign participants. One travel blogger writes:

“This sandbox of a meditation hall proved to be quite the challenge, as most days it rained and your feet would be wet and then would be completely covered with sand by the time you reached your place. Sand would get on your cushions and in your clothes and could be quite irritating and a distraction while you meditated” (Azurra 2007).

Therefore some beginning meditators find the adjustment to this lifestyle testing. Each meditator’s room consists of a cement bed and a wooden pillow. This is a demanding aspect of the retreat and to some can feel like a jail cell. But along with the challenge is the realization that this is part of the natural lifestyle and retreat experience sought out. Getting used to the surroundings and the lifestyle can be rewarding for those who stay. Therefore many travelers spend time writing about the layout of the retreat center and how they dealt with living in this way for the duration of the retreat.

“Well, it must have taken some time that I actually realized that THIS ‘room’ will be my place for eleven nights. It is comparable with a cell or even a prison. The room is approx {sic} 8 sq meter, has openings to all sides (even to the next room), it has a STONE Bed, a WOODEN pillow, just a mat and a blanket. There is also a cloth line and some hangers. More disturbing for me was the thought that all sorts of creatures moved in before me in my "room" and it did not look like they will leave. After working in a five star hotel environment and knowing Housekeeping Brand Standards - I had to make some compromises here... Well, it is part of the big picture and that's what I wanted- back to basic and living in and with nature.” (Lang 2007).

Another travel blogger comments about the living conditions, “I expected simple accommodation, not something that was frankly, oppressive. I found it {the concrete bed} pretty much impossible to sleep on it, it didn’t much help going to bed at 9:30pm” (Freeman 2009).

Aside from the discomfort of a wooden pillow and stone bed, there are positives of the retreat environment. Many meditators comment positively on the evening group walking meditation around the pond and standing meditation while looking up at the stars. Waking before dawn and being able to see the sunrise is also an awe-inspiring part of the experience. Another travel blogger comments, “so much of my time was spent observing all the minute details of this area and so much effort was dedicated to learning how to truly live in and as a part of the surroundings. The sand, the concrete bed, the mosquitoes, the wet ground, the slippery floors and the dark. All influenced my experience in it's own way” (Azurra 2007).

### *Schedule*

What stands out for many travelers who come to the International Dhamma Hermitage is the schedule. As expected, people who have participated in a retreat before find the schedule manageable but first-time retreatants often think it is quite grueling. However, since there are other daily activities besides meditation such as yoga, chanting, and much time in the day for dhamma teachings, it is a less demanding schedule than that of Wat Rampoeng. Compared with Wat Rampoeng, there is much less meditation time and much more sleep.

During the last days of the retreat the schedule changes so that there is only one daily meal and there are no teachings—only meditation practice. This gives students a taste of a more advanced retreat. Also on the last day the silence is broken so that the international meditators can share their experiences with one another in an event called insight sharing. This often becomes more of a confessional atmosphere that has more to do with personal histories than meditation experiences. Others comment on the lifestyle and how difficult the retreat was for them—how they wanted to quit but felt good about staying in the end. For the most part these are very positive comments when most of the hard work is finished.

### *Meditation and Teachings*

Once international meditators at the International Dhamma Hermitage become used to the schedule, the next important aspect of the experience is the meditation practice and the teachings about Buddhism. Dhamma friend volunteers lead the group sittings, which last for one hour. Walking meditation is also taught and meditators are able to practice independently within the grounds of the center. However, many participants take this opportunity to wander aimlessly, not following the confined, slow movements that walking meditation requires. Without the supervision of the volunteers, this practice period becomes an opportunity for subversion and increased freedom within a tightly regimented daily schedule.

British monk, Than Dhammavidu, is the main teacher at this retreat site. He mostly explains concepts within Buddhism that Buddhadasa Bhikkhu emphasized in his writing. Even if Than Dhammavidu's teachings aren't precisely remembered by his meditation students of over ten years, his personality and presence are easily recalled. His delivery and dry humor are memorable and he makes the complex ideas of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu seem understandable with his daily lectures. Along with his teachings are talks by the various volunteers that manage the retreat. Some lay foreigners, Thai laywomen, and Thai *mae chiis* often talk about their meditation experiences and offer some teachings to the group. One travel blogger discusses the difference between Than Dhammavidu's teaching and a Thai nun's, along with why he is attracted to Buddhism,

“I enjoyed the lectures quite a bit. The first thing they told us was to not blindly believe anything they say, to try and experience it for ourselves and build our own belief system. I was immediately attracted to a religion that supports their belief system with empiricism rather than faith. Half of the lectures were done by the Thai Buddhist nuns who of course had all of the religious dogma of a Thai Theravāda Buddhist such as ghosts, karma, reincarnation and an afterlife. The other half and my favorite half was done by a British, Atheist, Buddhist monk, an interesting combination to say the least. He had a way of teaching with such comical cynicism that it made the whole chamber laugh. His teachings of Buddhism were very down to earth, philosophical and really got to the nuts and bolts of what the Buddha actually taught, without the religious dogma that generally comes with this particular spiritual practice.” (Quest 2010).

Here is it revealed the kind of religiosity this international meditator is seeking.

The writer here gives value to atheism and the Buddha's teachings while labeling the Thai nuns' teaching negatively as dogmatic. This highlights the prevalence of the ideas of modern Buddhism and the contextual nature in which Buddhist teachings are received.

*Reflections on the Retreat Experience*

Reinhard sums up the international meditators' reflections from the International Dhamma Hermitage:

“People liked the silence, the simple living conditions, the close contact to nature. To me the takeaway for most is the experience that a place like the International Dhamma Hermitage exists, that it is possible to live a different life than they have grown used to and that meditation provides a tool to deal with the challenges of life. Most then will not make any use of this knowledge once they have left the monastery gate until they run into problems or a crisis in their lives. Then they will remember that it is possible to calm and to train the mind in order to solve their difficulties and may give it another try – this is what many “old friends” are telling us.”<sup>211</sup>

Therefore even though many of the travelers seem less than serious in their approach to the retreat—the practice can still be meaningful. One traveler, after his experience at the International Dhamma Hermitage, recommends meditation for all people:

“I urge everyone who reads this to seek a class or two in the practice of meditation. It doesn't matter if you are faithful to a certain religion, meditation is non-denominational, if anything it will help you grow closer to your beliefs. Meditation and mindfulness is such an important skill to have. With just a basic understanding of the practice, I am able to be proactive when a negative emotion enters my mind, and allow it to pass before it takes hold and I become a victim of it” (Quest 2010).

One young traveler who was curious about Buddhism found that for a long time after his retreat experience at the International Dhamma Hermitage his life was simpler and he felt more clear-headed. He continues to do part of the yoga routine taught at this retreat and meditate a few times a month.<sup>212</sup> There are a variety of responses and reflections on the meditation experience, with each being

---

<sup>211</sup> Email correspondence May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>212</sup> Email correspondence May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

unique to the individual. Of course this depends on the person's prior knowledge of Buddhism and meditation, their expectations of the retreat and their reasons for attending.

## **Conclusion**

The avenues by which international meditators come to attend a meditation retreat in Thailand lead to a variety of hybrid religious formations as well as the possibility of deep and long-term engagement through an initial transformative experience. It is not only the meditation itself, but also the schedule, surroundings of the retreat center, and other activities of living in the center, that makeup the content of the experience. From an accidental religious tourist who happens upon a scenic temple and is invited to learn meditation to one who plans a retreat to deal with a certain problem in his or her life—there are many different kinds of international meditators. For those interested in therapy and healing, the 'Buddhist' aspects of living in a temple can be a challenge, but for others interested in cultural exploration and being in nature the experience of living in the temple is a highlight. Some international meditators have found a place where they benefited and have eventually become teachers and volunteers at these sites. Others find ways to dissent from the strict meditation program through not acknowledging the ban on speaking or sleeping during the day. Only a small minority of international meditators come to Thailand with the intention of becoming deeper or more devout Buddhists as many do not mention Buddhism at



all. This shows the extent to which meditation has become divorced from its Buddhist context within the popular imagination.

## Chapter 6

### DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES OF REINTERPRETATION IN THAILAND'S INTERNATIONAL MEDITATION CENTERS

Through their varied interactions and engagements with Thai Buddhism, international meditators create hybrid constructions of religiosity. Their interaction with Thai Buddhism constitutes new, hybrid forms of Buddhism that draw on both indigenous Buddhist ideas and postmodern religiosities that do not integrate the full Buddhist worldview. International tourists spur hybridity through their reactions and feedback to international meditation teachings. International meditators' ideas about meditation and the Buddhist tradition influence the way meditation teachings are offered and presented. International meditation center teachers often facilitate this mixing through creating adapted spaces and teachings, and showing an open attitude toward non-Buddhist participation. In this chapter I delineate the conditions and outcomes of hybridity in Thailand's international meditation centers. The conclusion points to what this research means for the future of hybrid religious forms.

The personalized hybrid religiosity of international meditators often merges Thai Buddhist practices, prominent discourses concerning meditation and Buddhism, and secular or non-Buddhist practices. However, there is not a shared worldview between the Thai and international meditators. As demonstrated below, international meditators receive adapted teachings and practices while the Thai meditators often receive what is considered standard teachings, which incorporate Thai Buddhist contexts. Both international meditation center teachers

in their adaptations and reinterpretations, and international meditators through their understandings based on popular discourses of Buddhism, work together to create these hybrid discourses and hybrid religiosities. These reinterpretations are areas of hybridity where flexibility and accommodation allow for varying levels of engagement with Thai Buddhism.

### **Reinterpretation and Adaptation**

In creating hybrid religiosities, reinterpretation and adaptation are necessary. Harrison connects adaptation to reinterpretation, “In Siam/Thailand, as elsewhere, adaptation is not simply a case of replication, but of reinvention and reinterpretation . . .” (Harrison 2010, 5). Reinterpretation and adaptation show a non-hegemonic model of change where local actors are not dominant but do have agency. This is seen in Thailand’s international meditation centers where teachers and students together create adaptations to Thai Buddhist meditation and retreat practices.

Some of the earliest Buddhist teachers to foreign audiences offer models of strategies of reinterpretation that continue today within Thailand’s international meditation centers. S.N. Goenka is a well-known example of a teacher who asserts that *vipassanā* meditation transcends the local through its universal applicability.<sup>213</sup> His strategy of teaching meditation is to use words that appear universal in nature rather than particularly Buddhist. When asked how he teaches

---

<sup>213</sup> For biographical information on S.N. Goenka see Chapter 3 in this dissertation.

meditation in India and the West, he responded that “[t]here is no difference in the actual teaching, but there is in the way of presentation. For example, I don't use the word ‘Buddhism’ which is commonly used for the teaching of the Buddha. Nor do I use the word ‘Buddhist’ for those who follow the teaching of Buddha” (Goenka 1998c, 175). He finds that if he used these words, people from different religious backgrounds would consider him to be religious and his retreats would not be well-attended. Because Goenka doesn't want to portray *vipassanā* meditation as a Buddhist practice, he uses the words Dhamma and Dhammist, which he believes appears more universal. He teaches *vipassanā* meditation as something that rises above all religions because he believes it has universal appeal and promotes secularism. These prominent discourses of secularism, universalism, and globalization propel adaptation and hybridity in Thailand's international meditation centers.

Another strategy of reinterpretation for non-native Buddhist audiences was employed by Sri Lankan Buddhist leader, Anagarika Dharmapāla. Kemper compares how Dharmapāla taught Sri Lankan and international audiences:

“To Sinhala audiences, he offered moral instruction and practical advice about handling money, table manners, and personal hygiene. For Western audiences, preaching in a way that resembled a Christian sermon made it an easily recognized social practice . . . nothing was lost, he thought, by sloughing off the repetitive and time-consuming quality of the traditional form. Westerners were not likely in any event to be interested in making merit. They could convert by taking the Three Refuges; they could participate if they liked; or they could come and go. The one thing non-Sinhala were certain to find engaging was meditation.” (Kemper 2005, 29).

Like Goenka, Dharmapāla argues that his reductive strategy does not affect the quality of the teachings received by non-Buddhists. Mixing Buddhist teachings

with other religious practices and a flexible attitude is common in Thailand's international meditation centers. Teachers allow and create spaces for non-Buddhists to mix meditative practices with their own secular and religious frameworks.

Scholars have found that as Buddhist teachings and movements globalize, specific strategies for reinterpretation need to be employed. Low observes about the growth of the Soka Gakkai<sup>214</sup> movement and its global prominence that “. . . this process of hermeneutical revisioning and remapping is part of a historical process of re-interpretation within tradition” (Low 2010, 28). Low argues that remapping and revisioning Buddhist concepts as well as decentering rituals from the historical and cultural specificity of its religious tradition serve to transcend the local in the midst of the effects of globalization (Low 2010, 28). In Thailand's international meditation centers the local or national is often discarded in favor of global and ‘universalizing’ discourses.

Strategies of reinterpretation for non-Buddhists are key processes involved with hybrid religiosity. McMahan finds that hybridity has played a large role in the popular idea of Buddhism in Western countries. He writes:

“The popular western picture of Buddhism is neither unambiguously ‘there’ in ancient Buddhist texts and lived traditions nor merely a fantasy of an educated elite population in the West, an image with no corresponding object. It is, rather, an actual new form of Buddhism that is the result of a process of modernization, westernization, reinterpretation, image-making, re-vitalization, and reform that has been taking place not only in the West but also in Asian countries for over a century” (McMahan 2008, 5).

---

<sup>214</sup> Soka Gakkai is a new Buddhist religious movement started in Japan with practitioners and centers throughout the world. See Seager (2006).

Reinterpretation is necessary as religions encounter modernity and connect with new communities and audiences globally. The discursive strategies that Thailand's international meditation center teachers employ reveal the inevitability of reinterpretation and the creation of new hybrid religious formations. Below I discuss the specific processes of reinterpretation within Thailand's international meditation centers and theorize more broadly about the creation of hybrid religious formations. International meditation center teachers play a large role in creating these processes of reinterpretation and hybridity. Before detailing these reinterpretations and their effects, I first describe the various social positions of Thailand's international meditation center teachers in order to foreground the various strategies they implement.

### **Thailand's International Meditation Center Teachers**

Lay, ordained, female, male, Thai and foreign—all of these characterize international meditation center teachers who share a role in the processes of reinterpretation. Nationality, gender, and religious status of teachers directly shape international meditators' experiences, mediating and providing structures through which international meditators encounter Thai Buddhism. Some meditators prefer the 'authentic' experience of a Thai monk teacher while others feel uncomfortable with the rituals surrounding a monastic and would prefer a more secular experience with a lay international teacher. International meditators encounter a variety of teachers from different social backgrounds when learning meditation in international meditation centers in Thailand. These teachers' roles

are significant as they shape the experience of international meditators, establish the flexibility necessary for hybrid engagements, and attempt to provide continuity with modern global Buddhist imaginaries.

Thai monk meditation teachers who cater to both Thai and international communities must differentiate their teaching depending on their students. Since these monks assume different roles when teaching separate groups, there is not a shared worldview that emerges from the intersection of Thai and international meditators. These Thai monk teachers acknowledge and accommodate for international, non-Buddhist meditators' religious and cultural backgrounds, constantly shifting teaching practices and languages while weaving between the worlds of Thai Buddhists and international meditators. This group therefore is most articulate about their strategies of reinterpretation. Because they also teach Thai meditators, they are more aware of the adaptations they facilitate for international students.

These Thai monk teachers who instruct both Thai and international meditators are usually abbots who have recently opened their temples for foreign guests. These teachers typically have no formal training in English but learn through their interactions with the first international meditators they host. Other temple abbots appoint one or two Thai monks to dedicate their time to international meditators. These monks are nearly fluent in English and are often younger than the monks who teach Thai meditators. Despite these cases, many Thai monk meditation teachers don't have enough fluency in English to be an international meditation center teacher.

Because of this lack of proficiency in English among Thai monastic meditation teachers, the increasing presence of international meditators has created opportunities for English-speaking lay teachers. This small group of meditation teachers consists of both Thai and foreign laity. The need for different skills, such as knowledge of English and a multicultural perspective, creates new social spaces and roles. International meditators respond differently to lay teachers who do not require practices such as bowing and chanting. Teacher and student can interact on a more familiar and informal level, especially if the lay teacher is also a non-Thai like the student.

Lay foreign teachers only instruct foreign meditators and have achieved their status through their meditation experience and authorization from their Thai monk teacher or other lay, foreign teachers. The smallest group of international meditation center teachers consists of foreign monastics. These teachers have a unique place, as they are able to teach with the authority of an ordained person and without a language barrier.

In a similar way alternative roles for female teachers are also created. Cook (2010) has observed this in her study of *mae chiis* in a Northern Thai meditation temple. She argues that with the rise of lay *vipassanā* meditation, a significant way *mae chiis* can embody the monastic ideal is through teaching meditation. International meditation centers follow this trend by creating roles for English-speaking Thai *mae chiis*, international female monastics and lay female meditation teachers. The rise in popularity of meditation practice and the



international meditation center is therefore opening new spaces and alternative forms of authority for women and laity within Buddhism.

Other roles for those interested in helping international meditators include volunteers who manage international group retreats. These roles exist for both monastic and laypeople, foreign and Thai and can include giving a dhamma talk of one's personal experiences, and offering interviews for those international meditators with questions about their practice. These different roles lead to various reinterpretations and open new spaces for a diversity of teachers and teachings. But regardless of their status each teacher faces similar issues of how and what to adapt. Even though many international meditation center teachers, especially those who are Thai monks, find it hard to envision the worldview of their international students, many of them have had enough interaction and feedback from this group in order to be aware of the need to decontextualize and reinterpret the teachings for this audience.

### **Meditation Reinterpreted**

International meditation center teachers in Thailand often argue that there is a need to present meditation in specific ways to international meditators. Many teachers find that they must secularize the practice for foreigners. Because of the location of many international meditation centers within Buddhist temples in a Buddhist country, there is a heightened atmosphere of religious practices that some international meditators find confusing and disconcerting. This is in contrast, of course, to Thai meditators. For Thai meditators the meditation center

exposes a religiosity where meditation is one part of a larger experience of living in a Buddhist temple that includes maintaining ascetic precepts, listening to dhamma talks by monks, chanting, and devotional activities. In contrast, for international meditators the processes of dialogue with their teachers create an intensification of meditation while deemphasizing and separating out ritual and devotional practices. Because of international meditation center teachers' assumptions about the religiosity of Thai and international meditators, we see again how a shared worldview does not emerge between the two groups. Many of the teachers I interviewed discussed how international meditators and Thai Buddhists for the most part approach meditation and Buddhism from different angles and how being a Thai Buddhist since birth compared with being non-Buddhist created differences on issues of faith, devotion, and generosity (discussed in detail below).

Meditation as taught by international meditation center teachers to international meditators becomes a hybrid of modern discourses and Thai Buddhist methods and retreat settings. These hybrid meditation teachings, however, are only applicable to international meditators. Thai meditators often do not notice that the practices and teachings are being adapted for their international counterparts. This is evidenced by my conversations with Thai meditators.<sup>215</sup> I

---

<sup>215</sup> For my fieldwork I was able to participate in both groups' activities, joining the chanting and dhamma talks of the Thai meditators and the English meditation instruction with the international meditators. Although I focused on discussions with international meditators, I was able to interact with Thai meditators as well. Interviews with Thai meditators and Thai international meditation center teachers were conducted in Thai while I used English with international meditators and

asked one Thai meditator at Wat Umong if she participated in an opening ceremony. She responded positively and asked about my experience. I told her that international meditators do not participate in an opening ceremony. This statement confused her, and I had to repeat the information. She assumed that international meditators would go through the same process as Thai meditators. Thai meditators are often happy to see international meditators and assume similar motivations or that foreign meditators have more discipline than Thais. Two Thai Buddhists at Wat Chom Tong, seeing my white clothing, a sign of my participation in a retreat, commented to me that they admire foreign meditators because they take meditation seriously. International meditators generally are regarded highly without much knowledge about the adaptations created for them.

Therefore international meditators encounter and engage to a limited extent with Thai Buddhists but this does not penetrate into the ways Thai Buddhists conduct their meditation retreats. This is because, through the establishment of lay meditation centers for Thai Buddhists, many meditation teachers have created a standard retreat format. The Young Buddhists Association of Thailand (YBAT), with a number of centers within Central Thailand, is an explicit example of this. Administrator Khun Tom discussed with me that YBAT's aim is to create a routine English-speaking program at their centers. In order to implement this, international teachers are encouraged to modify the standard Thai retreat format as they deem suitable.<sup>216</sup> As well some of the features

---

foreign international meditation center teachers.

<sup>216</sup> Interview conducted at YBAT Headquarters, Thonburi, on December 12<sup>th</sup>,  
263

of the retreat, such as strict silence, air-conditioned meditation halls, and non-vegetarian food can be adapted for foreigners.<sup>217</sup> Because, in most cases, Thai meditation retreats were established first, many of the reinterpretations for foreigners are adapted from this model.

In this context it is clear that intentional changes are made to teach and present meditation to a foreign audience. Therefore, dual processes are at work here, the international meditators' attitudes and feedback as well as the meditation teachers' adaptations and innovations for this audience. Through feedback and teaching international meditators for many years, international meditation center teachers are aware of international travelers' perceptions of meditation. They respond to international meditators' concerns by providing non-Buddhist, secular practices and spaces for long-term meditators to develop their practice.

The presentation of meditation teachings for international meditators does not offer Buddhist teachings to a large extent but adds secular, scientific, and psychological discourses to aid in understanding the purpose and benefits of meditation. For foreign non-Buddhists there are a number of key teachings that are offered. These Buddhist teachings are all related to developing their meditation practice. For example the five hindrances (ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, desire, and doubt) are a key teaching for overcoming problems during meditation. This is one of the only teachings presented at many

---

2010.

<sup>217</sup> International meditators often associated meditation retreats with natural environments, as stated in Chapter 4. Natural air flow, breezes, and vegetarian food create a more natural atmosphere for some international meditators.

of the international meditation centers. As part of the orientation at the outset of many retreats, teachers delineate the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.<sup>218</sup>

Teachers only discuss these concepts as they relate to meditation practice; they do not educate international meditators on the broader context or teaching of the Buddha from which they developed.

This type of presentation is necessary because international meditators often want to focus exclusively on meditation. International meditators question their idea of meditation as a universal philosophy when confronted with unfamiliar devotional practices within the temple surroundings. Therefore, discursive strategies of reinterpretation for international meditators are implemented in various modes at meditation retreats for foreigners in Thailand. The meditation practices that are divorced from Buddhist teachings allow spaces for new discourses to enter and create a hybrid construction consisting of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist applications. These strategies are employed through the construction of separate physical spaces for international meditators and specific reinterpretations for non-Buddhists.

### **Implementing Reinterpretations**

International meditation center teachers implement various discursive strategies of reinterpretations that are specific to each temple or retreat center environment. These strategies are employed through two different avenues, the

---

<sup>218</sup> When teaching this, international meditation center teachers discuss the four objects of mindfulness but do not bring in the context of this teaching from the Satipatthāna Sutta.

construction of physical spaces and practices of international meditators, adapted from the standard Thai Buddhist retreat format; and reinterpretations of teachings for a non-Buddhist audience. Both of these avenues are implemented because of the global, universal discourses of meditation (explored in Chapter 2), which create particular ideas among international meditators (explored in Chapter 5). These ideas and feedback from international meditators necessitate adaptations made in the physical environment, practices during the retreat, and the presentation of teachings.

#### *Reinterpretations of the Retreat Format*

In this section I demonstrate the reinterpretations from the Thai Buddhist retreat format, focusing on distinct practices and separate spaces of international meditators and Thai meditators. Although the majority of foreign participants as reflected by international meditation center statistics<sup>219</sup> and interviews with international meditation center teachers are Euro-American with little to no experience with Buddhism, there is diversity among international meditators. Some international meditators have lived in Thailand for many years and have deep knowledge of Thai Buddhism. As well Japanese, Chinese, Malaysian, Korean, Singaporean and other international meditators from Buddhist countries have knowledge of other types of Buddhism. Thai meditators are for the most part Buddhist; however, some Thai Christians partake in meditation retreats as well. Therefore it is impossible to capture the range of international meditators and

---

<sup>219</sup> For statistics see Appendix 2.

Thai meditators. But, the picture that I paint is one that international meditation center teachers use to characterize their students, which is based on a broad knowledge and in some cases decades of teaching both groups.

In Thailand's international meditation centers it is not only the teachings that are adapted for foreign meditators but oftentimes the physical space and practices of the meditation center are altered to accommodate this audience. In international meditation centers where both Thai and international meditators live together, the practices of orientation to the temple and the daily schedule demonstrate the contrasts between these two groups and highlight starkly the reinterpretations for the international group. Because of their non-familiarity with the culture and traditions of Thai Buddhism, English-speakers are treated as a distinct group by the meditation teachers and among themselves. I investigate English-speaking meditators' experiences when they are considered the 'ethnic' and how living within a Thai Buddhist meditation center and temple presents unfamiliar challenges to their cultural backgrounds.

Hybridity emerges from the addition and removal of practices from the typical schedule of Thai meditators to accommodate the international group. Within centers where international and Thai meditators are integrated, of course, the language is a major dividing factor as international meditation students are taught and instructed in English and Thai meditators in Thai. But other activities are adapted as well. Thai meditators report to different instructors at different times of the day, they attend different dhamma talks, different orientations and may have separate meditation areas. This is what I wrote in my fieldnotes from

my discussion on this topic with one of the foreign lay meditation teachers at Wat Chom Tong International Meditation Center:

Thai meditators at Wat Chom Tong meditate for only 3 or 4 hours a day and meet the monk teacher in a group. He heard one woman complain about being instructed to meditate for 25 minutes. These Thai Buddhists come to the temple to make merit and participate in the ritual activities. But this is adapted for the international meditators' sensibilities. They have the teacher available to them individually, whenever they need and for as long as they need. They are challenged to do intense meditation. The key is adaptation for the international meditators but the international meditation center teachers don't do anything before asking the abbot, Ajan Tong's, permission.

These adaptations are created as a result of international meditators' requests, international meditation center teachers' perceptions of student needs, and with the head of the international meditation center's permission. This allows for a retreat experience that in some cases is quite different from the standard Thai format. The international meditator orientation is adapted especially conspicuously at Wat Umong. Here international meditators are not asked to participate in any type of opening ceremony. Thai meditators need to prepare the flowers, candles, and incense necessary for this ritual but foreigners begin the practice without this formal ceremony. Phra Uttara, Vietnamese monk and one of the teachers of the foreign meditators, said the abbot has decided not to conduct the opening ceremony for foreigners in order to make it easier for them. He finds that the international meditators come to Wat Umong only to practice meditation and often do not care to participate in ceremonial and ritual activities. In my fieldnotes from my interview with Phra Uttara I wrote:

Phra Uttara and the Abbot of Wat Umong want to make it easy for foreigners. Thai people have the formal precept ceremonies and need the



incense, flowers and candle. But foreigners only want to practice meditation— that is why they come to Buddhism, not for the religion.

From my interview with the abbot of Wat Umong, I wrote:

Foreigners don't formally take precepts like Thais because they ask foreigners to follow the precepts on their own. It is not necessary to receive the precepts from a monk, just knowing how to follow is enough. The eight precepts are listed in the residence halls in English so foreigners can read this.

This reinterpretation serves to remove part of the Thai Buddhist practice and replace it with a do-it-yourself orientation. There is no formal reception of precepts so the international meditators must read and internalize the rules on their own without a ritual marking their entrance into a retreat and an ascetic lifestyle. Therefore the assumed preference of international meditators for practicing meditation without ritual creates a more secular retreat experience.

During their orientation to the temple, international meditators receive training for practices that are considered necessary at each temple. Sometimes this includes how to bow to a monk or Buddha statue or how to chant before the meal offering or during the opening ceremony. But sometimes this training is avoided entirely as the teacher feels 'religious' activities are unnecessary for the foreign mediator. International meditators don't participate in group activities with the Thai meditators, such as their chanting sessions, dhamma talks, and other ceremonies. This is partly due to the language barrier, but also the fact that over the years teachers have seen many English-speakers desiring a focus on meditation exclusively. This emphasis on meditation and flexibility allows possibilities for hybrid religiosities mixed with international meditators' cultural

backgrounds and expectations. Through these adaptations international meditators have the freedom to place meditation practices and temple lifestyles within their own cultural and religious frameworks.

A striking example of discursive strategies of reinterpretation is the daily practice at Wat Umong. Here Thai and Western meditators' schedules list the same morning and evening periods for group practice but the groups are led in separate meditation halls by different monk teachers. During the international group meditation period, the teacher, Phra Uttara, enters and bows to the Buddha statue. He then conducts a short chanting session and leads meditation. Here is what I wrote in my fieldnotes concerning Phra Uttara's perceptions of the international meditators during this session:

Phra Uttara has found that there is no major resistance to bowing or chanting. He doesn't instruct his students to bow to the Buddha statue. As he bows the international meditators can follow him if they wish. They can also bow to him, their teacher, if they want. Phra Uttara teaches that this has the effect of creating respect for the teacher and cultivating a flexible mind. Most like chanting because Pāli words are interesting. Some foreigners want to get a record of the chanting or copy the chanting book so they can keep it for themselves.

In the mornings Phra Uttara also teaches yoga. This is not typical procedure at meditation retreats led by Thai monks and is idiosyncratic to this temple. Phra Uttara leads some yoga poses learned from a former student. The point in mentioning this is that for international meditators there is a flexibility of practices. Yoga is an ambiguous activity to conduct within temple grounds, often frowned upon by conservative monks and laypeople. However, for many international meditation center teachers, yoga is seen to be especially important

for foreigners who are not used to sitting cross-legged on the floor. The Thai meditators, in contrast, during their group practice time, have a much longer chanting session, dhamma talk, and no yoga. This flexibility for international meditators allows space for them to mix their own cultural and religious backgrounds with their meditation practices and retreat experiences.

Thus some practices are added and others are adjusted for the international meditators. This is also evident in the comparison of the international meditation centers at Wat Chom Tong and Wat Rampoeng. Wat Chom Tong has a separate space for the international center, whereas at Wat Rampoeng the two groups are mixed within the same space. This causes different reinterpretations for English-speaking meditators. At Wat Chom Tong international female meditators must wear the *sabhai*, a white scarf that wraps around the chest, while in the temple areas, but when females return to the international meditation center area, they can remove it. A contrast to this flexibility can be seen at Wat Rampoeng. Here females must always wear the *sabhai* because there is no separate space without Thai meditators. In the presence of Thai meditators, English-speaking meditators must follow Thai practices with less flexibility.

The practice of daily meditation interviews also reveals the extent of adaptations for international meditators. At Wat Chom Tong one bows to a Buddha statue when entering the reporting room. If one does not understand why one must bow, this can be questioned and negotiated. In Wat Rampoeng, however, there is a mandatory process when entering and exiting the reporting room where one must bow to the Buddha statue and the abbot as the Thai

meditators do. In contrast the English-speaking lay teachers of Wat Chom Tong do not require the same level of respect and formality as an ordained Thai monk would. Thus when Thai and international meditators practice in the same area it is difficult to make accommodations. When international meditators have their own space, they have more freedom to determine which essential practices they can add to their own frameworks. Because the contexts and backgrounds of Buddhism and Buddhist teachings are not offered, there is more opportunity for international meditators to select the information they deem important and insert this into different contexts.

Within various centers, English-speaking meditators are able to chant with Thai monks, ask to speak with a Thai monk about meditation practice, listen to a dhamma talk in Thai, and attend any ritual or celebration that is occurring at the temple if they wish. However, it is not expected and sometimes not encouraged that they attend. For foreign meditators the expectation is that their main purpose in attending the retreat is meditation and other activities they may engage in may not be truly devotional but instead a way to avoid another hour of meditation. However, other English-speaking meditators make it clear that they want to meditate but don't want to do anything they deem 'religious.' Therefore international meditation center teachers find that there are different responses to temple activities including curiosity, disengagement, and disingenuousness. In contrast it is natural for Thai Buddhists to attend all temple functions. Many Thai meditators come to live at the temple to make merit through practicing meditation, but also through hearing the dhamma and participating in ritual

activities. The spaces created for international meditators are spaces of hybridity where Buddhist practices and a flexible attitude toward participating in temple activities mix. International meditators can create their own hybrid religiosity, which mixes meditation with varying levels of engagement with Thai Buddhism.

These spaces of hybridity can be created also because of the lack of familiarity with Buddhism on behalf of the international meditators. Many international meditators do not understand the practices occurring within the international meditation center. International meditators question the practices of Thai Buddhists and don't grasp the context and motivations for Thai Buddhist practices. The most obvious misunderstanding for foreign meditators is the idea of merit. The international visitors observe the stray, starving cats and dogs within the meditation center and wonder why they receive no food when the monks receive abundant amounts of food each morning. One international meditator at Wat Chom Tong, Han from Germany, commented to me that he didn't understand why the monks receive more food than they can eat while the dogs and cats in the alleys are not cared for. Caroline from Ireland took one of the new-born kittens back to a yoga studio in Chiangmai where she worked because she felt it would be better cared for there. For many Thai Buddhists giving to monks offers greater merit than giving to animals. This is because monks, unlike cats and dogs, are considered sources of merit on account of their observance of the monastic rules as delineated in the *Vinaya*.

Campbell finds similar circumstances concerning convert Canadian Buddhists in Toronto's Zen Buddhist Temple. This group felt that practices of

merit making were not a means of spiritual attainment. She writes, “Respondents aspired to be their own source of spiritual merit and the agents of their own spiritual growth and were less willing to rely upon external powers or authorities” (Campbell 2010, 198). Similar to international meditation center teachers’ perceptions of their students, international meditators often exhibit an individualistic, self-authoritative response to meditation retreats in Thailand. This creates a mixture of individualized, eclectic practices with newly learned meditation techniques.<sup>220</sup> Because the context of Thai Buddhist practices is not learned, international meditators use their own frameworks to insert the practice of meditation.

Besides self-authority, psychology also plays an important role in many international meditators’ frameworks for meditation, and international meditation center teachers’ reinterpretations reflect this. International meditation center teachers find that their students often perceive ‘insight’ as any kind of psychological transformation that allows one a sense of clarity in regard to one’s own life. Therefore insights are thought of as personally meaningful rather than as a demonstration of Buddhist truth. One of the foreign teachers from Wat Chom Tong related to me why he chooses to use psychology in his teaching. In my fieldnotes I wrote:

Psychological terms can be like a mini-dhamma that can lead to the bigger Dhamma. Using terms like anxiety, depression, anger, hatred, paranoia is helpful for Westerners to label their feelings so they can identify it, know they can deal with it, and think that it’s normal. Western psychology is a

---

<sup>220</sup> See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for examples of this kind of self-authoritative response to meditation.

useful translator and stepping stone to understand deeper Buddhist concepts.

Thai Buddhists, on the other hand, are usually taught that insight is an experience that illuminates the three universal characteristics of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* (impermanence, suffering, non-self), and is not a secular or pragmatic understanding of one's personal psychological processes. By allowing international meditators to have the ability to integrate psychology, they create hybrid spaces where Buddhist meditation practices can be integrated with secular frameworks. Through the international meditation center teachers' reinterpretations of Buddhist teachings for an international audience, hybrid religiosities are created that mix discourses of secularism, psychology, individualism, and self-authority.

### **Reinterpretations for Non-Buddhists**

In Thailand's international meditation centers specific Buddhist practices are removed or adapted by international meditation center teachers with the non-Buddhist in mind. Many of these teachers have experienced foreign meditators who encounter conflict when faced with the realities of Buddhism in Thailand. This section considers sites where a high number of non-Buddhist international meditators practice meditation. These sites include group retreats where foreign meditators do not practice together with Thai meditators, as well as smaller sites that have teachers who are known internationally.

In order to show the reticence of some international meditators to devotional practices, here is a quote from the Thai Visa Forum (2009) discussion titled “Help Me Choose Among 4 Centers for Meditation Retreat.” In answer to the question of which meditation retreat the discussion topic creator should attend, one commenter writes, “{Wat Rampoeng} also has a good reputation it seems. But seems a bit heavy on the Buddhism influence. Just seems a little funny that I have to bring 11 lotus flowers, etc., and circle around a Chedi 3 times and do all this chanting. Does that actually have any benefit?”<sup>221</sup> The author of the quote above wonders why he has to participate in more ‘Buddhist/religious’ activities; he wonders if these have any benefits, when presumably he is attending only for the practice of meditation and is a non-Buddhist. This kind of wariness toward Buddhist practices besides meditation is a consequence of the universal discourses of meditation within modern Buddhism.

In an effort to solve this problem, international meditation center teachers have developed strategies for dealing with the confusion and reticence of some international meditators who either identify with other religious traditions or are seeking a secular experience. During the course of my fieldwork I asked more than thirty meditation teachers about their strategies for accommodating and teaching meditation to those international meditators who are sensitive about religious participation. Indeed, Venerable Piyabhaso<sup>222</sup> former teacher of the

---

<sup>221</sup> See Thai Visa Forum Website: [www.thaivisa.com/forum/topic/241648-help-me-choose-among-4-centers-for-meditation-retreat/page\\_\\_st\\_\\_25](http://www.thaivisa.com/forum/topic/241648-help-me-choose-among-4-centers-for-meditation-retreat/page__st__25).

<sup>222</sup> Phra Piyabhaso Bhatsakorn, Wat Mahathat, June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010.



International Buddhist Meditation Center at Wat Mahathat, Bangkok, believes that there are two kinds of foreign meditators: those with no religion who are more open to participating in a variety of temple activities and those with a religious affiliation who have restrictions on their participation.

An important strategy to familiarize international meditators with the temple environment is to provide explanations. Ajan Buddhasak, of Wat Prathat Doi Suthep,<sup>223</sup> has led retreats for some foreign meditators who are resistant to activities such as prostrating to the Buddha and teacher and attending morning and evening periods of chanting because they believe these are not allowed in their religion. In these cases Ajan Buddhasak advises them not to be concerned about participating. He makes sure to explain the reasons for the rituals, but clarifies that they are not compulsory. But Phra Ajan Buddhasak finds that many people, after staying at the temple for some time and hearing the explanations for ritual activities, change their points of view and start to participate. He emphasizes that participation is a choice available for each person, and meditators can simply continue meditating if they do not wish to partake in other activities.

From my interview with Ajan Buddhasak I recorded the following fieldnotes:

Ajan Buddhasak has had some foreign meditators who told him that in their religion bowing to statues is not allowed. He responds by instructing them not to worry because Buddhism isn't about external but internal, it's not out but in. He explains that bowing is not religious but a kind of respect similar to what one would pay to one's father and mother. But if people don't want to, it doesn't matter because it's only ceremony, it's not necessary. He wants them to learn about Buddhist culture but if they don't want to it's up to them.

---

<sup>223</sup> Ajan Buddhasak, Wat Prathat Doi Suthep, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010.

Phra Ajan Suputh Kosalo<sup>224</sup> of Wat Mahathat, Section 5, has a similar strategy of explanation for foreign meditators. He told me what he has learned from his thirteen years teaching international meditators from Western countries, “if you know Westerners, then you know that they have to know ‘why’ before doing anything.” Because of this he provides justification for activities that could be considered religious such as receiving the eight precepts required of a meditator. Thus explanation and accommodation to foreign meditators are key components to resolving the tensions that arise from practicing meditation as a non-Buddhist.

Another commonly used strategy is to provide international meditators with a choice about their level of participation. At Section 5 of Wat Mahathat meditators are given the option to meditate for a day and then return to their own residences. Phra Ajan Suputh Kosalo estimates that for over 30 or 40 years foreigners have come to Section 5, to spend the day meditating, receiving instruction through a translator. But since the arrival of Ajan Suputh Kosalo in the late 1990s, foreigners have had two choices, they can practice for the day as in the past, or if they agree to follow the regulations, they can stay overnight at Section 5. These regulations include wearing white clothing, taking the eight precepts, paying respect to the Buddha statues and monks, and participating in chanting. These choices available for non-Buddhists remove any fear of conversion and

---

<sup>224</sup> Interview with Venerable Phra Suputh Kosalo (Ajan Suphat), Section 5, Wat Mahathat, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

allow the center to uphold the discourse that meditation is a non-religious practice for all.

Some international meditation center teachers are compelled to offer more flexible practices based on feedback and reactions from the international meditators themselves. Phra Bart used to have a ceremony giving the eight precepts to each participant at Wat Luang Por Sot, but some of the foreigners told him they were not Buddhist and did not want to follow these rules. Now foreign visitors are offered the choice to take the five or eight precepts. Another activity that causes tension for international meditators from other faiths is chanting. At the Dipabhavan Meditation Center on Koh Samui, it is emphasized that chanting is optional. The website states, “Some people may feel that ‘Buddhist’ chants conflict with their own religious beliefs. If so, you need not chant along, if it makes you uncomfortable.”<sup>225</sup> Thus there is sensitivity to those who practice another religion. These strategies are employed as a consequence of the discourses of a universal practice of meditation. In order to offer non-Buddhists a meditation retreat experience, these reinterpretations are necessary.

Because the practice has been made available to non-Buddhists in such a widespread way, spaces have been created for non-Buddhist ideas, both secular and from other religions. Indeed, at a number of retreats for English-speaking meditators taught by monks, practitioners do not bow to the Buddha statues<sup>226</sup> or monks. During interview sessions, foreign meditators sit across from monks on

---

<sup>225</sup> Quote taken from the Dipabhavan retreat website (no date): <http://dipabhavan.weebly.com/retreat-guidelines.html>.

<sup>226</sup> At some centers, Buddha statues are absent altogether.

the same level rather than below. This would seem strange to a Thai Buddhist who is accustomed to the process of bowing before and after speaking with a monk, sitting below him, and keeping the hands in a respectful *wai* position while listening. This flexibility for international meditators also creates a hybridized meditation retreat where international meditators experience the retreat in a Thai Buddhist environment but with informal, non-Buddhist regulations.

There are a few international meditation center teachers in Thailand who have thought deeply and written about teaching meditation to practitioners from other faiths. The late and well-respected scholar-monk, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, was one of these teachers who was able to adapt his message to a non-Thai audience. When discussing the Buddha's teachings with foreigners in 1986, he compared the dhamma to a strange and special medicine because it can be taken by anyone, regardless of religion, nationality, ethnic background, education, class, or language. Santikaro, the translator for Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, writes:

“In speaking to Western meditators, Achan Buddhadasa uses a straightforward, no-frills approach. He does not go into the cultural interests of traditional Thai Buddhists; instead, he prefers a scientific, rational, analytical attitude. And rather than limit the instruction to Buddhists, he emphasizes the universal, natural humanness of Anapanasati {mindfulness with breathing}” (Santikaro 2001a, xvi).

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu delivered these talks to foreigners at Wat Suan Mokkh in the late 80s and early 90s. Through the emphasis on *vipassanā* meditation as a method divorced from faith, Buddhism is explicitly contrasted with theistic religions.

When entering the meditation hall of Dipabhavan Meditation Center in Koh Samui, one can see large banners in Thai and English stating the three resolutions of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, “That all people strive to realize the heart of their own religions, that all people make mutual good understanding of essential principles among the religions, and that all people liberate themselves from the power of materialism.” What is most striking about the teachings of this retreat is how each talk, especially those from the tapes of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, discusses the universal nature of Buddhism. These talks all compare Buddhism with Christianity or contain references to how Buddhism coalesces with the other religions of mankind.<sup>227</sup> Thus the universal purpose and application of Buddhism is stressed in the dhamma talks for foreigners as each demonstrates that meditation and this retreat are intended for people of all religions.

Venerable Dhammananda Bhikkhuni<sup>228</sup> is another teacher who considers teaching Buddhism and Buddhist practice within a multi-faith environment. She uses Christian concepts to help her audience understand Buddhist ideas. For example, the recitation of the Triple Gem, “I take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma,

---

<sup>227</sup> Based on fieldwork at Dipabhavan Meditation Center, June 20<sup>th</sup>-June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>228</sup> My interview with Venerable Dhammananda Bhikkhuni of Wat Songdhammakalyani, took place on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Ven. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, formerly known as Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, is well-known in Thailand and abroad for her progressive stance on women and Buddhism. She was the first Theravāda *bhikkhuni* (fully-ordained nun) in Thailand, and her temple in Central Thailand, Wat Songdhammakalyani, is the first to train and create a group of female novices and monastics. Through this establishment, she has guided other Thai women through ordination in Sri Lanka, where she became a *bhikkhuni*. In my work, I am interested in Ven. Dhammanada Bhikkhuni as a meditation teacher and host to foreign visitors.

and Sangha,” can appear like a statement of conversion to international meditators. Because of this, Ven. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni notifies foreign visitors when the three refuges are being chanted and warns them that they may wish to refrain from repeating these Pāli words. She explains how to understand the three refuges in a Buddhist context by placing it within a Christian framework, “Very much like the Christians, when you go for your Sunday mass . . . it is the time that you are reminded that you are to follow the spirit of Christ . . . that is how we as Buddhists take Buddhahood into ourselves, follow the path and make it real” (Kabilsingh 2008, 84). Along with placing Buddhist practices into familiar terms of Christianity, this kind of sentiment allows non-Buddhist international meditators to understand experiences from meditation retreats within Christian frameworks.

In Ven. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni’s pamphlet *Meditation for Buddhists and Christians* (no date), and her book about meditation, *Training the Monkey Mind* (2008), she directs her teaching of meditation explicitly to a non-Buddhist audience. She begins by delineating the many different meditation techniques and objects of concentration, emphasizing that each person can choose which one is most suitable. This signals that Buddhism respects individual differences (Kabilsingh 2008, 9). Thus one can practice according to individual preference, even as a Christian. Instead of reciting the mantra ‘Buddha,’ she suggests substituting ‘breathing in’ and ‘breathing out’ for non-religious participants and ‘Jesus’ and ‘Christ’ for Christian participants. Here is what I have written in my fieldnotes from our conversation:

Ven. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni uses the same technique of mindfulness of breathing for foreigners and Thai but when she hosts groups of American university students she doesn't say anything about Buddhism, only explaining meditation as mental training. She tells Christians that they can concentrate on a cross or use a mantra of Jesus Christ because the outer form doesn't have to be Buddhist.

This modification of a meditation technique for non-Buddhists is not completely uncommon. A laywoman at Wat Pa Baan That, informs me that

“in practice, the late Luangpho Budh Thaniyo of Wat Pa Salawan, Korat {Nakhon Ratchasima}, used to teach his Christian students to chant by heart ‘Jesus’ while the Buddhists were taught to chant ‘Buddho’, in his meditation class. As a result, the Christians attain *samadhi* {concentration} as well as the Buddhists. Luangpho said should he have Muslim students he would teach them to chant ‘Allah’ and he’s sure they could get into *samadhi* as well.”<sup>229</sup>

In this way meditation is inserted into other religions and serves to enhance the possibility of hybrid religiosities.<sup>230</sup> These kinds of modifications make possible the creation of a hybrid religiosity.

In addition to being sensitive to religious identity and practice, meditation teachers are also aware of international meditators’ cultural backgrounds. I asked many teachers if they teach Thai and international meditators in different ways. Many responded that yes, there is a big difference between these two groups, but were quick to clarify that the dhamma is universal. These teachers argue that cultural differences create a need for different presentations of the teachings. At

---

<sup>229</sup> Email correspondence March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Note here that *samadhi*, as discussed in Chapter 2, is considered the universal practice applicable to all faiths. *Vipassanā* meditation, for some teachers, has more specifically Buddhist goals and is not as easy to adapt for people of other religions.

<sup>230</sup> Similar to the Dalai Lama as we saw in Chapter 2, these teachers refer to *samadhi* meditation as a universal practice, rather than *vipassanā*, which has more tradition-specific goals.

the Vimutti Dhamma Retreat in Mae Tang, Phra Ajan Nawi Piyadassi<sup>231</sup> stated that he cannot start by teaching foreigners about the Buddha because this group does not yet have belief or faith. So instead he starts with the teachings, or dhamma. He finds that Thai people have faith in the Buddha first and come to the dhamma later. In this way he observes that both groups reach the same results but from different starting points. Mae Chii Brigitte<sup>232</sup> similarly finds that foreigners have much conceptual knowledge from reading books about Buddhism but lack faith; this is the opposite of Thai Buddhists.<sup>233</sup> Thus in addition to external practices that differ for foreign practitioners, their status as non-Buddhist and non-Thai leads teachers to establish different didactic approaches.

---

<sup>231</sup> Ajan Nawi Piyadassi, Wat Tam Dauy Don, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>232</sup> Mae Chii Brigitte, Wat Prayong Gittivararam, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>233</sup> This bifurcation between the faith of native Buddhists and the questioning of non-native Buddhists was also noted by Moran (2004) in his study of Western travelers interested in Tibetan Buddhism in Kathmandu, Nepal.



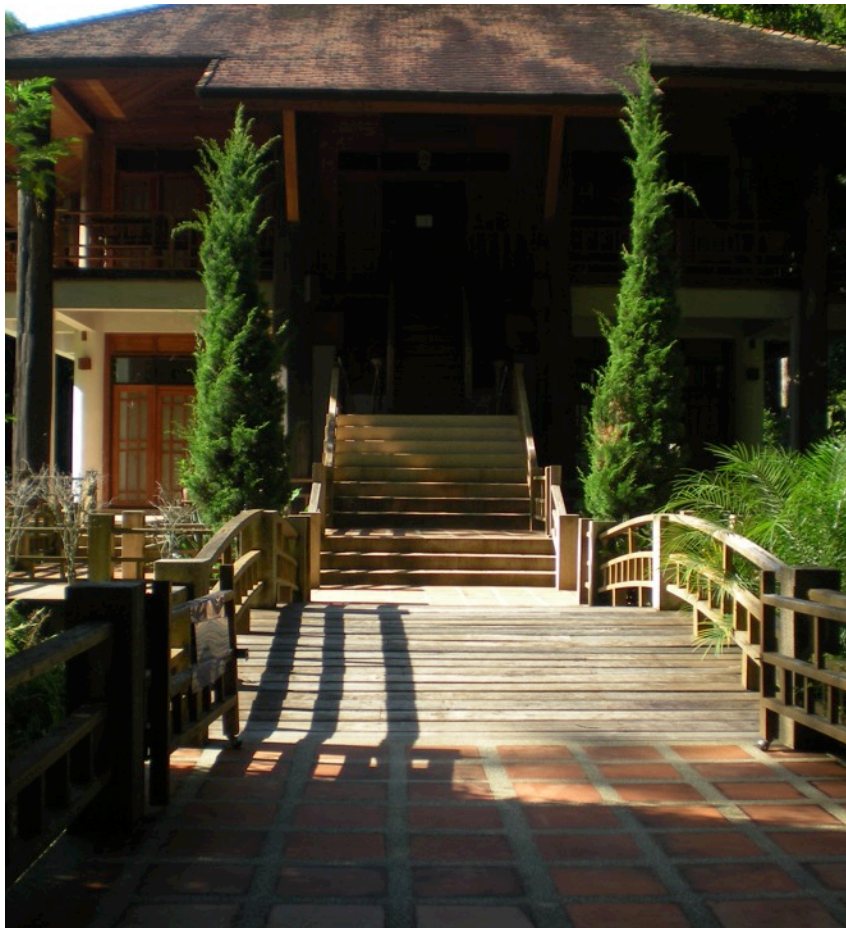


Figure 8. Bridge to Dhamma Hall, Vimutti Dhamma Retreat, Mae Tang, Thailand

Some teachers at international meditation centers intentionally present meditation in a culturally familiar way to foreign meditators. These teachers introduce a hybridized form of meditation retreat that mixes recognizable secular discourses with Buddhist meditation practices. Phra Bart of Wat Luang Por Sot<sup>234</sup> finds the best way to communicate Buddhism to foreigners who are non-Buddhists is to teach it as a science. He holds the view that many people from Western countries have given up on Christianity and replaced it with science. Scientific teachings, he asserts, have the benefit of being recognizable and

---

<sup>234</sup> Interview with Phra Bart, Wat Luang Por Sot, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

familiar to the international meditators. He teaches aspects of Buddhism to those who are interested and recommends attending evening chanting for a cultural or 'touristy' experience, but when he teaches meditation, he focuses on its compatibility with a scientific worldview. This scientific presentation serves to assuage international meditators from other religions that meditation is a secular enterprise. This allows international meditators to place meditation practice within a secular framework useful for relaxation, therapeutic healing, and as an antidote to hectic modern lifestyles.

International meditation center teachers are familiar with the problems encountered by non-Buddhist foreign meditators and are used to compromising after many years of teaching. At some centers the international meditators are able to keep fewer precepts but still live in the temple, and at others more ceremonial activities such as chanting are explicitly optional. The motto is to 'do as one feels comfortable.' In this way, teachers make sure to emphasize that there is no pressure to participate in temple activities, and thus maintain that meditation is a practice available to all faiths and backgrounds. International meditators who identify with other religions therefore are free to mix their own beliefs and practices with Thai Buddhist meditation teachings.

## **Conclusion**

Sanger (1988) studies how barong dances in Bali have been adapted for tourism. She finds that tourist reactions to the shows have caused adaptations to its presentation in order to appeal to the audience's tastes. Through feedback from

tourists, barong dances became shorter, more entertaining sequences were added, females were asked to play the female roles, and sections unpleasant to tourists, such as eating live chickens, were removed from the performance. But Sanger finds that these changes are not seen as affecting the tradition or authenticity of the dance. Balinese justify this in a number of ways including that the barong costume is used without desecration and the show is performed respectfully. Therefore this tradition has been modified by the addition of tourism but the adaptation has occurred in ways that Balinese feel do not affect the integrity of the tradition.

This can be compared with the reinterpretations for international meditators throughout Thailand. Meditation teachings and the experience of living in a temple are adapted for foreign meditators; however, the teaching and the space of the temple are still respected. International meditation center teachers feel that the changes they make for international meditators do not impinge on the regulations of temple living or the ways meditation is practiced. These teachers argue that there is no loss from these reinterpretations as they serve to spread meditation throughout the world. International meditators return to their home countries—some discussing their experiences with friends, others joining local meditation centers, and others forming long-term connections to their teachers in Thailand. Members of the latter group often return to Thailand and even sponsor their teacher's meditation teaching tour within their home country. Each foreign meditator who engages with Thai Buddhism by participating in a meditation

retreat in Thailand contributes to the globalization of meditation, as well as its reinterpretation.

It is clear that reinterpretation and hybridity are inevitable within sites of encounter between international tourists and locals. Adams's study of commoditized ethnic art objects in upland Sulawesi demonstrates that indigenous art can transform dramatically and create new hybridized forms that are produced through intercultural dialogue (Adams 2009, 81). Within Thailand's international meditation centers, intercultural dialogue and discourses of modern Buddhism act as a frame for continued reinterpretation and negotiation. Through these reinterpretations non-Buddhists are able to experience meditation and create a proliferation of hybrid religious formations.

Postmodern religions exhibit a propensity for hybridity. These traditions have been seen as impure and merely responses to capitalism and alienation (Vasquez & Marquardt 2003, 31). Instead of this critique, international meditation centers can be seen to represent the prevalence of hybridity in postmodern religiosity that is produced through cosmopolitan practices such as tourism. In this context tourists search for the 'exotic' and 'authentic' and in the process blur the purifying practices of modernity (Latour 1993). In this way international meditation centers in Thailand exemplify how hybridity can help to understand the experimentation involved in modern, lived religion including sampling religious practices and mixing the religious and secular. Meditation is added, combined and placed within the framework of each international meditator. This is not done only at the whim of these international visitors to Thailand, but is

encouraged by international meditation center teachers as well as the larger global Buddhist culture.

Combining Buddhist meditation practice with other religious and non-religious practices illuminates the interstices of religion and modernity, where religious identity and conversion are not relevant scholarly categories. For international meditators only meditation is added, but nothing is taken away. In this way conversion is not an applicable term in this context. For the duration of a meditation retreat, international meditators are asked to take on ascetic practices and conduct the meditation practice as instructed. However, international meditators are not asked to give up any beliefs or practices that might be in conflict with the traditional goals of meditation. This allows for elements of the retreat experience and meditation practice to be incorporated into one's own cultural matrix. Thus much of the Buddhist tradition is left out and none of the international meditators religio-cultural frameworks are challenged.

Therefore the hybrid religious formations that result point to how processes of decontextualization and appropriation create multiple and fluid religious and secular practices within the frame of globalization. McMahan writes about how processes of disembedding Buddhism from traditional social networks and insertion into new discourses and contexts “multiplies the circumstances in which Buddhism must develop adaptations and strategies of legitimation. This in turn tends to spawn new interpretations, new practices, and new hybrids . . .” (McMahan 2008, 256). I have described how engagements with meditation are informed by conjunctures of science, psychology, modern Buddhism, and

Buddhist leaders' openness to incorporating meditation into other religious frameworks. These new mixtures created within Thailand's international meditation centers demonstrate how meditation has become a site of selective appropriation.

The removal of Thai Buddhist practices creates spaces for international meditators to insert meditation practice into the contexts they deem useful. And the insertion of non-Buddhist teachings and secular practices encourages international meditators to engage their cultural and religious backgrounds and beliefs along with meditation. Therefore Thailand's international meditation centers demonstrate the nature of hybrid religious forms, which are constituted by dynamic and individualized combinations. During their interactions, international meditators and their teachers create possibilities of hybrid religious formations through the discourses of modernity that depict meditation as a universal practice for all.

## Chapter 7

### CONCLUSION

In this final chapter I summarize my conclusions, provide implications for future research, and demonstrate how this material relates to broader inquiries within the study of religion. Travel is one way modern people engage with religion. Buddhism specifically has captured the imagination of tourists interested in Asia. This has led to new ways of engaging with Buddhist teachings and of presenting and adapting the tradition for non-Buddhists. Social discourses about Buddhism and meditation for non-Buddhists reveal a process of adaptation, flexibility, reinterpretation, and finally, hybridity. Because of popular ideas about meditation beginning with modern Buddhist Orientalist writing and continuing through promotional materials for international meditators, reinterpretations are created in international meditation centers. For this study, it is important to point out that I gathered the material through ethnography. Therefore, this study does not deal only with literature and scholarship, but with people on the ground. Interpersonal engagement through ethnographic fieldwork enabled me to gain a deeper level of understanding concerning the implementation of reinterpretation strategies and the hybrid religious formations that result.

Throughout the course of this dissertation I have contextualized historically the modern phenomenon of international meditation centers in Thailand. I have shown how Orientalist and modern Buddhist discourses affect the ways meditation is promoted and presented to international meditators. Within the intercultural exchange between teachers at international meditation centers

and their international students, meditation is treated as a non-Buddhist practice devoid of devotional, ethical, social, or cosmological context. At the same time as the Buddhist context is stripped away new opportunities are opened for non-Thais and Thai laity to occupy roles previously reserved only for monastics.

International meditation center teachers apply strategies of reinterpretation that resonate with cultural understandings of international meditators employing discourses of science, psychology, and interreligious dialogue.

International meditators have a wide spectrum of goals and motivations for entering retreats that draw from modern Buddhist discourses. This diversity of motivations for practice demonstrates the routes by which hybrid forms are created. I have shown that these routes occur through both secular connections of meditation with therapy and health, and religious ideals that meditation can help one gain more faith in one's theistic tradition. Tourism also plays a significant role, with its romantic discourses of escape and the experience of an exotic culture. According to each meditator's goals, they selectively appropriate aspects of the meditation retreat and add this to their cultural frameworks. Within this process of exchange, translation of Buddhist practices for international meditators and appropriation of meditation within non-Buddhist contexts are significant features.

### **Role of Translation and Appropriation**

I have stated throughout this dissertation that within Thailand's international meditation centers, international meditation center teachers



reinterpret meditation teaching and practices for their students. This can also be characterized as performing a kind of translation. Processes of reinterpretation and translation occur within dialogue between international meditation center teachers and their students so that teachers learn how to make *vipassanā* meditation within a retreat setting comprehensible to international visitors. This translation is not only from Thai to English, but from the Thai Buddhist cultural idiom into a Western, secular, psychological framework. This translation is most notable upon reflecting that there are hardly any Thai Buddhist terms that international meditation center teachers use. Most meditation terms are translated into the cultural idiom of the international meditators. In rare cases students may be required to greet their teacher using the Thai greeting ‘*sawatdii*,’ however, no Thai Buddhist terms remain within the international meditation teaching sessions. International meditation center teachers often overcome the need for Buddhist terms by translating Buddhist concepts into a new cultural idiom that is different from the way meditation is taught to Thai meditators. This translation into a new cultural idiom becomes a way of claiming modernity and universalism. Translation, for international meditation center teachers, entails apprehending difference at a cultural level.

McMahan points out that historically Buddhist traditions “selectively and creatively re-present elements of Buddhism using the local vernacular, sometimes diluting it with local custom, accommodating it to local dialects, adapting it to local practices” (McMahan 2008, 262). My study therefore investigates one trajectory of this translation process within the globalization of Buddhism.

International meditation center teachers do not consider their translation practices to create significant difference because Buddhist notions of insight knowledge are thought to subsume all cultural distinctions. Buddhist teachers deem the experience of insight to be extra-linguistic and beyond translation as *vipassanā* meditation alone is thought to guide the student to the experience of reality directly. However, these reinterpretation strategies uncover concerns beyond the effects of cultural translation. International meditators' engagements with *vipassanā* meditation within Thailand's international meditation centers reveal selective patterns of appropriation, concentrating on a connection with nature, therapy, well-being, and an enhancement of one's theistic faith. These different appropriations result from the diverse non-Buddhist frameworks international meditators bring to their *vipassanā* practices. This interaction produces a number of alternative appropriations of *vipassanā* meditation, illustrating that religions do not travel as whole entities but partial elements that resonate with different cultures and are appropriated over time. This also reveals that translation and reinterpretation are factors creating hybridity.

### **Modern Religious Identities and Hybridity Revisited**

This dissertation has considered religious encounters and dialogues. I have been especially interested in the formations of hybrid religiosities within the context of global flows of meditation and the ways discourses about the practice are exchanged and disseminated. International meditators create personalized hybrid religious formations that mix meditative practices and temple living

experiences with their secular worldview or non-Buddhist religious affiliation. Meditation as taught by international meditation center teachers to international meditators becomes a hybrid of modern discourses of psychology, science, and universalism mixed with Thai Buddhist environments.

When international travelers engage with Thai Buddhism in a postmodern way multiple forms of religiosity emerge that range from secular to monastic. Indigenous Buddhist practices, appropriated in a modern context, reveal a hybrid process drawing on global ‘universalizing’ discourses of the traditional and the popular understandings of meditation. Within the international meditation centers of Thailand, therapy, tourism, religious and non-religious beliefs, New Age spirituality, and processes of deritualization are mixed with Thai Buddhist meditative practices. These discourses have the effect of reinterpretation and adaptation in Thailand’s international meditation centers. International meditators are for the most part, seekers on journeys to learn about themselves and the world, participating in meditation retreats through their own religious and cultural frameworks.

An important consideration within these encounters is religious identity. Postcolonial and postmodern discourses exhibit a heightened awareness of religious identity, which is part of the construction of cultural hybridity. Because of the widespread claim that meditation is a practice for all, Buddhism is especially ripe for creating hybrid religiosities and identities. Along with the discourses of meditation, Buddhism’s attitude toward other religions is an important factor in producing hybrids. Jayatilleke finds that this attitude “has from

its very inception been one of critical tolerance. But what is significant is that it {Buddhism} was able to combine a missionary zeal with this tolerant outlook.” (Jayatilleke 1975, 2). Therefore Buddhism maintains a missionizing project while promoting an inclusive attitude toward other religions. Meditation has become a marker of Buddhism’s inclusive tolerance through which this practice can be divorced from the tradition and appropriated into non-Buddhist contexts. It is this process that makes Buddhism particularly amenable for appropriation by non-Buddhists. Wilson finds that “Buddhism as a religious tradition is open to outsiders and can be partially or selectively participated in without full adherence or conversion” (Wilson 2009, 188). This is because Buddhism is presented as focusing on practice rather than doctrine, accessibility instead of adherence, and experience over devotion. International meditation centers draw on these discourses in their promotional materials and presentation of teachings.

Buddhist missionaries have tended to be less concerned with gaining adherents from other religions—which both opens the tradition to practitioners of other religious affiliations as well as gives “new meaning to the process of missionization and conversion” (Learman 2005, 10). As this study has shown, in the certain contexts, conversion and religious identity are not relevant categories. Instead hybridity emerges as a more significant term. Tweed finds that Buddhism lends itself to hybrid identities. In his essay on Buddhism and religious identity, Tweed (1999) notes that, historically, “most Western scholars have regarded religious identity as singular and fixed, and more or less straightforward. Furthermore, even while acknowledging and exploring the difficulties of defining

‘who is’ and ‘who is not’, many discussions of religious identity focus on only two categories, the adherent and the non-adherent” (Tweed 1999, 71). This way of categorizing ignores the hybridity that is present in all religious traditions, as pristine beginnings or essences are usually difficult—if not impossible—to locate (Tweed 1999, 72–3). My study of international meditators demonstrates that hybridity is both an inevitable outcome of cultural exchange and a necessary analytical tool for investigating postmodern and globalizing forms of religion.

In this dissertation I have discussed selective appropriation and engagement. It is this selectivity that allows for hybridity. Zehner discusses Thai evangelical Christian churches and shows how hybrid appropriations enable these communities to adapt to the local (Zehner 2005, 586). Selective hybridity attempts to maintain the translocality of the evangelical movement that chooses which terms and practices are negotiable and which are not. In the context of Buddhist meditation, as we have seen, the practice has become so disembodied from the tradition that, for the most part, only hybrid teachings and practices remain. These selective appropriations open spaces of participation that resonate with the modern fascination with the self.

### **Practices of the Self**

Giddens (1990) and Taylor (1989) argue that a key aspect to the creation of modernity is the increasingly reflexive nature of the self. Giddens defines the reflexivity of modernity as “directly involved with the continual generating of systematic self-knowledge” (Giddens 1990, 45) and “consists in the fact that

social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those practices, thus constitutively altering their character” (Giddens 1990, 38). The self is able to question society and one’s identity through awareness of other worldviews and cultures within a plurality of possibilities. Because of the recognition of other options, attention turns to one’s own values, identity, and biography, and creates greater agency in defining and constructing one’s own religiosity. Reflexivity also allows an inner awareness of oneself and increases the importance of reflection on one’s own experiences and self-exploration (Taylor 1989, 211). Taylor writes “the growth of forms of inwardness” is “correlative of the increasing centrality of reflexivity in spiritual life” (Taylor 1989, 186). This reflexivity is part of the modern Western understanding of the self that focuses on the interior, autonomous self. This idea of the sovereign self, that the interior is ultimately more significant than the exterior, is in contrast to what has been called the ‘technologies’ or ‘practices of the self.’

Practices of the self refer to bodily actions and performances, which can be traced to early Greco-Roman philosophy. These practices are intended to create a change in the behavior and character of those who enact them. External practices working on the body make one fit for spiritual development and eventually transformation into the state of ethical perfection or happiness desired. Foucault delineates how both ancient philosophy and Christian asceticism were preoccupied with the constant practice of the care of oneself (Foucault 1988, 21). This care was manifested in constant social practices, attention to the body and

modes of behavior that required reflection and discussion (Foucault 1976, 45). Foucault traces this history in order to understand how care of the self has been obscured by the idea of knowing oneself. He finds that because the modern West respects external law as the basis for morality, in this cultural context, care and respect for the self have become less important (Foucault 1988, 22). However, religious movements such as the modern piety movement in Islam have revitalized the practice of caring for the self.

Scholars Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2006)<sup>235</sup> have studied the constitution of the self in Islamic contexts. Mahmood's study of the female mosque movement in Cairo focuses on how the bodily performance of virtue both creates and expresses desired traits such as modesty. For this, one performs acts on oneself in order to make oneself an ethical subject (Mahmood 2005, 30). Ethical practices then shape the subject through a range of bodily and religious practices within everyday life. For example, Mahmood discusses informants who want to cultivate the quality of shyness. They do this by bodily acts such as wearing the veil and conducting themselves modestly in order to create an internal tendency toward shyness (Mahmood 2005, 158). In this way exteriority produces desired habits of interiority of a pious self.

Hirschkind investigates the ways Muslims in Cairo use tape recordings of sermons to “offer a portable, self-administered technology of moral health and Islamic virtue, one easily adapted to the rhythms, movements, and social contexts characteristic of contemporary forms of work and leisure” (Hirschkind 2006, 73).

---

<sup>235</sup> Following Foucault (1978; 1988).

In this way listening to the cassettes helps to create the modern virtuous subject and ethical self-improvement. For Hirschkind, the senses help to cultivate the self, as the act of listening becomes a ritual that leads to religious development. The sermons represent a ‘technology of the self’ through which individuals work on their selves to attain an ethical ideal (Hirschkind 2006, 39). This creation of the ethical self is acquired not through the rational mind but through personal experience (Hirschkind 2006, 175).

These examples within the Islamic revival and piety movement resemble the lay *vipassanā* movement that reveals a return to the self in response to the alienating experience of modernity. However, in Theravāda there is an apparent contradiction between transcending of the self and the quest for *nibbāna* motivated by the self. Yet the self must be examined and reflected upon in *vipassanā* meditation in order to understand what habits and tendencies need to be reshaped. As one progresses along the path to *nibbāna* one creates a self that aligns with Buddhist ascetic and ethical ideals.

Asad is concerned with the practices of the self as they relate to Christian monastic disciplines. He describes how religious discourses construct religious selves, and particular to Christian monasticism, how an obedient will is formed through guiding virtuous desires (Asad 1993, 125). The monastic program of disciplinary practices is aimed at reorganizing desire and humility toward obedience to God (Asad 1993, 134). The practices of the self in which monks engage, such as manual labor and disciplinary techniques, become part of an external training of the self that creates a desire for obedience.



Within Buddhist studies, Collins (2012) has begun to make comparisons between Pāli practices of the self with those of Greco-Romans and Christian monastics. In both cases practices of the self embody particular modes of being wherein these embodied practices create a change in one's existential and social status. Cook has recently examined the ways the self is made meaningful for modern Thai monastics and how their subjectivity is formed through religious experience (Cook 2010, 7). These 'technologies of the self' demonstrate how meditators remake themselves in ways consistent with their religious doctrines. In this way practitioners are meant to relate their meditation experiences with Buddhist concepts of non-self, impermanence, and suffering. The point then of *vipassanā* is to recognize Buddhist doctrines (Cook 2010, 9).

Cook investigates the ultimate aims of meditation, which is traditionally reserved for monastic renouncers. However, within the modern context, laity are taught to strive for the same goal of *nibbāna*, even if they will return to the householder's life at the conclusion of a retreat. Thai lay meditators do not always have a thorough understanding of the Buddhist truths *vipassanā* meditation is meant to reveal. However, there is still a distinction between international meditators and Thai meditators, because the former usually have at minimum a social and cultural frame of reference for *vipassanā* meditation within the context of Buddhism. Therefore the self is expressed through the performance of meditation within the structures of a particular tradition. Thai monastics and Buddhist laity strive for tradition-specific goals, an act which conforms to Buddhist cosmology, ethics, and social dimensions.

This is in contrast to international meditators, who even though practicing in a Buddhist context, are not striving for tradition-specific goals, and operate within the modern Western understanding of the self. A tradition-specific subjectivity is not formed among international meditators because they are not familiar with the structures of the Buddhist tradition. In this way their subjectivity is formed through the knowledge of the practice but also within other religious or secular frameworks. Certainly some foreign meditators become deeply informed by meditation and Buddhist truths—however, because of the commodification and modern Buddhist discourses that divorce meditation from its Buddhist framework, many are experimenting and sampling the practice as a new way to ‘discover’ the self. As stated in Chapter 3, the distinction between ‘knowing’ oneself and ‘finding’ oneself is difficult to transmit to international meditators who are steeped in psychological and New Age discourses of discovering one’s true self. In this way international meditators and their teachers mutually understand a self that is created internally, without external influence. Instead of this understanding, Thai Buddhists participate in meditation retreats and all of its ritualized behaviors of silence and ascetic practices, as an external way to ‘know’ oneself. By understanding one’s particular exterior qualities, tendencies, and habits, one can overcome interior defilements and aid in cultivating the direct experience of reality.

Michal Pagis relates this increased interest in the modern Western understanding of the self to the popularity of *vipassanā* meditation. She notes with some irony:

“In its {*vipassanā* meditation} modern manifestation, people who have little to do with Buddhism who do not call themselves Buddhists go to silent meditation retreats where they practice renunciation and embodied introspection, entering a process meant to lead to the de-stabilization of the experience of a permanent, stable self” (Pagis 2008, vi).

Therefore, meditation practices resonate with the increased importance of the interior life and personal experience in modernity in contrast to practices of the self apparent in religious revival movements. International meditators’ meditation practices are directed more toward other religious or secular goals, rather than tradition-specific Buddhist goals while exhibiting a modern Western understanding of the self.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation has argued that it is important for religious studies scholars to investigate hybrid religious formations in modernity. These formations characterize the postmodern appropriation of a multiplicity of elements from various traditions. Analyzing processes of decontextualization, appropriation, and intercultural dialogue are important features for understanding religion in modernity.

In order to contextualize the intercultural exchange within Thailand’s international meditation centers, this dissertation first explored Orientalist interpretations of Buddhism and the historical practice and scholarly category of modern Buddhism. I demonstrated that Romantic Orientalism, discourses of science, and a preference for Buddhist origins are trajectories, which are manifested anew by international travelers who engage with Thai Buddhism.

Postmodern conjunctures of Buddhist meditation portray the decontextualization of the practice using psychology and empirical scientific studies to verify the practice's benefits. Appropriations of the practice into other religious and secular frameworks convey the proliferation of hybrid possibilities in Thailand's international meditation centers.

The context of Theravāda meditation and the recent rise of lay meditation in Burma and Thailand provided background information for the reinterpretations seen in Thailand's international meditation centers. Knowledge of the ways *vipassanā* was traditionally practiced and is currently understood within Thai Buddhist contexts is crucial to understanding the ways international meditators differ from their Thai counterparts. The field of meditative engagement for international meditators offered readers a picture of the sites and meditation methods most common to English-speakers interested in participating in a meditation retreat.

Promotional material for international meditation retreats— meditation guidebooks, TAT booklets, and international meditation center brochures— reveals similar Romantic Orientalist and modern Buddhist discourses. This commodification of meditation draws from Western cultural imaginations of Buddhism as 'exotic' and 'ancient.' These publications also depict meditation as modern and familiar, expressing that this practice can be molded to fit and create the desires of international tourists.

International meditators' motivations and goals resonate with these materials but are much more complex. Portraits of international meditators'

experiences expose the diverse avenues through which they come to enter a meditation retreat. A desire for escape and to ‘find oneself’ in nature is a prominent theme also resonating with Romantic Orientalism. Seeking therapy and well-being resonates with modern Buddhist discourses of meditation’s connection to science and positive mental health. At the same time there are long-term international meditators who have become teachers and volunteers, illustrating the social spaces that have been created in order to accommodate this new audience.

Reinterpretations are necessary within Thailand’s international meditation centers. In many centers, international meditators either constitute a separate group or participate in a separate retreat altogether from Thai Buddhists. This demonstrates the extent to which the Thai Buddhist retreat model has been adapted for international visitors. International meditation center teachers have created a number of strategies for teaching meditation to non-Buddhists including sensitivity to participants of other religions. Because international meditators arrive in retreats with models of hybrid religious formations that permeate global Buddhism through memoirs, Asian Buddhist teachers’ writings, and the *vipassanā* meditation movement in North America, these reinterpretations are essential.

I have delineated the conditions and outcomes of hybridity in Thailand’s international meditation centers. I contextualized contemporary Buddhist practices within historical genealogies of Orientalism and modern Buddhism. These modern interpretations and presentations of Buddhism to non-Buddhist audiences have had lasting effects and have created the need for adaptation and reinterpretation of meditation teachings. This has led to the creation of hybrid

religious formations so that international meditators mix the practice of meditation with their own secular and other religious frameworks.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, Kathleen. 2009. "Indonesian Souvenirs as Micro-Monuments to Globalization and Modernity: Hybridization, Deterritorialization and Commodification." In *Tourism in Southeast Asia: Challenges and New Directions*, eds. Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King & Michael Parnwell, 69-82. Copenhagen, Denmark: NIAS Press.
- Alabaster, Henry. 1971. *The Wheel of the Law, Buddhism*. Taipei, Taiwan: Ch'eng-Wen Publishing.
- Almond, Philip. 1988. *The British Discovery of Buddhism*. Cambridge, MA & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2008. *Satipatthana: The Direct Path to Realization*. Birmingham, UK: Windhorse.
- Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities*. Revised edition. London & New York: Verso.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Arnold, Edwin. 1879. *The Light of Asia*. London: Trubner & Co., Ludgate Hill.
- Asad, Talal. 1996. "Comments on Conversion." In *Conversion to Modernities: the Globalization of Christianity*, ed. Peter Van der Veer, 263-274. New York: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin. 2000. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London & New York: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995. "General Introduction." In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, 1-6. London & New York: Routledge.
- Azurra. 2007. "My Suan Mokkh Experience." Travel Pod Website. [http://www.travelpod.com/travel-blog-entries/azurra/se\\_asia\\_2007/1194878220/tpod.html](http://www.travelpod.com/travel-blog-entries/azurra/se_asia_2007/1194878220/tpod.html). Accessed 5/20/2011.

- Bangkok Post, no author. 2009. "Meditation hub planned for Thailand." <http://www.bangkokpost.com/business/tourism/24718/meditation-hub-planned> Published: 29/09/2009 at 12:00 AM. Accessed 5/1/2011.
- Baltruschat, Dieter. 2007. "Meditation Retreats in Southeast Asia." Katharina Titkemeyer, transl. [http://www.retreatinfos.de/Download/Retreats\\_in\\_Asia\\_Oct07.pdf](http://www.retreatinfos.de/Download/Retreats_in_Asia_Oct07.pdf). Accessed 5/1/2011.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1998. *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. London & Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Baumann, Martin. 1995. "Creating a European Path to Nirvana: Historical and Contemporary Developments of Buddhism in Europe." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 10 (1): 55-70.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. "Culture Contact and Valuation: Early German Buddhists and the Creation of a 'Buddhism in Protestant Shape.'" *Numen* 44: 270-294.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. "Global Buddhism: Developmental Periods, Regional Histories, and a New Analytical Perspective." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 2: 1-43.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2012. "Modernist Interpretations of Buddhism in Europe." In *Buddhism in the Modern World*, ed. David McMahan, 113-136. New York: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. "Protective Amulets and Awareness Techniques, or How to Make Sense of Buddhism in the West." In *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Martin Baumann & Charles S. Prebish, 51-65. Berkeley, CA & London: University of California Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. "The Transplantation of Buddhism to Germany: Processive Modes and Strategies of Adaptation." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 6 (1): 35-61.
- Bechert, Heinz. 1966. *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravāda Buddhismus*. Vol. 1 Berlin: Alfred Metzner. 1966; Vol. 2. Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz. 1967; Vol. 3 Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz. 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. "Buddhistic Modernism: Its Emergence, Impact and New Trends." *Business & Economic Review* 14: 93-104.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1973. "Sangha, State, Society, 'Nation': Persistence of Traditions in 'Post-Traditional' Buddhist Societies." *Daedulus* 102 (1): 85-96.



- Bell, Sandra. 2000. "Being Creative with Tradition: Rooting Theravada Buddhism in Britain." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 1: 1-23.
- Berkwitz, Stephen, Juliane Schober & Claudia Brown. 2009. "Introduction: Rethinking Buddhist Manuscript Cultures." In *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*, eds. Stephen Berkwitz, Juliane Schober & Claudia Brown, 1-16. Milton Park, Abingdon & Oxford, UK; New York: Routledge.
- Beyer, Peter. 2007. "Religion and Globalization." In *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, ed. George Ritzer, 444-460. Malden, MA & Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Blackburn, Anne. 2001. *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth-century Lankan Monastic Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2010. *Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu, 1988. "A Look at the Kalama Sutta." *Access to Insight Website*. [http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay\\_09.html](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay_09.html). Accessed 4/14/2012.
- Bond, George. 1988. *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation, and Response*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Boorstein, Sylvia. 1996. *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There: A Mindfulness Retreat with Sylvia Boorstein*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. *It's Easier than you Think: The Buddhist Way to Happiness*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist: On Being a Faithful Jew and a Compassionate Buddhist*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins.
- Boucher, Sandy. 2005. *Dancing in the Dharma: The Life and Teachings and Ruth Denison*. Boston, A: Beacon Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. New York & London: Routledge.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1985. "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups." *Social Science Information* 24(2): 195-220.
- Boyce, Barry, ed. 2011. *The Mindfulness Revolution*. Boston, MA & London: Shambhala Publications.
- Bowers, Jeffrey. 1996. *Dhammakaya Meditation in Thai Society*. Bangkok, Thailand: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- Braun, Erik. 2008. "Ledi Sayadaw, Abhidhamma, and the Development of the Modern Insight Meditation Movement in Burma." Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University.
- Brenner, Suzanne. 1998. *The Domestication of Desire: Women, Wealth, and Modernity in Java*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. 1977. *Christianity and Buddhism*. Bangkok, Thailand: Sublime Life Mission.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1968. *Christianity and Buddhism: Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lecture*. Bangkok, Thailand: Sublime Life Mission.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. *Mindfulness with Breathing: A Manual for Serious Beginners*. Santikaro, transl. Chiangmai, Thailand: Silkworm Books.
- Cadge, Wendy. 2005. *Heartwood: The First Generation of Theravada Buddhism in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Campbell, Patricia. 2010. "Transforming Ordinary Life: Turning to Zen Buddhism in Toronto." In *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada*, eds. John S. Harding, Victor Sogen Hori & Alexander Soucy, 187-209. Montreal & Kingston, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Canclini, Nestor Garcia. 1995. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Exiting Modernity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Carrithers, Michael. 1983. *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka: An Anthropological and Historical Study*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.
- Casanova, Jose. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2010. "Foreword." In *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand*, eds. Rachel V. Harrison and Peter A. Jackson, vii-xviii. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

- Cheah, Joseph. 2004. "Negotiating Race and Religion in American Buddhism: Burmese Buddhism in California." Ph.D. Dissertation, Graduate Theological Union.
- Cho, Francesca. 2012. "Buddhism and Science: Translating and Re-translating Culture." In *Buddhism in the Modern World*, ed. David McMahan, 273-288. New York: Routledge.
- Cohen, Erik. 2001. *Thai Tourism: Hill Tribes, Islands and Open-ended Prostitution*. Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus Press.
- Coleman, James William. 2001. *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Collins, Stephen. 1990. "On the Very Idea of the Pāli Canon." *Journal of the Pali Text Society*. XV, 89-126.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2012. "Pāli Practices of the Self." Keynote Address of the Theravāda Civilizations Project. March 10, 2012.
- Cook, Joanna. 2010. *Meditation in Modern Buddhism: Renunciation and Change in Thai Monastic Life*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Craik, Jennifer. 1994. "Peripheral pleasures: the peculiarities of post-colonial tourism." *Culture and Policy* 6(1): 153-182.
- Crosby, Kate. 2005. "Devotion to the Buddha in Theravada and its Role in Meditation." In *The Intimate Other: Love Divine in Indic Religions*, eds. Anna S. King & John Brockington, 244-277. New Delhi, India: Orient Longman.
- Crosby, Kate (2000). "Tantric Theravāda: A bibliographic essay on the writings of François Bizot and others on the yogāvacara Tradition." *Contemporary Buddhism*, 1(2): 141-198.
- Culler, Jonathan. 1981. "The Semiotics of Tourism." *The American Journal of Semiotics* 1 (½): 127-141.
- Cummings, Joe. 1991. *The Meditation Temples of Thailand: A Guide*. Woodacre, CA: Spirit Rock Center.
- Dalai Lama, H.H. 1996. *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998. *Spiritual Advice for Buddhists and Christians*. Donald Mitchell, transl. New York & London: Continuum.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*. New York: Morgan Road Books.
- Dalai Lama, H.H., Herbert Benson, Robert A. F. Thurman, Howard E. Gardner, Daniel Goleman & The Harvard Mind Science Symposium. 1999. *Mind Science: An East-West Dialogue*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Dhammananda, Bhikkhuni. No date. *Meditation for Buddhists and Christians*. Nakhon Pathom, Thailand: Wat Songdhammakalyani.
- Dann, Graham. 1996. "The People of Tourist Brochures." In *The Tourist Image: Myths and Myth Making in Tourism*, ed. Tom Selwyn, 61-82. Chichester, UK and New York: Wiley.
- Davies, Serena. No date. "Bliss out with a meditation holiday in Thailand." iVillage UK Website. [http://www.ivillage.co.uk/bliss-out-a-meditation-holiday-in-thailand/82575?field\\_pages=0](http://www.ivillage.co.uk/bliss-out-a-meditation-holiday-in-thailand/82575?field_pages=0). Accessed 5/21/2011.
- Dipabhavan Meditation Center Website. No date. "Retreat Guidelines." <http://www.dipabhavan.com/index.php?lay=show&ac=article&Id=538637615>. Accessed 7/10/2010.
- Drew, Rose. 2011. *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Eberhardt, Alfred. 2010. "Investigate Buddhism for Healthy Mind, Body." *The Nation*. Published September 11. <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/home/Investigate-Buddhism-for-healthy-mind-body-30137727.html>. Accessed 8/2/2011.
- Eihrenreich, Barbara. 2010. *Bright-Sided: How Positive Thinking is Undermining America*. New York: Picador.
- Eisenstadt, S.N. 2002. *Multiple Modernities*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1971. *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*. Willard R. Trask, transl. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1960. *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*. Philip Mairet, transl. New York & Evanston: Harper Torchbooks.

- Evrard, Olivier & Prasit Leepreecha. 2009. "Staging the Nation, Exploring the Margins: Domestic Tourism and its Political Implications in Northern Thailand." In *Asia on Tour: Exploring the Rise of Asian Tourism*, eds. Tim Winter, Peggy Teo & T.C. Chang, 239-252. London & New York: Routledge.
- Featherstone, Mike. 2007. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Sage Publications.
- Foucault, Michel. 1976. *The History of Sexuality*. Robert Hurley, transl. New York: Pantheon Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. "Technologies of the Self." In *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. and transl. Luther Martin, Huck Gutman & Patrick Hutton, 16-49. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Freeman, Paul. 2009. "My Experience of Wat suan Mokkh's 10 Day Meditation Retreat in Thailand." <http://voyage-of-the-odd-essay.com/2009/01/14/my-experience-of-wat-suan-mokkhs-10-day-meditation-retreat-in-thailand/>. Accessed 5/10/2011.
- Fronsdal, Gil. 1998. "Insight Meditation in the United States: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." In *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, eds. Charles Prebish & Kenneth Tanaka, 163-182. Berkeley, CA & London: University of California Press.
- Fuengfusakul, Aphinya. 1993. "Empire of Crystal and Utopian Commune: Two Types of Contemporary Theravāda Reform in Thailand." *Sojourn* 8 (1): 153-183.
- Garland, Alex. 1996. *The Beach*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Gaonkar, Dilip. 2001. "On Alternative Modernities." In *Alternative Modernities*, ed. Dilip Gaonkar, 1-23. Durham, NC: North Carolina Press.
- Garrett, Lee. 2008. "Meditation at Wat Rampoeng." Travel Blog Website. <http://www.travelblog.org/Asia/Thailand/North-West-Thailand/Chiang-Mai/blog-395373.html>. Accessed 5/20/2011.
- Garrigan, Paul. 2010. *Dead Drunk: Saving Myself from Alcoholism in a Thai Monastery*. Ireland: Maverick House Publishers.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. "Wat Rampoeng: Vipassana Meditation Retreat in Thailand."

Associated Content by Yahoo Website

[http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2258497/wat\\_rampoeng\\_vipisana\\_meditation\\_retreat\\_pg2.html?cat=16](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2258497/wat_rampoeng_vipisana_meditation_retreat_pg2.html?cat=16). Accessed 5/11/2011.

- Geary, David. 2008. "Destination Enlightenment: Branding Buddhism and Spiritual Tourism in Bodhgaya." *Anthropology Today* 24 (3): 11-14.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Goddard, Dwight. 1966 [1938]. *A Buddhist Bible*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Goenka, S.N., 1998a. "The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation." In *Sayagyi U Ba Khin Journal: A Collection Commemorating the Teaching of Sayagyi U Ba Khin*, Vipassana Research Institute, 105-108. Maharashtra, India: Vipassana Research Institute.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998b. "Buddha's Path is to Experience Reality." In *Sayagyi U Ba Khin Journal: A Collection Commemorating the Teaching of Sayagyi U Ba Khin*, Vipassana Research Institute, 109-113. Maharashtra, India: Vipassana Research Institute.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998c. "On Goenkaji's Return to Myanmar (Burma)." In *Sayagyi U Ba Khin Journal: A Collection Commemorating the Teaching of Sayagyi U Ba Khin*, 173-178. Maharashtra, India: Vipassana Research Institute.
- Goldstein, Joseph. 2003. *One Dharma: The Emerging Western Buddhism*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Gombrich, Richard. 1983. "From Monastery to Meditation Center: Lay Meditation in Contemporary Sri Lanka." In *Buddhist Studies Ancient and Modern*, eds. P. Denwood & A. Piatigorsky, 20-34. London: Curzon Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. *What the Buddha Thought*. London: Equinox Publications.
- Gombrich, Richard and Gananath Obeyesekere. 1988. *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Changes in Sri Lanka*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Graburn, Nelson, H.H. 1983. "The Anthropology of Tourism." *Annals of Tourism Research* 10: 9-33.
- Greene, Stephen Lyon. 1999. *Absolute Dreams: Thai Government Under Rama IV, 1910-1925*. Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus Press.

- Hall, C. Michael & Hazel Tucker. 2004. "Tourism and Postcolonialism: An Introduction." In *Tourism and Postcolonialism: Contested Discourses, Identities and Representations*, eds. C. Michael Hall and Hazel Tucker, 1-24. Oxford & New York: Routledge.
- Hallisey, Charles. 1995. "Roads Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism." In *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, 31-62. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hamilton-Merrit, Jane. 1986. *A Meditator's Diary: A Western Woman's Unique Experiences in Thailand Monasteries*. London: Unwin Paperbacks.
- Hansen, Anne. 2007. *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia 1860-1930*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Harris, Elizabeth. 2006. *Theravāda Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth-Century Sri Lanka*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Harrison, Rachel V. 2010. "Introduction: The Allure of Ambiguity: The 'West' and the Making of Thai Identities." In *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand*, eds. Rachel V. Harrison and Dipesh Chakrabarty, 1-36. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Hart, William. 1987. *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as Taught by S.N. Goenka*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.
- Hefner, Robert W. 1998 "Introduction." In *Market Cultures: Society and Morality in the New Asian Capitalisms*, ed. Robert W. Hefner, 1-40. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Houtman, Dick and Stef Aupers. 2010. "Religions of Modernity: Relocating the Sacred to the Self and the Digital." In *Religions of Modernity: Relocating the Sacred to the Self and the Digital*, eds. Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers, 1-30. Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Houtman, Gustaaf. 1990. "Traditions of Buddhist Practice in Burma." Ph.D. Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, London University.
- Houtman, Gustaaf, 1997. "The Biography of Modern Burmese Buddhist

- Meditation Master U Ba Khin: Life Before the Cradle and Past the Grave.” In *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schober, 310-344. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Imamura, Ryo. 1998. “Buddhist and Western Psychotherapies: An Asian Perspective.” In *Faces of Buddhism in America*, eds. Charles Prebish & Kenneth Tanaka, 207-227. Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Inda, Jonathan Xavier and Renato Rosaldo. 2002. “Tracking Global Flows.” In *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*, eds. Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo, 3-46. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Jackson, Peter. 2010. “The Ambiguities of Semicolonial Power in Thailand.” In *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand*, eds. Rachel V. Harrison and Peter Jackson, 37-56. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2003. *Buddhadasa: Theravada Buddhism and Modern Buddhist Reform in Thailand*. Chiangmai, Thailand: Silkworm Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. “Royal Spirits, Chinese Gods and Magic Monks: Thailand’s Boom-Time Religions of Prosperity.” *South East Asia Research* 7 (3): 245-320.
- Jayatileke, K.N. 1975. “The Buddhist Attitude Toward Other Religions.” *The Wheel Publication* No. 216. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society. <http://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh216.pdf>
- Johnson, Andrew Alan. 2007. “Authenticity, Tourism, and Self-discovery in Thailand: Self-creation and the Discerning Gaze of Trekkers and Old Hands.” *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 22 (2): 153-178.
- Johnston, William. 1997 [1971]. *Christian Zen*. New York, San Francisco & London: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Jordt, Ingrid. 2007. *Burma’s Mass Lay Meditation Movement: Buddhism and the Cultural Construction on Power*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon. 2006. *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness*. New York: Hyperion.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. New York: Hyperion.



- Kabilsingh, Chatsumarn. 2008. *Training the Monkey Mind*. Bangkok, Thailand: KerdThai.
- Keane, Webb. 2007. *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*. Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA & London: University of California Press.
- Kemper, Steven. 2005. "Dharmapala's *Dharmaduta* and the Buddhist Ethnoscape." In *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Linda Learman, 22-50. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Kendall, Laura. 2011. *Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity: Commodification, Tourism and Performance*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Keyes, Charles. 1993. "Why the Thai are Not Christians: Buddhist and Christian Conversion in Thailand." In *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, ed. Robert Hefner, 259-284. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kiblinger, Kristin Beise. 2005. *Buddhist Inclusivism: Attitudes Towards Religious Others*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing.
- Kiely, Robert. 1996. "Preface." In *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, ix-xiv. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- King, Richard. 1999. *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India, and 'the Mystic East.'* London & New York: Routledge.
- King, Victor. 2009. "Anthropology and Tourism in Southeast Asia." In *Tourism in Southeast Asia: Challenges and New Directions*, eds. Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King & Michael Parnwell, 43-68. Copenhagen, Denmark: NIAS Press.
- Kirk, G.S. 1973. *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kirsch, A. Thomas, 1977. "Complexity in the Thai Religious System." *Journal of Asian Studies* 36, no. 2, pp. 241-266.
- Kitiarsa, Pattana. 2007. *Religious Commodifications in Asia: Marketing Gods*. Oxford & New York: Routledge.

- Knitter, Paul. 2009. *Without Buddha: I Could Not Be a Christian*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
- Kornfield, Jack. 2001. *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry: How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path*. New York: Random House.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1978. *A Brief Guide to Meditation Temples in Thailand*. Bangkok, Thailand: World Fellowship of Buddhists.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2010. *Living Dharma: Teachings and Meditation Instructions from Twelve Theravada Masters*. Boston, MA & London: Shambhala.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. *A Path With Heart: A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*. New York: Random House.
- Kontogeorgopoulos, Nick. 1998. "Tourism in Thailand: Patterns, Trends, and Limitations." *Pacific Tourism Review* 2: 225-238.
- Kovacic, Rehn, 2004. "'Buddha's Me:?' Jack Kerouac and the Creation of an American Buddhism." Masters Thesis, Arizona State University.
- Kraidy, Marwan. 2005. *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Krishnaswamy, Revathi. 2008. "At the Crossroads of Postcolonial and Globalization Studies: Connections, Conflicts, Complicities." In *The Postcolonial and the Global*, eds. Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley, 1-21. Minneapolis, MN & London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lang, Pierre. 2007. "Suan Mokkh- Ten Days Retreat in Monastery." Travel Pod Website.[http://www.travelpod.com/travelblogentries/pierrelang/career\\_break\\_07/1176293940/tpod.html#ixzz1LuyDS5QV](http://www.travelpod.com/travelblogentries/pierrelang/career_break_07/1176293940/tpod.html#ixzz1LuyDS5QV). Accessed 5/10/2011.
- Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Learman, Linda. 2005. *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Lehmann, David. 2002. "Religion and Globalization." In *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, eds. Linda Woodhead, Paul Fletcher, Hiroko Kawanami & David Smith, 345-364. New York: Routledge.

- Loos, Tamara. 2006. *Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Lopez, Donald S. 2008. *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995. "Introduction." In *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, 1-30. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. "Introduction." In *A Modern Buddhist Bible*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, viii-xli. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. "Paths Terminable and Interminable." In *Paths to Liberation: The Marga and Its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*, eds. Robert E. Buswell & Robert M. Gimello, 147-192. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Low, Sor-Ching. 2010. "The Re-invention of Nichiren in an Era of Globalization: Remapping the Sacred." *Journal of Global Buddhism* Vol. 11: 27-43.
- Lyon, David. 1999. *Postmodernity*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- MacCannell, David. 1976. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Marx, Karl. 1912. *Capital, a Critique of Political Economy*. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, transl. Frederick Engels, ed. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Masuzawa, Tomoko. 2005. *The Invention of World Religions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McAra, Sally. 2007. *Land of Beautiful Vision: Making a Buddhist Sacred Place in New Zealand*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- McDaniel, Justin. 2006. "Buddhism in Thailand: Negotiating the Modern Age." In *Buddhism in World Cultures: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Stephen Berkwitz, 101-128. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- McMahan, David. 2012. "Buddhist Modernism." In *Buddhism in the Modern*

- World*, ed. David McMahan, 159-176. New York: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2008. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72 (4): 897-933.
- Meethan, Kevin, Alison Anderson & Steve Miles, eds. 2006. *Tourism Consumption and Representation: Narratives of Place and Self*. Oxfordshire, UK & Cambridge, MA: CAB International.
- Mendelson, Michael, E. 1975. *Sangha and State In Burma: A Study of Monastic Sectarianism and Leadership*. Ithaca, NY & London: Cornell University Press.
- Meyer, Walter. 1988. *Beyond the Mask: Toward a Transdisciplinary Approach of Selected Social Problems Related to the Evolution and Context of International Tourism in Thailand*. Saarbrücken, Germany & Fort Lauderdale, FL: Verlag Breitenbach Publishers.
- Moran, Peter. 2004. *Buddhism Observed: Travelers, Exiles and Tibetan Dharma in Kathmandu*. London & New York: Routledge.
- National Identity Board (Prime Minister's Office). 1988. *A Brief Guide to Buddhist Meditation Centres in Thailand*. Bangkok: World Fellowship of Buddhists.
- Naeb, Mahaniranonda. 1982. *The Development of Insight*. Bangkok, Thailand: Abhidhamma Foundation.
- Natoli, Joseph P. and Linda Hutcheon. 1993. "Introduction." In *A Postmodern Reader*, eds. Joseph P. Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, vii-xiv. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Newell, Catherine. 2008. "Monks, Meditation and Missing Links: Continuity, 'Orthodoxy,' and the *Vijja Dhammakaya* in Thai Buddhism." Ph.D. Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
- Nhat Hanh, Thich. 1999. *Going Home: Jesus and Buddha as Brothers*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995. *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. New York: Riverhead Books.

- Nhat Hanh, Thich & Daniel Berrigan. 1975. *The Raft is Not the Shore: Conversations Toward a Buddhist/Christian Awareness*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Noz. 2009. "The Retreat at Wat Rampoeng." Travel Blog Website. <http://www.travelblog.org/Asia/Thailand/North-West-Thailand/Chiang-Mai/blog-457594.html>. Accessed 5/26/2011.
- No Author. 2008. "Meditation Bootcamp: The Story of Two Meditation Dropouts." Living Spree Website. <http://livingspree.wordpress.com/2008/11/14/meditation-bootcamp/>. Accessed 5/20/2011.
- Nyanaponika Thera. 1996 [1954]. *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Obeyesekere, Gananath. 1970. "Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon." *Modern Ceylon Studies: Journal of the Social Sciences* 1(1): 43-63.
- Ooi, Can-Sen. 2010. "Histories, Tourism and Museums Re-making Singapore." In *Heritage Tourism in Southeast Asia*, eds. Micheal Hitchcock, Victor T. King & Michael Parnwell, 83-102. Copenhagen, Denmark: NIAS Press.
- Pagis, Michal. 2008. "Cultivating Selves: Vipassana Meditation and the Microsociology of Experience." PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. "Embodied Self-Reflexivity." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 72: 265-283.
- Paine, Jeffrey. 2004. *Re-enchantment: Tibetan Buddhism comes to the West*. New York: Norton and Company.
- Pieterse, Jan Nanderveen. 2001. "Hybridity, So What?: The Anti-hybridity Backlash and the Riddles of Recognition." *Theory, Culture & Society* 18 (2-3): 219-245.
- Prebish, Charles. 1999. *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Prothero, Stephen. 1996. *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Quest. 2010. "10 Days of Silence, Meditation, and Monastic Life." Travel Pod

Website: <http://www.travelpod.com/travelblogentries/quest/1/1270984065/tpod.html#ixzz1LuzGucw3>. Accessed 5/10/2011.

- Rafael, Vicente. 1987. "Confession, Conversion, and Reciprocity in Early Tagalog Colonial Society." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (2): 320-339.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998. *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Rajyanvisith, Dr. Phra. 2009. *The Heart of Dhammakaya Meditation: Volume 1*. Wat Luang Por Sot, Rajburi, Thailand, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.
- Ray, Reginald. 1994. *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Reynolds, Craig, transl. 1979. *Autobiography: The Life of Prince-Patriarch Vajiranana of Siam, 1860-1921*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Reynolds, Craig. 1973. *The Buddhist Monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University.
- Reynolds, Frank. 1977. "Civic Religion and National Community in Thailand." *Journal of Asian Studies* 36 (2): 267-282.
- Ricard, Matthieu. 2001. *The Quantum and the Lotus: A Journey to the Frontiers Where Science and Buddhism Meet*. New York : Crown Publishers.
- Robbins, Joel. 2009. "Conversion, Hierarchy, and Cultural Change: Value and Syncretism in the Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity." In *Hierarchy: Persistence and Transformation in Social Formations*, ed. Knut Rio, 65-88. New York: Berghahn.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011. "Crypto-Religion and the Study of Cultural Mixtures: Anthropology, Value, and the Nature of Syncretism." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79 (2): 408-424.
- Rocha, Cristina. 2006. *Zen in Brazil: The Quest for Cosmopolitan Modernity*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Roof, Wade Clark. 1999. *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Rory, Mackenzie. 2007. *New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: Towards an Understanding of Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke*. Oxford & New York: Routledge.
- Said, Edward. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.
- Salazar, Noel. 2010. *Envisioning Eden: Mobilizing Imaginaries in Tourism and Beyond*. Oxford & New York: Bergahn Books.
- Salzberg, Sharon. 1999. *A Heart as Wide as the World: Stories on the Path of Lovingkindness*. Boston, MA: Shambala Publications.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Boston, MA: Shambala Publications.
- Samuels, Jeffrey. 2003. "Establishing the Basis of the *Sasana*: Social Service and Ritual Performance in Contemporary Sri Lankan Monastic Training." In *Approaching the Dhamma: Buddhist Texts and Practices in South and Southeast Asia*, eds. Anne M. Blackburn & Jeffrey Samuels. Seattle, WA: BPS Pariyatti Editions.
- Sanger, Annette. 1988. "Blessing or Blight? The Effects of Touristic Dance-Drama on Village Life in Singapau, Bali." In *Come mek me hol'yu han': the impact of tourism on traditional music*, papers presented at ICTM Colloquium in Jamaica, 1986. Kingston: Jamaica Memory Bank.
- Santikaro. 2001a. "Translator's Introduction." In *Mindfulness with Breathing: A Manual for Serious Beginners*, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, xv-xx. Chiangmai, Thailand: Silkworm Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001b. "Translator's Conclusion: Summary and Suggestions for Practice." In *Mindfulness with Breathing: A Manual for Serious Beginners*, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 109-134. Chiangmai, Thailand: Silkworm Books
- Satha-Anand, Suwanna. 1990. "Religious Movements in Contemporary Thailand." *Asian Survey* 30 (4): 395-408.
- Schedneck, Brooke. [forthcoming]. "Forest as Challenge, Forest as Healer: Rinterpretations and Hybridity within the Forest Tradition in Thailand." *Pacific World Journal Third Series* (13).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2010. "Sovereign Yet Subordinate: The Use of Buddhist Discourse During

the Reigns of King Rama IV, V, and VI in Siam (1851-1925).” *Explorations: A Graduate Student Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 10(Spring): 23-31.

Schober, Juliane. 2011. *Modern Conjunctures in Burma: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1995. “The Theravada Buddhist Engagement with Modernity in Southeast Asia: Whither the Social Paradigm of the Galactic Polity?” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26 (2): 307-325.

Scholte, Jan Aart. 2000. *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*. Houndmills, Basingstoke & Hampshire, UK: MacMillan Press Ltd.

Scott, David. 1999. *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Scott, Rachelle M. 2009. *Nirvana for Sale: Buddhism, Wealth, and the Dhammakaya Temple in Contemporary Thailand*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Seager, Richard Hughes. 1999. *Buddhism in America*. New York: Columbia University Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006. *Encountering the Dharma: Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai, and the Globalization of Buddhist Humanism*. Berkeley & LA: University of California Press.

Shankman, Richard. 2008. *The Experience of Samadhi: An In-depth Exploration of Buddhist Meditation*. Boston, MA & London: Shambhala Publications.

Shapiro, Dani. 2010. “PS.” In *Devotion: A Memoir*, Dani Shapiro, 6-8. New York: Harper Perennial.

Sharf, Robert. 1995. “Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience.” *Numen* 42: 228-283.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1998. “Experience.” In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, 94-116. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Simmons, Beverly Ann. 2004. “Saying the Same Old Things: A Contemporary Travel Discourse and the Popular Magazine Text.” In *Tourism and Postcolonialism: Contested Discourses, Identities and Representations*, eds. C. Michael Hall and Hazel Tucker, 43-56. London & New York:



Routledge.

Sinha, Vineeta. 2011. *Religion and Commodification: 'Merchandizing' Diasporic Hinduism*. New York & London: Routledge.

Sirikanchana, Pataraporn. 2004. *A Guide to Buddhist Monasteries and Meditation Centres in Thailand*. Bangkok: World Fellowship of Buddhists.

Smalley, Susan & Diana Winston. 2010. *Fully Present: The Science, Art, and Practice of Mindfulness*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

Smith, Christian. 2003. *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Snodgrass, Judith. 2007. "Defining Modern Buddhism: Mr. and Mrs. Rhys Davids and the Pali Text Society." In *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 27 (1): 186-202.

Soma, Thera. 1967. *The Way of Mindfulness*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.

Soontravanich, Chalong. 2004. "The Regionalization of Local Buddhist Saints: Amulets, Crime, and Violence in Post World War II Thai Society." In *Proceedings of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and National Research Council of Thailand Core University Program Workshop on Flows and Movements in East Asia*, 115-139. Kyoto: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University.

Sujato, Bhikkhu. 2009. *A History of Mindfulness: How Insight Worsted Tranquility in the Satipatthana Sutta*. [http://www.theravadadhamma.org/pdf/Ajahn\\_SujatoHistory%20of%20Mindfulness.pdf](http://www.theravadadhamma.org/pdf/Ajahn_SujatoHistory%20of%20Mindfulness.pdf). Accessed 3/20/2011.

Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. 1974 [1934]. *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. New York: Causeway Books.

Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro, Erich Fromm & Richard De Martino, eds. 1960. *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Grove Press.

Swearer, Donald. 2010. *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2006. "The Ecumenical Vision of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and his

- Dialogue with Christianity.” In *Buddhist Studies from India to America: Essays in Honor of Charles S. Prebish*, ed. Damien Keown, 270-285. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1989. “Introduction.” In *Me and Mine: Selected Essays of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa*, ed. Donald Swearer, 1-13. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1971. “Review.” *Buddhadasa: Appearance and Reality being a review of Christianity and Buddhism*, Bhuddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1-30. Bangkok, Thailand: The Sublime Life Mission.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995. “The Way of Meditation.” In *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, 207-215. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Tambiah, Stanley J. 1984. *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets: A Study in Charisma, Hagiography, Sectarianism, and Millennial Buddhism*. Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, James. 2008. *Buddhism and Postmodern Imaginings in Thailand: The Religiosity of Urban Space*. Surrey, UK & Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. *Forest Monks and the Nation-State: An Anthropological and Historical Study in Northeast Thailand*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast-Asian Studies.
- Teo, Peggy & Sandra Leong. 2006. “A Postcolonial Analysis of Backpacking.” *Annals of Tourism Research* 33 (1): 109-136.
- Thai Visa Forum Website. 2009. “Help Me Choose Among 4 Centers for Meditation Retreat.” Posted 8/4/2009.  
[http://www.thaivisa.com/forum/topic/241648-help-me-choose-among-4-centers-for-meditation-retreat/page\\_\\_st\\_\\_25](http://www.thaivisa.com/forum/topic/241648-help-me-choose-among-4-centers-for-meditation-retreat/page__st__25). Accessed 2/28/2010.
- Tiyavanich, Kamala. 1997. *Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Tong Srimangalo, Ajan. 2004. *The Only Way*. The Disciples, transl. Chiangmai, Thailand: Wat Chom Tong.
- Tongkanaraksa, Doungkamon. 2010. “Suitable Buddhist Meditation Retreats For

Foreigners in Thailand.” Ph.D. Dissertation,  
Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.

Tourism Authority of Thailand, Tourism Authority of Thailand Website. No date.  
<http://www.tourismthailand.org/about-tat/>. Accessed 7/1/2011.

Tourism Authority of Thailand E-Magazine. No date. “Thailand: Centre of  
Buddhist Learning and Traditions.”  
<http://www.tatnews.org/emagazine/2146.asp>. Accessed 5/1/2011.

Tourism Authority of Thailand Booklet. 2003. “Experience Buddhist Meditation.”  
Printed in Thailand by Advertising Production Division, Tourism  
Authority of Thailand.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2010. “Meditation in Thailand: Learn and Practice Buddhist Meditation in  
the Traditional Thai Surroundings.”  
<http://www.tourismthailand.org/meditation/>. Accessed 5/1/2011.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2008. “Meditation in Thailand: The Path to Inner Peace and Well-Being.”  
<http://issuu.com/diethelmtravel/docs/meditation>. Accessed 5/1/2011.

Triolo, Rosalie & Robert Lewis. 1998. *A Thai Journey*. Carlton, Australia:  
Curriculum Corporation.

Tucker, Hazel & John Akama. 2009. “Tourism as Postcolonialism.” In *The Sage  
Handbook of Tourism Studies*, eds. Tazim Jamal & Mike Robinson, 504-  
520. London & Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Tweed, Thomas. 1992. *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912:  
Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana  
University Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2008. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Cambridge, MA:  
Harvard University Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1999. “Nightstand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers,  
Adherents, and the Study of Religion.” In *American Buddhism: Methods  
and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, eds. Duncan Ryuken Williams and  
Christopher S. Queen, 71-90. Surrey, UK: Curzon Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2002. “Who is a Buddhist? Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures.”  
In *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, eds. Martin Baumann and  
Charles Prebish, 17-33. Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of  
California Press.

- Urry, John. 1995. *Consuming Places*. London & New York: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. London & Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- U Sīlananda Sayadaw. 2002. *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*. Heinze, Ruth-Inge, ed. Boston: Shambhala.
- Van Esterik, John. 1977. "Cultural Interpretation of Canonical Paradox: Lay Meditation in a Central Thai Village." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Vasquez, Manuel A. & Marie Friedmann Marqua. 2003. *Globalizing the Sacred: Religions Across the Americas*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Vukonic, Boris. 2002. "Religion, Tourism and Economics: A Convenient Synthesis." *Tourism Recreation Research* 27 (2): 59-64.
- Wallace, B. Alan. 2003. *Buddhism and Science: Breaking New Ground*. New York & Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Columbia University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007. *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. *Mind in the Balance: Meditation in Science, Buddhism, & Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wannamethee, Phra. 2004. "Foreward." In *A Guide to Buddhist Monasteries and Meditation Centres in Thailand*, Pataraporn Sirikanchana. Bangkok: World Fellowship of Buddhists.
- Ward, G. 2003. "The Commodification of Religion and the Consummation of Capitalism." *Hedgehog Review* 5 (2): 50-65.
- Weber, Max. 2003 [1958]. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Talcott Parsons, transl. Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Weir, Bill. 1991. *A Guide to Buddhist Monasteries and Meditation Centres in Thailand*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Bangkok: World Fellowship of Buddhists.  
<http://www.hdammm.de/buddha/mdtctr01.htm>. Accessed 5/1/2011.

- Weissman, Rosemary & Steve Weismann. 1999. . . . *with Compassionate Understanding: A Meditation Retreat*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Westerhausen, Klaus. 2002. *Beyond the Beach: An Ethnography of Modern Travellers in Asia*. Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus Press.
- Wilson, Janet, Cristina Sandru & Sarah Lawson Welsh. 2010. *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium*. New York: Routledge.
- Wilson, Jeff. 2009. *Mourning the Unborn Dead: A Buddhist Ritual Comes to America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Winichakul, Thongchai. 2000. "The Others Within: Travel and Ethno-Spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects 1885-1910." In *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States*, ed. Andrew Turton, 38-62. Richmond & Surrey, UK: Curzon.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Wongprasert, Sanit. 1988. "Impact of the Dhammacarik Bhikkhus' Programme on the Hill Tribes of Thailand." In *Ethnic Conflict in Buddhist Societies: Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma*, eds. K. M. De Silva, Pensri Duke, Ellen S. Goldberg and Nathan Katz, 126-137. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- World Fellowship of Buddhists Website. No date. <http://wfbhq.org/>. Accessed 12/29/2011.
- Wuthnow, Robert & Wendy Cadge. 2004. "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States: The Scope of Influence" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43 (3): 363-380.
- Zehner, Edwin. 2005. "Orthodox Hybridities: Anti-Syncretism and Localization in the Evangelical Christianity of Thailand." *Anthropological Quarterly* 78 (3): 585-617.

APPENDIX A  
**RESEARCH SITES**

<b>Research Site</b>	<b>Teacher/s</b>
Wat Prathat Doi Suthep International Meditation Center	Phra Buddhasak
House of Dhamma	Ajan Helen
Wat Prathat Sri Chom Tong International Meditation Center	Authorized teachers of the Ajan Tong lineage
Wat Rampoeng Tapotaram	Phra Ajan Suphan (Northern Insight Meditation Center)
Wat Kow Tahm International Meditation Center	Rosemary and Steve Weissman
International Dhamma Hermitage	Ajan Bodhi Buddhadhammo and Dhamma Friends
Wat Umong	Phra Uttara
Wat Songdhammakalyani	Ven. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni
Wat Prayong Gittivararam	Mae Chii Brigitte
Middle Way Retreat (Wat Dhammakaya)	Wat Dhammakaya Teaching Monks
Wat Mahathat Section 5	Venerable Phra Suputh Kosalo
Wat Sangathan	Phra Frank
Dipabhavan Meditation Center	Ajan Bodhi Buddhadhammo and Dhamma Friends
Wat Luang Por Sot Buddhist Meditation Institute	Khru Baitika Dr. Barton Yanathiro

Vimutti Dhamma Weekend Retreat at Wat Tam Dauy Don	Ajan Nawi Piyadassi
Young Buddhists Association of Thailand (YBAT)	Khun Tom
Wat Pah Tam Wua	Ajan Luangta



APPENDIX B

**INTERNATIONAL MEDITATION CENTER STATISTICS\***

<b>Research Site</b>	<b>Number Per Year</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Program</b>
International Dhamma Hermitage	On average 1000	20,000 since 1989	Once per month
The Middle Way Meditation Retreat (Wat Dhammakaya)	Not calculated	Participants since February 2006 to end of 2009= 536	7 days almost every month
Northern Insight Meditation Center Wat Rampoeng	On average 450	Participants from 2006-2009= 1,759	Length of stay and timing dependent on retreatant
Wat Kow Tahm International Meditation Center	Not calculated	7,000 since 1988	Dependent on the teachers' schedule
Wat Luang Por Sot Buddhist Meditation Institute	80 in 2009	320 since 2005	Length of stay and timing dependent on retreatant
Wat Mahathat Section 5	On average 750	Participants from 1998-2009= 9070	Length of stay and timing dependent on retreatant
Wat Prathat Doi Suthep	On average 417	Participants from 2004 - 2009 = 2504	Length of stay and timing dependent on retreatant

\*These statistics contain information only on those sites that calculated the number of foreign meditators. Many smaller sites do not calculate these statistics and are not listed here.

APPENDIX C

**GLOSSARY OF PĀLI AND THAI TERMS**

(T) designates Thai terms; (P) designates Pāli terms.

*Abhidhamma* (P): The philosophical section of the Pāli Canon that presents a scholastic and detailed analysis of physical and mental processes.

*Ajan* (T): title used for a teacher

*Anāgāmi* (P): nonreturner, a person who has reached the third of the four stages of *nibbāna*

*Ānāpānasati* (P): mindfulness of breathing; the meditation technique based on paying attention to the in and out breaths.

*Annatā* (P): non-self

*Anicca* (P): impermanence

*Arahat* (P): one who has reached the final stage of *nibbāna* and has eradicated all defilements.

*Ariya-magga* (P): the path of the four stages of attainment

*Bhikkhu* (P): Buddhist male monk

*Bhikkhunī* (P): a fully ordained nun

*Buddho* (P): a word that is used as a concentration mantra in some meditation techniques

*Dāna* (P): the virtue of generosity

*Dhamma* (P): the Buddha's teachings

*Dosa* (P): hatred

*Dukkha* (P): suffering, discontent with conditioned existence consisting of pain, stress, and discomfort

*Ekaggatā* (P): one-pointed concentration; one of the factors of the first *jhāna*

*Ganthadhura* (P): referring to those monks for whom their 'burden is the book,' which refers to scholastic monks

*Jhāna* (P): state of deep concentrative absorption where the mind is completely unified with its object of concentration

*Kamma* (P): past life and present actions that result in future consequences and states of being

*Khanika-samadhi* (P): momentary concentration

*Kilesa* (P): defilements that create unwholesome states of mind

*Lobha* (P): greed

*Lokiya* (P): worldly realm of existence

*Lokuttara* (P): transcendent realm of existence

*Mae chii* (T): white-robed Thai Buddhist female renunciate

*Mahanikai* (T): The ‘great’ order of monks. This term was coined only after the establishment of the Thammayut order of King Mongkut. All monks who did not reordain into the reform sect became known as Mahanikai.

*Metta* (P): loving-kindness; this is a kind of concentration meditation that consists of repeating phrases which spread kindness to all beings.

*Moha* (P): delusion

*Nibbāna* (P): enlightenment, moral perfection

*Pāli* (P): the language used in the scriptures and texts of Theravāda Buddhism

*Pañña* (P): wisdom

*Pariyatti* (P): the scholastic vocation of the monastic discipline

*Patipatti* (P): the meditation practice vocation of the monastic discipline

*Pīti* (P): joy; one of the factors of the first *jhāna*

*Sakadāgmin* (P): once-returner; one who will be reborn once more before reaching liberation

*Samādhi* (P): The state of concentration attained during meditation practice. There are a number of levels of concentrative absorption.

*Samatha* (P): tranquility or calming meditation that develops levels of concentration

*Sangha* (P): the monastic community

*Sāsana* (P): the Buddha's dispensation

*Sati* (P): awareness

*Sīla* (P): moral virtue or training rules

*Sotāpanna* (P): stream-enterer; one who will take at maximum seven lifetimes to attain *nibbāna*

*Sukha* (P): bliss; one of the factors of the first *jhāna*

*Sutta* (P): discourse of the Buddha

Thammayut (T): reformed sect of Thai Buddhist monasticism founded by King Mongkut

*Thudong* (T): ascetic practices

*Upācāra-samadhi* (P): access concentration; a level of concentration below *jhāna*

*Upekkhā* (P): equanimity

*Vinaya* (P): rules of monastic conduct; section of the Pāli Canon which delineates these rules

*Vipassanā* (P): insight meditation; the type of meditation aimed toward realizing the ultimate nature of reality

*Vipassanādhura* (P): referring to those monks for whom their 'burden is meditation'

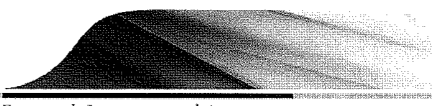
*Vicāra* (P): sustained attention; one of the factors of the first *jhāna*

*Vitakka* (P): applied attention; one of the factors of the first *jhāna*

*Wat* (T): a Thai monastery in which monks reside

APPENDIX D

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORM**




---

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

---

**To:** James Rush  
COOR

**From:** Mark Roosa, Chair   
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 02/28/2012

**Committee Action:** Exemption Granted

**IRB Action Date:** 02/28/2012

**IRB Protocol #:** 1202007488

**Study Title:** Constructing Religious Modernities: Reinterpretations, Hybridities, and Adaptations  
in Thailand's International Mediation Centers

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.



