

Local Agency in Global Movements: Negotiating Forms of Buddhist Cosmopolitanism in the Young Men's Buddhist Associations of Darjeeling and Kalimpong

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Introduction

Darjeeling and Kalimpong have long played important roles in the development of global knowledge about Tibetan and Himalayan religions.¹ While both trade centres became known throughout the British empire for their recreational opportunities, favourable climate, and their famous respective exports of Darjeeling tea and Kalimpong wool, they were both the centres of a rich, dynamic, and as time went on, increasingly hybrid cultural life. Positioned as they were on the frontier between the multiple states of India, Bhutan, Sikkim, Tibet, and Nepal, as well as the British and Chinese empires, Darjeeling and Kalimpong were also both home to multiple religious traditions. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Christian missionaries from Britain developed churches and educational institutions there in an attempt to gain a foothold in the hills. Their task was not an easy one, due to the strength of local traditions and the political and economic dominance of local Tibetan-derived Buddhist monastic institutions, which functioned as satellite institutions and commodity brokers for the nearby Buddhist states of Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan. British colonial administrators and scholars from around the world took advantage of the easy proximity of these urban centres for their explorations, and considered them as museums of living Buddhism. While Tibet remained closed for all but a lucky few, other explorers, Orientalist

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scholars, and administrators considered Darjeeling and Kalimpong as micro-versions of Tibet. As a consequence, their religious institutions, and more notably, the individuals linked to them, became convenient centres for the study of Buddhism as it was constructed by global intellectual networks.²

However, the representation of the Buddhism in this area as a form of diluted Tibetan Buddhism by Orientalist scholars and colonial administrators is problematic, and obscures the far more complex cosmopolitan interactions that were taking place under the surface between different traditions. Not only did a number of the Sikkimese and Bhutanese residents of these towns practice their own unique forms of Buddhism, but other ethno-cultural groups, including the Newars from Nepal, were part of broader global Buddhist movements of reform and revival. This paper seeks to validate the important place that both Darjeeling and Kalimpong played in the cosmopolitan networks of the modern Buddhist revival taking place in the twentieth century throughout Asia and further afield in Europe, America, and burgeoning communities in colonial states in the Pacific. It will do so by focusing on the activities of two branches of the Young Men's Buddhist Association, based in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, respectively, between the 1930s and 1960s. While the name of these organisations suggests that they were both affiliated to an association founded in Colombo, Ceylon³ in 1898, their local histories were far more complex and show the importance of local agency in global movements. The identities of the respective founders of these associations represent the abundance of global interactions and the diversity of forms of Buddhist cosmopolitanism characteristic of this period.

The Darjeeling branch was established by a Sikkimese aristocrat turned Ceylon-educated Theravadin monk and educational reformer named Kazi Pak Tséring (*'Phags tshe ring*,⁴ also known as S. K. Jinorasa,

2 Clare Harris has discussed how the eastern Himalayas functioned as a museum for the study of the material culture of Tibet in *The Museum on the Roof of the World: Art, Politics and the Representation of Tibet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

3 "Ceylon" was the name used for Sri Lanka up until the 1940s; in this paper I will use Ceylon for consistency, as it is the name used by the individuals discussed in the paper.

4 In this paper, all Tibetan words are rendered in a phonetic transcription (using the THL Simplified Phonetic Transcription System, see <http://www.thlib.org/reference/transliteration/#!essay=/thl/phonetics/> [Accessed on 21 July 2016]), except when referring to individuals who preferred a different spelling. This standardisation is necessary since there is still no universally accepted system for spelling Tibetan and Sikkimese Bhutia terms. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, after Europeans made contact, this was all the more problematic as many different transliterations were used for one person. For example, in archival materials, Pak Tséring is also referred to as Fak Tsering, Phags Tshering, and sometimes only as Jinorasa, though local people did not use that name for him.

1895/6?–1943). The founder of the Kalimpong branch was Dennis Lingwood (born 1925), an ambitious British army deserter and poet, who converted to Buddhism in his late teens and, after ordination in Asia, took the name Sangharakshita. Both of these figures also had distinctive visions for their organisations, and both have left different legacies that reflect the fate of civil societies, social clubs, and other global networks in the era of post-world war nationalism. One thing they did have in common, though, was the use of forms of colonial social organisation in order to reimagine Buddhism as the source of an alternative modernity beyond the state in the modern world.

The local histories of these very different characters place Darjeeling and Kalimpong into broader trends of organisations, associations, and societies that asserted the potential of religion to function as a source of translocal political affiliation that could counter colonial critiques of indigenous traditions and identity. However, with the events of the mid-twentieth century, including decolonisation in South Asia, the rise of Communism in China, and the triumph of nationalism, these religious networks and forms of Buddhist cosmopolitanism were considerably changed. While different Buddhist traditions and their respective cultures became further globalised, this took place in a new marketplace of spiritual consumption, where religious traditions were also commodified and, in some ways, homogenised to facilitate their expansion. The kind of hybridity that characterised the inter-cultural and inter-traditional exchange facilitated by global cultural and social associations during the early twentieth century disappeared. The result was that the local histories of movements such as the Young Men's Buddhist Association, which historically played an important role in these global movements, have often become obscured.

Buddhist modernity as an alternative modernity: The Young Men's Buddhist Association as a global movement

The Young Men's Buddhist Association was by no means a unique organisation for its time. A common form of social organisation in colonial societies was the establishment of new associations in colonial centers from where they radiated outwards, bringing together otherwise disparate racial and caste communities in groups with shared social goals. These associations were significant due to their similar outward form as they spread across different communities, and to their role in encouraging the adoption of ideal colonial behaviours among local elites and Anglophiles. The Rotary Association is a pertinent example of a socially-minded organisation that

required its local members to adopt a British upper-class sense of propriety which bound together colonial and local elites in different environments.⁵

Religious associations were another form of these groups, with the added motivation of evangelisation and conversion. These associations were distinct from missionary organisations that were often limited in their goals. The foundation of the Young Men's Christian Association (known more popularly as the YMCA) in 1844 challenged the usual focus on conversion and responded to the needs of industrialising societies by providing recreational as well as religious activities for young people moving into urban centres. These activities included the founding of educational and athletic institutions which would encourage the development of a healthy "mind, body, and spirit."⁶ As the YMCA opened in the cities of colonial Latin America, Asia, and Africa, these institutions became part of an informal colonial structure, whereby local members of the community were inculcated with colonial attitudes and ideas regarding religion, the mind, and the body through informal interaction and activity.⁷

However, these were not merely unidirectional movements established by colonial elites. Local agents and groups interacted with the ideas propagated by these groups and utilised these forms of social organisation in different ways for anti-colonial purposes as well. Importantly, associations connected with Asian religions also began to appear alongside religious revival movements. Mark Frost has outlined how, in Indian Ocean port cities, movements and associations developed through the use of new technologies, such as newspapers, periodicals, and the telegram, and educational facilities

5 For an overview of the international reach of the Rotary Club, see Brendan M. Goff, "The Heartland abroad: The Rotary Club's Mission of Civic Internationalism," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/60765> [Accessed on 27. June 2016]. For a discussion of Rotary and its adaptation to and influence in Southeast Asia, see Su Lin Lewis, "Rotary International's 'Acid Test': Multi-ethnic Associational Life in 1930s Southeast Asia," *Journal of Global History* 7, no. 2 (2012): 302–324.

6 For more on foundations and functions of the YMCA, see Nina Mjagkji and Margaret Spratt, eds., *Men and Women adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

7 On the YMCA in Africa, see David Anthony, "Unwritten History: African Work in the YMCA of South Africa," *History in Africa* 32, no. 1 (2005): 435–444. The YMCA also played an important role in parts of Asia that were not colonies, where local branches were set up by students returning from study in the US. On the YMCA in Republican China, see Charles A. Keller, "The Christian Student Movement, YMCAs, and Transnationalism in Republican China," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 13, no. 1 (2004): 55–80. Regarding the YMCA and its links with local forms of imperialism, see Jon Davidann, "Japanese YMCA Cultural Imperialism in Korea and Manchuria after the Russo-Japanese War," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 5, nos. 3–4 (1996): 255–276.

including schools and universities were established as part of the consolidation of the colonial state. These associations were founded by members of “a non-European, western-educated professional class that serviced the requirements of expanding international commercial interests and the simultaneous growth of the imperial state.” Their establishment was motivated partly in response to pressures that colonialism exerted on traditional social practices, as well as in response to the development of Orientalist depictions that dismissed their cultural heritage. These networks saw local intellectuals draw on modernized forms of their own traditions for social, political, and educational change in response to these critiques. These activities often fed into the rise of nationalist movements, as among Hindu groups in India and the South Asian diaspora, who used religion and culture as central elements in the creation of discrete identities that could act as social binders.⁸

The YMCA in India represented one such association.⁹ While it took several attempts for it to be firmly established, the current association, organised in 1875, began as a missionary forum for inculcating Christian values through Bible study and prayer meetings. However, it was not synonymous with the colonial state, as many of the early foreign participants and founders were Americans, who had travelled to India as part of the set of broader American Christian activities that Ian Tyrell has named “America’s moral empire” that aimed to spread American ideals of democracy and freedom (including support of Indian independence), but without state interests.¹⁰ The YMCA India quickly developed from a foreign-dominated group into a more complex organisation where Indian leaders worked to respond to local social issues, especially related to education and politics, and took part in global Christian networks.¹¹ Other religious communities then replicated elements of the YMCA’s organisational success, with Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities establishing similar associations in the late nineteenth century around their own concerns.

Buddhism was noteworthy in this context because, like Islam, its historical presence in a number of Asian countries could be used as a platform for both

8 Mark Frost, “‘Wider Opportunities’: Religious Revival, Nationalist Awakening, and the Global Dimension in Colombo,” *Modern Asian Studies* 36, no. 4 (2002): 937–938.

9 For a general history, see M. D. David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India: A Centenary History* (New Delhi: National Council of YMCAs of India, 1992).

10 The YMCA serves as an important case study of American evangelical activity in Ian Tyrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America’s Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

11 Chandra Mallampalli explores these local motives in *Christians and Public Life in Colonial South Asia, 1863–1937* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004). For a biography of a prominent Indian YMCA leader, see Susan Billington Harper, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V. S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

cosmopolitanism and nationalism. It was also interesting due to its popularity and sympathetic representation in European and American intellectual cultures, where it was presented as an Asian tradition whose rationalism, empiricism, democratic tendencies, and philosophical tradition made it compatible with modernity.¹² Conveniently, it had largely died out in India, which left its contemporary status there open for interpretation by colonial scholars and administrators as well as local intellectuals, while Ceylon and Burma, two of the places where it was still active, were both British colonies, allowing easy access for Western scholars and spiritual seekers.

Ceylon was the locus of several important Buddhist revival movements and was cited in anti-colonial discourse as a prominent site of local identity. This prominence had developed out of the famous Buddhist-Christian debates of the late nineteenth century, particularly the 1873 debates at Panadura, in which Buddhist intellectuals took on Christian missionaries, using their same rhetoric and technologies to triumph in public reassertions of Buddhist superiority. These successes were widely celebrated in both English and Sinhala newspapers at home and abroad. They were key moments in overcoming missionary hegemony, long connected with the control exercised by foreign political and economic establishments. The Theosophists, another influential global movement, took an interest in Ceylonese Buddhism and played a key role in the dissemination of news regarding the triumph of Buddhism over Christian missionaries. The leaders of the movement, Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Colonel Henry Olcott (1832–1907), travelled to Ceylon in 1880 after reading about the Panadura debates, and promoted their own understanding of Buddhism through public rituals and the creation of the Buddhist Theosophical Society in Colombo.¹³ Olcott's experiences in Ceylon led him to write the influential explanatory text *The Buddhist Catechism*, in which he promoted his own American and Protestant version of Buddhism with its emphasis on textualisation, rationalism, and demystification.¹⁴ *The*

12 A number of important studies outline the construction of modern Buddhism. These include, more generally, David McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); and, more specifically related to colonial constructions of Buddhism, Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Jeffrey Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2008). On Asian responses to these constructions, see Anne Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) and Richard Jaffe, "Seeking Shakyamuni: Travel and the Reconstruction of Japanese Buddhism," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30, no. 1 (2004) 65–96.

13 Frost, "Wider Opportunities," 944.

14 Stephen Prothero focuses on the life of Olcott in *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

Buddhist Catechism was widely circulated in Ceylon and further afield, consolidating Buddhist movements both locally and globally with its clear, accessible, and modernist interpretations of Buddhist lore and philosophy.

The interest in Ceylon as a site for Buddhist revival was not limited to Westerners. One of modern Buddhism's most famous transnational activists, Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933), was originally from Colombo. While he is remembered for promoting meditation, Sunday schools, and other elements of Buddhist modernism among the bilingual elites of Ceylon and further afield,¹⁵ his motivations and viewpoints were complex; he was also known for articulating communalist ideas, and is remembered as an early nationalist. Outside of Ceylon he was a widely known lecturer and participant in high-profile meetings, including the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1892, and was also the leader of the Maha Bodhi Society, which aimed to rejuvenate Bodh Gaya as a transnational centre for Buddhist communities.¹⁶

While the Maha Bodhi Society had perhaps the greatest visibility among these global Buddhist associations, other organisations had their own agendas. The Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) was originally founded in Colombo, Ceylon, in 1898 by a group of English-language educated elites. While materials related to its founding do not cite the YMCA as an influence,¹⁷ the name of the organisation and its goals can be seen as mirroring the YMCA. According to the founders of the movement, the purpose of the YMBA was to promote the study and encourage the practice of Buddhism, and to provide a forum for the discussion of related subjects.¹⁸ In its actual activities, the YMBA very consciously mirrored Christian missionary organisations. It held Sunday schools, where Buddhist children dressed in white sang hymns to the Buddha. It helped to disseminate Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism*. Its additional activities included the foundation of educational institutions, including groups providing free coaching and tuition in academic topics, and recreational facilities for young men. It published *The Buddhist*, which functioned as a site for the dissemination of modern Buddhist ideology as well as news and opinions that would help to build

15 Frost, "Wider Opportunities," 956.

16 For more on the life of Dharmapala and his complex position, see Steven Kemper, *Rescued from the Nation: Anagarika Dharmapala and the Buddhist World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

17 See, for example, Mallika Wanigasundera, "A Story of Struggle and Achievement," *The Buddhist* 68, nos. 3–4, (1997): 35–37.

18 Wanigasundera, "A Story of Struggle and Achievement," 35.

a community.¹⁹ Like the YMCA, it spread to other Southeast Asian colonial cities such as Rangoon and Singapore in the early twentieth century, and eventually as far afield as Japan and England. *The Buddhist* was also widely disseminated within the broader networks of Buddhist sympathisers of the day.

As with many Christian missionary organisations, the YMBA did not have a consistent ideology as it travelled. While many Buddhist leaders at the time, such as Olcott and Charles Pfoundes (1840–1907), attempted to found global Buddhist movements with strong central ideologies and activities,²⁰ the YMBAs that appeared around the world were often quite separate from the Ceylon YMBA, with activities that were guided by local interests and agency. An example of this is the YMBA established in Burma in the first decade of the twentieth century. Alicia Turner argues that this YMBA was representative of other social organisations in colonial Burma that functioned to bring Burmese people into a “moral community” dedicated to promoting and “saving” Buddhism in a time of rapid change.²¹ It came to be regarded as an important early nationalist organisation, as its founders had promoted the phrase “To be Burmese is to be Buddhist” in order to define a religious and national identity for themselves and others in their local western-educated, cosmopolitan circles.²² The YMBA as a movement was thus far from centralised, but the continued invocation of the YMBA “brand” was important for the legitimacy of the organization, and for reinforcing the idea of a global community of Buddhists. This local autonomy was particularly important in the case of the YMBA, for it allowed for the assertion of local agency in reaction to different political situations.

The lack of a centralised administration means that tracing the genealogy and interconnected history of these local organisations can be difficult. However, the fact that the same “brand” was adopted locally remains significant for understanding the development of international and inter-traditional Buddhist links during this period, leading to the creation of an imagined, if not actual,

19 Sumana Saparamadu provides a history of the publication in *The Buddhist* 68, nos. 3–4 (1997): 70–79.

20 For a discussion of such an attempt, see Brian Bocking, “Flagging up Buddhism: Charles Pfoundes (*Omoie Tetzunostzuke*) among the International Congresses and Expositions, 1893–1905,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 14, no. 1 (2013): 17–37.

21 Alicia Turner, *Saving Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2015).

22 Juliane Schober, *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2011), 66–67, 73–75. For more on the political elements of the Burma YMBA, see Myo Oo, “The Covert Objective of YMBA (1906–1920) and Its Activities,” *The Boundaries of History [Korea]* 81 (2011): 107–128.

Buddhist cosmopolitanism. This cosmopolitanism provided its members with a sense of shared identity, and a platform for the assertion of Buddhism as a modern ideology in the face of missionary and colonial critiques of local traditions. Studying the local adaptations of the YMBA brand also allows for an understanding of just how widely the idea of Buddhist modernism was accepted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a crucial moment for global networking and anti-colonial organising.

Reassessing Buddhist modernism in the Himalayas: Buddhist institutions and colonialism in Darjeeling and Kalimpong

The establishment of YMBAs in Darjeeling and Kalimpong marked salient moments in the local adaptation of these global movements. These branches were among the most remote of the organisation, but were to have significant influence on their local environments and later, particularly in the case of Kalimpong, on a global level. Historically, Darjeeling and Kalimpong had been part of the Buddhist kingdoms of Sikkim and Bhutan. British trade interests had led to the annexation of Darjeeling by the East India Company in 1835. Originally it had been a small village, centred around a monastery founded in the 1740s as a summer residence by the eighteenth century Sikkimese Buddhist savant Dzokchen Khenchen Rölpe Dorjé (*Rdzogs chen mkhan chen Rol pa'i rdo rje*).²³ Other monasteries in the area had different institutional affiliations. Ging Monastery, the most venerable one, was part of the Sikkimese royal monastery Pemayangtse's estate, and as a consequence Darjeeling was under the nominal political control of the royal lamas. The annexation of Darjeeling by the British therefore had significant religious as well as political consequences. While monasteries and temples continued to operate, those that had been satellite institutions of Sikkimese monasteries saw a decline in patronage. This decline was exacerbated by the arrival of new forms of religiosity. The process of conflict and accommodation between Buddhism and Christianity is powerfully represented in the story of Observatory Hill. Observatory Hill had originally been the site of a Mahakala Shrine patronised by diverse Buddhist and Hindu cultural groups. The original Pemayangtse satellite monastery was situated here as

23 Maharaja Thuthop Namgyel and Maharani Yeshe Dolma, "The History of Sikkim," trans. Kazi Dawa Samdrup, 1908, MSS Eur E78, India Office Records and Private Papers, British Library, London. For more information on Sikkimese Buddhism and history, see Saul Mullard, *Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Pranab Kumar Jha, *History of Sikkim, 1817–1904: Analysis of British Policy and Activities* (Calcutta: OPS Publishers, 1985); Sonam B. Wangyal, *Sikkim and Darjeeling: Division and Deception* (Jaigon: Sonam Wangyal, 2002); and Anna Balikci, *Lamas, Shamans, and Ancestors: Village Religion in Sikkim* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

well. When in the 1850s the British built a church here, the local congregants complained to the authorities that the rituals in the monastery were too loud and disruptive. To accommodate British requests, the monastery was thus forced to move, losing its cosmologically significant position at the centre of Darjeeling.²⁴ This loss of position symbolised the loss of local agency more generally in Darjeeling. The arrival of more Christian congregations and missionaries further marginalised local religions and cultural communities.

In contrast to Darjeeling's religious foundations, before the arrival of the British, Kalimpong was already an important trade centre for the exchange of yak wool and musk in Himalayan trade networks, particularly between Tibet, Bhutan, and Sikkim. Originally a part of Sikkim, it was absorbed into Bhutan in 1700 during Bhutan's occupation of Sikkim (1700 and 1708). It became part of Bengal when the British invaded Bhutan in 1864 and captured the Dooars in early 1865. Later in the year, a formal treaty fixed the new border, and most of the Bhutanese territory in the plains was ceded to the British, along with the sliver of hill tract that included Kalimpong.²⁵ In 1866 the tract was added to the administrative District of Darjeeling. It was home to a number of different trans-Himalayan cultural groups, who established their own places of worship around the central bazaar. As with Darjeeling, the arrival of Christian missionaries led to the development of a shared religious and cultural space in Kalimpong, though due to its position as an important trade and economic centre between empires, Buddhism was not as marginalised. The appearance and gradual dominance of Christian missionary schools did, however, produce a new form of local identity. The local elites who sent their children there, including the royal families of Sikkim and Bhutan, did so in order to provide their children with what was considered a "modern" education, which would presumably provide them with more awareness of colonial society, thereby creating a more even standing with the British. The missionaries, for their part, believed they were leading a civilising mission in the hills. The power dynamics produced by these missionary institutions in Kalimpong were complex, and rather than creating a ground for asserting colonial authority and mind-set, local agents used this mind-set to their own economic and political advantage. Educational experiments with local students in Darjeeling were similarly ambiguous in their outcome. While the Darjeeling Government High School was created in 1891 by the British authorities to train indigenous collaborators,

24 Thierry Dodin, "The Observatory Hill in Darjeeling: Some Remarks on Space, Time, Power, and Religions," in *Tibetan Studies: Conference Proceedings from the 7th International Association of Tibetan Studies Conference*, ed. Helmut Krasser et al. (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 213–235.

25 V. H. Coelho, *Sikkim and Bhutan* (Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1970), 67.

particularly for surveillance work in Tibet, only some of the *pandits* that were trained ended up collecting materials in Tibet, while others took part in local modernisation and anti-colonial movements. As a consequence, the school's program was discontinued.²⁶

The appearance of the YMBA and Buddhist organisations is another example of how a global movement, with its beginnings as a mirror organization of a colonial association, was modified to fit local needs. The appearance of the YMBA in the eastern Himalayas contradicts widely held assumptions regarding the absence of modern forms of Buddhism in Tibetan communities throughout the Himalayas, articulated among others by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. when he wrote,

Modern Buddhism did not come to Tibet. There were no movements to ordain women, no publication of Buddhist magazines, no formation of lay Buddhist societies, no establishment of orphanages, no liberal critique of Buddhism as contrary to scientific progress, no Tibetan delegates to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, no efforts by Tibetans to found world Buddhist organizations.²⁷

In light of more recent research, the “modern Buddhism” characterized in this list might be too narrowly defined. The Tibetan State and other practitioners of Tibetan-derived Buddhism elsewhere in the Himalayas were not as isolated as this quote might suggest. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama, for example, was very interested in reform, and was a member of the international Maha Bodhi Society. The Oxford-educated Sikkimese prince (and later king) Sidkeong Tulku was also deeply interested in modern Buddhist organisations and in Buddhist reform in Sikkim.²⁸ The eastern Himalayas were also a crucial link in broader scholarly debate about Buddhism, as much of the scholarly and popular information regarding Tibetan Buddhism was transferred through the same trade networks that linked Darjeeling and Kalimpong with the rest of the British empire via the European and American scholars visiting the area. These included the British civil servant/scholar L. A. Waddell (1854–1938), the Belgian-French author-explorer Alexandra David-Neel (1868–1969), the

26 Derek Waller, *The Pundits: British Exploration of Tibet and Central Asia*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: University of Kentucky) 193–194.

27 Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Madman's Middle Way: Reflections on Reality of the Tibetan Monk Gendun Chopel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 250.

28 For more on Sidkeong Tulku and his Buddhist reforms see Toni Huber, *The Holy Land Reborn: Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Reinvention of India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 281–282; and Berthe Jansen, “Monastic Guidelines (*bCa'yig*) by Sidkeong Tulku: Monasteries, Sex, and Reform in Sikkim,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24, no. 4 (2014): 597–622.

Italian author Marco Pallis (1895–1989), and American self-styled mystical seeker Theos Bernard (1908–1947).²⁹

The appearance of the YMBA in these areas, linked as they were by the circulation of people, commodities, and ideas facilitated by empire, is not surprising. However, the personalities that founded these associations, and their relationships with colonial authorities and broader global networks, reveal the very different ways Buddhism could be used for social organization. The founder of the Darjeeling YMBA, Kazi Pak Tséring, and the Kalimpong branch, Sangharakshita, both had complex and differing attitudes towards Buddhism as a cultural artefact and device for social and political change.

The Darjeeling YMBA (founded c. 1930): Education and Theravada anti-colonialism in the activities of Kazi Pak Tséring

In 1938 a new school was constructed on the road leading to lower Bhutia Basti, down the path from Chowrastra, the bustling centre of Darjeeling. It was prominent due to its distinctive gate, next to a large stupa that enclosed a white Burmese Buddha statue. Beneath the shrine large letters read: “YOUNG MEN’S BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION HEAD-OFFICE.SCHOOL.&c” [sic]. At 9am every morning, children in smart pressed school uniforms streamed through the gate into the simple white-washed two-floored school to begin the day in a unique way. Rather than reciting a Christian or even Tibetan prayer, the sound of Pali would instead echo from the school room, as the children “took refuge” in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. How did such an institution come to appear in the environment of Darjeeling? And who was the yellow-robed figure bustling about the premises who lived in one of the rooms downstairs?

This figure was no other than Kazi Pak Tséring, a Lepcha from Sikkim and a Theravada monk who went by the Pali name S. K. Jinorasa. The story of Kazi Pak Tséring and how he came to establish the YMBA Darjeeling is a complex one, which speaks to the complexities of adapting colonial rule to local culture in the eastern Himalayas, as well as forms of local response. More generally, this figure represents how traditions such as Buddhism could be modified and renegotiated to represent an alternative form of modernity and social change for individual agents and intellectuals, who cannot be categorised simply as either pro-British Anglophiles or rebellious

²⁹ See other articles in this volume for more on these networks, as well as Clare Harris, *Museum on the Roof of the World*.

nationalists.³⁰ The parts of his life story that can be documented suggest a different approach for understanding such figures, and the attempt to string them together here takes as its model Alicia Turner, Laurence Cox, and Brian Bocking's work on the mysterious monk Dharmaloka, who was also a key figure in a number of transnational Buddhist networks.³¹ Pak Tséring's life also highlights the ways in which colonial authorities were beginning to interfere with everyday life in Sikkim.

Kazi Pak Tséring was born in Pakyong in 1895 or 1896, into the family of the famous Sikkimese Phodrang Lama Karma Tenkyong (*Pho drang bla ma Karma bstan skyong*) of the aristocratic Khangsarpa clan. The Phodrang Lamas had risen to power during the reign of the sixth Sikkimese king, Tendzin Namgyel (*Bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal*, c. nineteenth century).³² By the late nineteenth century, Phodrang Lama was one of the most powerful men in Sikkim, particularly due to his close relationship with the British authorities. He died around the turn of the century, leaving two young sons, one of whom was Pak Tséring. Pak Tséring received an education under the patronage of Sidkeong Tulku, the crown prince of Sikkim, who had become interested in modernizing Sikkim. Sidkeong was interested in educating the children of Sikkimese elites, especially Kazis, or landlords, so that they could take part in the colonial state, with a view to eventually gaining more authority. In order to do this, in 1905 he proposed the founding of a school, which came to be known as Bhutia Boarding School. Pak Tséring was part of the original Bhutia Boarding School class of 1906.

In 1912, the powerful land holder Jeerung Dewan Karma Drugyü (*Kar ma grub rgyud*, ?–1912) passed away at his estate at Chakung in western Sikkim. He left behind two wives and vast estates in Darjeeling and Chakung. He also left behind a complex legal situation, as he had no heir and therefore, according to Sikkimese law, his estates were to revert to State management. In order to counter the State's claims to the land, his family claimed to have adopted the seventeen-year-old Kazi Pak Tséring.³³ Charles Bell, the British Political Officer in charge of the Sikkimese

30 For a broader discussion of such intellectuals, see Carole McGranahan, "In Rapga's Library: The Texts and Times of a Rebel Tibetan Intellectual," *Cahiers d'Extreme-Asie* 15 (2005): 253–274.

31 On Dharmaloka, see Alicia Turner, Laurence Cox, and Brian Bocking, "Beachcombing, Going Native, and Freethinking: Rewriting the History of Early Western Buddhist Monastics," *Contemporary Buddhism* 11, no. 2 (2010): 125–147.

32 For more on this period, see Mthu stobs rnam rgyal and Ye shes sgröl ma, *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* (Gangtok: Tsuklhakhang Trust, 2003), 117–118.

33 Petition for adoption from Pemba Dichen to Political officer, "Adoption of Kazi Phag Tsering by Jeerung Dewan of Chakung Estate/ subsequent rejection of the adoption deed," 10 August 1912, file no. 86 of 1912, General Section, Sikkim State Archives, Gangtok.

state, was skeptical of these claims, and so began a drawn-out series of court cases. Though Pak Tséring was involved in these cases for several years, it appears that by 1919 he wanted to escape from the bureaucratic entanglements, and signed over his legal rights and representation to his cousin Yishay Wangchuk.³⁴

His next destination was far from conventional. At around this time (no exact dates are available), Pak Tséring travelled to Ceylon. As no official records of his travels remain in Sikkimese or in Sri Lankan archives, he must have done so independently, without State sanction. It remains unclear why he decided to travel to Ceylon and what he did there, but when he returned to Sikkim in the 1920s, he had taken ordination in the Theravada tradition and was now calling himself D. S. (later S. K.) Jinorasa.³⁵ He was not the only Sikkimese Vajrayana Buddhist to convert to Theravada at this time. Pemba Tendup (*Pad ma bstan sgrub*), or as he became known, S. Mahinda Thero, was another student who had received educational patronage from Sidkeong. He lived in Ceylon for more than three decades, and became a famous poet and supporter of Sri Lankan independence.³⁶ Had Pak Tséring been influenced by Mahinda's story? Perhaps. It is also rumoured that he spent time studying in Burma; in Sikkim in the 1930s he was nicknamed "Burma gélong" (Burma *bhikkhu*) in recognition of his time abroad and his unique form of Buddhism.³⁷

After Pak Tséring returned to Darjeeling and Chakung he quickly emerged as an important Buddhist figure through his establishment of a Darjeeling branch of the Young Men's Buddhist Association. While the exact date of establishment is not clear, it was certainly already active before the founding of a similar initiative in Gangtok, which Pak Tséring may have been involved with as well. In July 1928, Sonam Tséring (*Bsod nams tshe ring*) submitted an application to the eleventh king of Sikkim, Tashi Namgyal (*Bkra shis rnam rgyal*), to be allowed to establish a YMBA in Gangtok, claiming that such an organization would "improve the welfare and social interest" of the Sikkimese.³⁸ The purposes of the group were very general, and "[a]ny

34 Affidavit signed by Kazi Pak Tséring on 30 January 1919, private collection.

35 There are no documents to provide information on what these abbreviations stand for, or where the name came from.

36 For more on S. Mahinda Thero, see Pema Wangchuck Dorjee, "S. Mahinda Thero: The Sikkimese Who Gave Lankans Their Freedom Song," *Bulletin of Tibetology* 44, nos. 1–2 (2008): 139–145.

37 These recollections were gathered during interviews in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Sikkim in July 2013.

38 Application submitted to Maharaja by Sonam Tshering, etc. related to Formation of the Young Men's Buddhist Association, 12 July 1928, file no. 15 of 1924, serial 3, General Section, Government of Sikkim General Department, Sikkim State Archives, Gangtok. Signatories included Sonam Tséring Bhutia, Rinzing Dorjee Bhutia, Yonten Gyatso Kazi, and Passang Namgyal Kazi, among others.

Buddhist having sympathy for the movement” was eligible to join. Despite the English language rules set out in the document and its formal tone, to the YMBA enthusiasts in Gangtok, the organisation appeared to be an excuse to continue with other pre-established forms of local practice. For example, on the submitted list of compulsory group activities, a number of Sikkimese practices were included, such as donations for ill members, “Khimsar Trashi” (*Khim gsar bkra shis*) for new house consecrations in the group, and “Thoongton” for new births in their families. More noteworthy was the provision that “No members shall be allowed to bring any kind of intoxicating drink wherever the meeting takes place.”³⁹ The king approved the application, noting that the organization had been successful elsewhere, including in Darjeeling.⁴⁰ The Political Officer asked for more information related to the size and purpose of the organization, but the ultimate fate of the proposal is not available in the Sikkim State Archives. The YMBA in Sikkim never held any prominent public office or organised events, and it thus appears to have been founded in admiration and imitation of the Darjeeling branch, without however contributing to the broader local social life or the wider YMBA.

In contrast, Pak Tséring’s namesake organization in Darjeeling was to become very active and influential. One of the earliest mentions we find of the YMBA in any official record is in a letter that he wrote to the YMBA in Ceylon, which was published in *The Buddhist* in 1931:

Our friend Mr. Phagtsring [i.e. Pak Tséring] of Darjeeling writes, “I am building a small family boarding at Bhutia Basti to give native education to boys and girls. I have now nearly completed the building, and I hope I can open the School in July. I am also having a small Vihara and rooms for Bhikkhus on the top floor so I can give accommodation to the Bhikkhus.”⁴¹

This small note remains as the only official correspondence related to the YMBA in Darjeeling. However, the YMBA Darjeeling became locally well known, particularly as an educational institution, but also for its connection with other religious and educational groups. It was based in Bhutia Busti, an area to which Pak Tséring had links through his Phodong Lama ancestry. Originally housed in a simple shed, a large two-storied school building was eventually constructed. It received sponsorship from the sons of Raja Seth Baldeo Das Birla “for the

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Pak Tséring, “News from India,” *The Buddhist* (August 1931): 84.

followers of Arya Dharma (Buddhists and Hindus),” and was consolidated in 1938 under a group of trustees, made up of elite members from the local community.⁴²

Although Pak Tséring had planned to open the YMBA in 1931, the first official class was only enrolled on April 24th, 1935. From the beginning, the students at the school were a mixed bunch from different classes, castes, and ethnicities. While many of the Bhutia children were the offspring of the local lamas, the Lepchas and “Kami” caste members from different Nepali-speaking communities were from families connected with a variety of vocations, including, according to the log book, meat sellers, rickshaw-sardars, clerks, tailors, gold-smiths, and electricians.⁴³ While most schools in the area had many different ethnic communities in attendance, the YMBA school was unique due to its representation of diverse economic groups and vocations. With its robust curriculum, it soon made a name for itself, as its junior students gained admission to some of the most prestigious higher educational institutions in the Darjeeling and Kalimpong area, and also due to its excellent English language tuition. Many students from the school went on to have distinguished civil service careers.⁴⁴

Another point in which the YMBA school differed from other local schools was its distinctly Buddhist character. Unlike the prestigious local missionary schools, religious proselytisation was not a major goal for the school, although Buddhist festivals were observed and there were daily prayers. As has been said, these were in Pali, reflecting Pak Tséring’s dedication to his status as a Theravada monk. The Buddhist element of the school was emphasised more in its secondary purpose, as a research institute. While records of activities related to this element of the YMBA are sparse, there are letters between Pak Tséring (alias Jinorasa) and well-known scholars and explorers who passed through Darjeeling in the 1930s and early 1940s. The famous modern Tibetan scholar Gendün Chöpel (*Dge ’dun chos ’phel*, 1903–1951?) lived at the school for eighteen months from 1935, and taught Tibetan there in exchange for food, lodging, and English tutorials.⁴⁵ He also gave much assistance to

42 This information appears on plaques in Hindi and English on the front of the building. They are dated 1995 Bikram Samvat, which corresponds to 1938 in several Nepali calendars.

43 Log Book, Young Men’s Buddhist Association School, Darjeeling, India, 1935, Young Men’s Buddhist Association Darjeeling Archives, Darjeeling, North Bengal.

44 One example of such a student was B. B. Gurung, now in his eighties, who served the last king of Sikkim as well as two successive democratic Sikkimese governments, and now acts as an advisor to the Chief Minister of Sikkim. B. B. Gurung, interview, July 2013.

45 Heather Stoddard discusses this period of Chöpel’s life in *Le mendiant de l’Amdo* (Paris: Société d’ethnographie, 1985). She mentions Pak Tséring on page 173, calling him ‘*gelong Pel Ji Norasa*’ after Kirti rin po che, *Dge ’dun chos ’phel gyi rab byed shabs btags ma* (Dharamsala, India: Kirti byes pa grwa tshang, 1983), 61.

Theos Bernard, the American explorer and yoga enthusiast who later visited Tibet and had planned to start a Tibetan studies institution in the United States with Gendün Chöpel acting as the main translator. Bernard met Pak Tséring (whom he knew as Jinorasa) around 1936, and found him to be enormously well-connected and knowledgeable.⁴⁶ Letters exchanged between them show shared interests in Buddhist studies. Pak Tséring informed Bernard of his plans to translate major Tibetan texts,⁴⁷ which was noteworthy given Pak Tséring's status as a Theravada monk.

Pak Tséring did not render this assistance without expectation of return. In 1940 and 1941, Pak Tséring wrote to Bernard three times, each time requesting donations for the school and the association. He justified his requests, saying that,

America is a very rich country so please try to give me some financial help and induce your friends to help the Association by sending some substantial contributions. The money spent on this Association will not go in vain and it will help the Association in doing more useful works for the humanity. Today the world is being ruined by wars. This is nothing but [the] outcome of hatred, ignorance, and greed among the people and nations. We must therefore, try to contribute some very useful thing to the world so that the world will be free from the useless bloodshed and will enjoy peace and Universal brotherhood.⁴⁸

In other letters, he appealed to Bernard and promised research assistance in return. Not at all a passive local informant, Pak Tséring was aware that without local guidance and assistance, scholars such as Bernard would not be able to realize their ambitions, and he used this reasoning with potential donors for well-argued pleas for assistance. It appears, however, that Bernard's assistance to the YMBA was never substantial.

The main reason why Pak Tséring was in need of financial assistance was due to the YMBA's activities beyond Darjeeling in west Sikkim, particularly around Chakung. Today, his major legacy is his founding of several secular schools for children of all backgrounds in west Sikkim. The first of these schools was

46 Paul Hackett discusses Bernard's mentions of and correspondence with the man he knew as Jinorasa in *Theos Bernard, the White Lama: Tibet, Yoga, and American Religions Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

47 S. K. Jinorasa to Theos Bernard, 26 January 1940, Theos Bernard Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

48 Ibid.

established in 1934 in Chakung, even before the Darjeeling school was completed. This suggests that the court cases had eventually been resolved and provided him with at least a small home. While local oral tradition states that as early as 1915 Pak Tséring was providing education for children of the Chakung estate in his own house, a formal school was established in 1934 with around thirty local village children attending.⁴⁹ This was the first school of its kind in Sikkim. Previously, secular schools had been established only for sons of the landholding elite and civil servants, while all other schools were run by missionaries. Therefore, establishing schools for all children was considered very new and quite radical. This demonstrated Pak Tséring's continued ties with the area and commitment to the school, and his name continued to appear in meeting minutes until 1939. The school at Chakung quickly established a reputation for its unique mission and excellence, despite its fiscal problems, and even the king of Sikkim praised its work on tours in the 1930s.⁵⁰ Pak Tséring also presided over the establishment of schools at Kaluk, Hee-gaon, Mangalbarey, Soring, Namchi, Gezing, and Timboorbong.⁵¹ Graduates were often sent to be teachers elsewhere, and despite the enormous challenges faced in raising money for the schools and their infrastructure, they had a huge impact on Sikkimese society, and many have become government schools today.

How did Pak Tséring go from being a disenfranchised young Kazi railing against the Political Officer to a Theravadin *bhikkhu* establishing schools throughout the state? The connection between these different periods of his life remains unclear. One possible explanation is that he was inspired by the YMBA, since the Association was active elsewhere in Asia in promoting non-missionary education. His personal background might provide another explanation. As a child of privilege, Pak Tséring had gained the favour of Sidkeong Tulku and had received a modern education. However, unlike his peers, he lost some of his privilege when the State complicated the recognition of his adoption and he lost his family lands. A number of students who benefited from his educational ventures posit that his difficult circumstances made him

49 This is based on popular knowledge in Chakung, and was repeated to me by numerous members of the public as well as members of staff at the present school.

50 Chakung School Log Book, Chakung Senior Secondary School Archives, Chakung, West Sikkim.

51 Dick Dewan, *Education in Sikkim: An Historical Retrospect, Pre-merger, and Post-merger Period* (Kalimpong: Tender Buds' Society, 2012), 200. In his final letter to Theos Bernard in December 1941, Pak Tséring writes that at that time the YMBA was managing thirteen schools. The exact locations of these schools is not provided, though the letterhead of the YMBA lists Darjeeling, Kalimpong Town School, Chakung School, Gezing School, Rinchenpong Kaluk School, the Buddhist Girls' School, Darjeeling, and the Orphans Home, Darjeeling. S. K. Jinorasa to Theos Bernard, 24 December 1941, Theos Bernard Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

sympathetic to the suffering of commoners, and that he felt education could provide them with alternatives to both British colonialism and the Sikkimese monarchy, which had been significantly weakened by British governance.⁵² Unlike his father and uncle, Pak Tséring did not benefit from his association with the British administration, which might explain why he was critical of both the colonial administration and the monarchy. His vision for the future, which included free education for all, suggested a third, alternate trajectory beyond either colonialism or a return to the monarchy.

This vision was never realised. On the 24th of February, 1943, Pak Tséring jumped from a bridge on the road between Darjeeling and Chakung, his body carried away by the rapid currents of a river near Nayabazaar. As with many suicides, the reasons remain unclear. The news shocked his colleagues. He had appeared happy and successful, at peace with his situation in life. Oral narratives suggest that his decision may have been linked to a family feud, or to deeper anguish regarding the lack of support for his initiatives from the state and from society in general.⁵³ This latter narrative seems to fit with the continued financial problems faced by the YMBA. In his last correspondence with Theos Bernard in December 1941, he again requested funds, suggesting that keeping his dreams intact was an ongoing challenge.

While it is impossible to know what really happened to Pak Tséring that day on the bridge, we can get a glimpse of the impact of his experiences on his motivations in this same letter to Bernard, where he describes himself as a kindred spirit with Gendün Chöpel.

Both of us [i.e., Pak Tséring and Gendün Chöpel] have no desire for worldly fame and wealth. We have seen and enjoyed them and we find it utterly useless thing [sic] to run after such mirage. Today you see quite clearly what worldly fame and wealth mean. But if we can do some useful works for the human beings we are ever ready to do it. Ignorance is bad and today the world suffers from ignorance. Wisdom is strength but the strength should be supported by selfless motives and then only the Wisdom can be used for happiness of the human beings.⁵⁴

52 These suggestions were made by various members of the public in Chakung during interviews in July 2013.

53 These narratives come from interviews carried out in Darjeeling and Sikkim, July 2013. I have kept the interviewees anonymous at their request, due to the sensitive nature of his death and political elements of his reputation.

54 S. K. Jinorasa to Theos Bernard, 24 December 1941, Theos Bernard Collection, Bancroft Library, the University of California, Berkeley.

This letter is rendered all the more tragic by an awareness of the fates of both of these individuals, as Chöpel died an alcoholic after a long imprisonment in Lhasa around 1951. As Carole McGranahan has stated, unfulfilled endings were all too common among Himalayan intellectuals of the period, who sought alternate modernities for their people and whose lives reveal the limits of cosmopolitan affiliation as a practicality in local settings.⁵⁵ Pak Tséring did leave a lasting legacy, despite this ending. His cousin (who is often referred to as his brother), Lhendrup Dorje, known more widely as L. D. Kazi, later assumed responsibility for the schools. He was to have a long lasting impact on Sikkimese society; after years as an advocate for equal access to education, he was a key figure in the revolution that led to the beginnings of political democracy for Sikkim in 1975, and became Sikkim's first Chief Minister in the Indian Union.⁵⁶

The Kalimpong YMBA (1950–c. 1957): Print, education, popular worship, and global Buddhist modernism in the activities of Sangharakshita

The YMBA in Kalimpong started, under quite different auspices from that in Darjeeling, when a young British *bhikkhu* arrived with his Bengali Buddhist teacher in 1950. Originally invited by Gyan Jyoti, a scion of an influential local Newar trading family, to help revive Theravada Buddhism among the Newars of the area,⁵⁷ Sangharakshita remained in Kalimpong for another fourteen years, and developed a formidable set of very different global networks around his base. Unlike Pak Tséring's association, the Kalimpong YMBA has a very rich, albeit one-sided, set of archival materials in the form of Sangharakshita's published memoirs.⁵⁸

Born Dennis Lingwood in South London in 1925, Sangharakshita's story was in many ways representative of the growing Western fascination with Buddhism in the twentieth century. Sangharakshita was a bookish child with an Orientalist fascination with the East. He was sent to India for military service during the Second World War, and used his time in Ceylon and Singapore to participate in local religious networks and associations, including branches

55 McGranahan, "In Rapga's library," 274.

56 The classic study of the events around this period and the beginning of democracy in Sikkim remains Sundanda K. Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim* (Delhi: Vikas, 1984).

57 Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga: An English Buddhist in the Eastern Himalayas* (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 1991), 8.

58 Sangharakshita has published multiple memoirs. The one that features his time in Kalimpong most prominently is *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga* (Glasgow: Windhorse Publications, 1991).

of the Theosophical Society. After the war he decided to remain in India, and spent time in Hindu ashrams and as an ascetic before deciding to become ordained in the Theravada tradition in 1949. Following his ordination, he travelled to Nepal, where Buddhism was still heavily restricted, but was undergoing a revival led by Theravada monks from Burma.⁵⁹ After spending time there and studying at Benares Hindu University with the influential Pali scholar Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap, who was a key figure in Buddhist revival movements in India, he ended up in Kalimpong.

While Kashyap and Sangharakshita had originally been invited to Kalimpong as guests of Gyan Jyoti and family, according to Sangharakshita's memoirs they found the local situation complex. The Theravada revival group Dharmodaya was active among the local Newars, but finding sustained patronage was a challenge, and the initial invitation they had received did not guarantee support. Kashyap decided to move on, but instructed his student to remain, to "serve Buddhism." He did so, making connections in the local community and eventually developing an "informal network of English-knowing people who, for one reason or another, had some kind of interest in, or sympathy for, Buddhism"⁶⁰ and, with some friends from this network, decided to establish a formal group for organizing activities. This group was to be a Kalimpong branch of the Young Men's Buddhist Association. Sangharakshita was aware of the original Ceylon Association, and particularly its print organ, *The Buddhist*, where he had published articles.⁶¹ It appears that branding was primary in this decision, as it helped lend formality to the establishment of the group. He describes the founding by quoting from an article written at the time:

On Sunday 6th May, 1950, the young men of Kalimpong assembled in the Dharmodaya Vihara under the chairmanship of Rev. Sangharakshita with the object of establishing a Young Men's Buddhist Association. After preliminary discussion resolutions concerning the objects and activities of the Association were unanimously passed, and office-bearers elected. It was decided to open a recreation room for the use of members as soon as possible and to inaugurate a series of weekly public lectures and debates. At the end of the meeting about thirty young men enrolled themselves as members of the Association.

59 For more on the revival of Buddhism in Nepal, see Sarah LeVine and David N. Gellner, *Rebuilding Buddhism: The Theravada Movement in Twentieth-century Nepal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

60 Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, 37.

61 Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, 38.

He goes on to explain that “The ‘objects’ adopted at the meeting were (1) To unite the young men of Kalimpong and (2) to propagate the teachings of Buddhism by means of social, educational, and religious activities.”⁶² The office bearers represented a number of different communities, including Newars and Darjeeling-born Tibetans.

The group was quick to begin organizing activities. Weekly lectures began on Sundays, and speakers included both residents and visitors to Kalimpong who had interests in Buddhism. The line-up appeared random, and depended on who was passing through at the time, irrespective of their qualifications and affiliation with Buddhism, though some of the more high-profile speakers included the Russian scholar Dr. George Roerich, who became an advisor to the organization during his residence in Kalimpong, as well as Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, a European aristocrat and anthropologist of Tibetan societies.⁶³ Lectures were an important part of intellectual life in the town during the mid-twentieth century, and Sangharakshita’s own activities included giving lectures for various associations and at local institutions such as the Hill View Hotel.⁶⁴

Many of these lectures provided the material for *Stepping-Stones*, a small magazine edited by Sangharakshita over twenty months between 1950 and 1951. The magazine included articles on Buddhism, poetry, short stories, and local news, as well as advertising by sponsors, such as the Jyoti family, the *Himalayan Times* newspaper, various trading houses and other affiliate Buddhist groups and publications. While the selection of articles appears somewhat random, and many seem to have been included because their authors were in Kalimpong, *Stepping-Stones* occupies a unique moment in print history. Parasmani Pradhan was a colleague and friend of Sangharakshita, and while he was responsible for printing the early editions of this journal at his Mani Printing Press in Darjeeling, he also sponsored the inclusion of a Nepali language

62 Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, 38–39.

63 For more on these figures and the Buddhist intellectual scene in Kalimpong, see Hackett, *Theos Bernard, White Lama*.

64 A summary of Sangharakshita’s activities during this period can be found in his memoirs, which include five volumes. The volumes most pertinent to his time in Kalimpong are *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, *In the Sign of the Golden Wheel: Indian Memoirs of an English Buddhist* (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 1996), and *Precious Teachers: Indian Memoirs of an English Buddhist* (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 2007). While these volumes provide a fascinating overview of his life and interactions in Kalimpong, the information in them must be treated critically due to their genre, Sangharakshita’s privileged position as a white Buddhist in a newly post-colonial society, and the lack of other sources to confirm or challenge some of his arguments and representations. The information used in the sketch of his life and activities below is therefore information that has been backed up by popular records and local sources, including issues of the magazine *Stepping-Stone* and the newspapers *The Tibet Mirror* and *The Himalayan Times*.

section, edited by local literary luminary Bhaichand Pradhan. Sangharakshita's excitement regarding this venture was largely due to its ability to contribute to the dissemination of knowledge about Buddhism among Nepali language communities, as he commented that nothing else was available in Nepali at the time. Due to its inclusion of modern literary forms and new genres, this section had significance for Nepali language communities well beyond Buddhism-focused topics.⁶⁵ The magazine began modestly, but as circulation took off, the YMBA Kalimpong became increasingly well known, and Sangharakshita was invited to start YMBA branches at Gangtok, Darjeeling, and Ajmer.⁶⁶

The Association did more than host intellectual activities. It organised full moon rituals and pujas in commemoration of Buddhist holy days, as well as other public events. In March 1951, Sangharakshita and the YMBA also did much to insert Kalimpong into the pan-Asian tour of the sacred relics of two of the Buddha's students, Shariputra and Maudgalyayana. The visit was an inter-traditional affair, involving the Newar Dharmodaya Vihara and local Tibetan monasteries, most notably the large monastery Tharpa Choling Gompa that was under the supervision of the popular local lama Tomo Geshe Rinpoche. Together with more serious religious activities, the Association also had an active recreation room, which was managed by an Activities Committee. It was centred around a ping-pong table and carrom-board, and patronised by young local men who paid fees every month. Sangharakshita and several of his expat colleagues also started a free tutoring class for high school students in order to help them prepare for exams.⁶⁷ Aside from these daily sessions, Sangharakshita also offered private English language tuition to support himself.

The free tutoring seems to have raised public awareness of the YMBA in Kalimpong more than any of its other activities. However, along with the recreation centre, it also caused the most problems in finding a permanent setting for the Association. After several months, Sangharakshita was asked to move out of the Dharmodaya Vihara due to concerns among the more orthodox Newars that YMBA activities were leading to caste intermingling.⁶⁸ The democratic nature of the gatherings, in which members of all communities were welcome, was a hallmark of Buddhist modernist discourses of democracy and social

65 Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, 254–257.

66 Sangharakshita laments that nothing came of these branches. Despite his best efforts to visit and organise lectures, he claims that once he left the area, local collaborators would not continue the work without him. Eventually, the Ajmer branch chose to become affiliated with the local Bengal Buddhist Association.

67 Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, 63

68 Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, 123–124.

justice. However, securing patronage for such ventures was more complicated, and like the Darjeeling YMBA, the Kalimpong Association struggled to find forms of income. By 1951, not even two years after its start, *Stepping-Stones* ceased publication. The Association changed premises a number of times, from a warehouse in the bazaar to a cottage, and then to another residence, before eventually gaining a permanent home in 1957 after Sangharakshita received donations from visiting scholars and others to purchase a headquarters, named the Triyana Vardhana Vihara, on the town's outskirts.⁶⁹

By this point, however, the YMBA was defunct. Due to continued funding problems, in the late 1950s the YMBA Kalimpong became the Kalimpong branch of the Maha Bodhi Society. Sangharakshita had been associated with the Society in Calcutta for a number of years, and had eventually become a member of the editorial board and the main editor for the *Maha Bodhi Journal*, which he edited from the Calcutta office. The promise of a monthly donation of fifty rupees meant financial stability for Sangharakshita's efforts, and despite his initial reluctance to be affiliated with the Maha Bodhi Society, which often had Hindu Brahmin presidents, he ultimately decided the affiliation would further the goals he shared with its founder, Dharmapala.⁷⁰

Was Sangharakshita aware of the YMBA's namesake in Darjeeling, where not even two decades before, another Theravada monk had struggled with similar challenges in securing patronage? On one occasion in the late 1950s, he acknowledges Pak Tséring:

The Bhutia Busti YMBA, as it was known, had no connection with its now defunct Kalimpong counterpart. It had been founded about twenty-five years earlier by Bhikkhu Jinorasa, a Sikkimese monk of noble family who had received ordination in Ceylon. After his death in 1931 the association's religious activities had come to an end, except for the celebration of Vaishakha Purnima, and it was in the hope of my being able to revive these that I had agreed to stay in Bhutia Busti that autumn, at the YMBA's spacious but run-down premises. Besides giving a public lecture on the Three Refuges and Five Precepts, and presiding at the Mahatma Gandhi birth anniversary celebrations, during my stay there I took every opportunity of pointing out to the people of the locality, many of whom were Buddhists, the need for taking a more active interest in the Dharma.⁷¹

69 These events are outlined in Sangharakshita, *Precious Teachers*.

70 Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, 463–464.

71 Sangharakshita, *In the Sign of the Golden Wheel*, 183–184.

It seems curious that Sangharakshita knew so little about the specifics of Pak Tséring's activities, and even mistook the date of establishment, considering his claim to have been a close friend of Pak Tséring's cousin, L. D. Kazi, and his wife, the mysterious Kazini Elisa Maria Dorji Khangsarpa.⁷² However, it also appears to be representative of Sangharakshita's character to overlook Pak Tséring's efforts, as he was often critical of local traditions. With the exception of the remarkable Nepali column, described above, *Stepping-Stones* included few local authors, and his own negative characterization of local forms of Buddhism are found throughout his memoirs. For example, he described the Tamang community as "divorced from understanding [their religion] to an alarming degree. English-educated Tamangs were, in fact, alienated from the ethnic cult into which it had degenerated, and spoke disparagingly of 'Lamaism' as a corruption of Buddhism."⁷³ While visiting Sikkim, he referred to the "disastrous decline in respect of doctrinal knowledge that had overtaken Sikkimese Buddhism in recent years," and called for an "urgent" revival of Buddhism, in which perhaps the YMBA could assist.⁷⁴ Sangharakshita's depiction of Himalayan Buddhism is indeed characteristic of the discourse of a Buddhist modernist, emphasizing textual knowledge and rationalism, and critiquing the "superstition" of local tradition. This may be why he struggled to find patronage, dismissive as he was of participating in "domestic rites."⁷⁵

As time passed in Kalimpong, Sangharakshita's activities changed in accordance with local events. The lack of patronage opportunities by the late 1950s reflected the general pressure that many of the town's local elite were under, due to changes in the trade route following the Chinese occupation of Tibet. This led monks and religious specialists to pursue alternative forms of income, including bartending and working in local cinemas as well as providing language and other forms of academic tuition, just as Sangharakshita had done.⁷⁶ Similarly, the headquarters of the YMBA shifted a number of times, as wealthy Tibetan refugees were buying up property as quickly as possible in preparation for moving to India permanently. His position as a foreigner in

72 This friendship was detailed in Sangharakshita, *Precious Teachers*.

73 Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, 32.

74 Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, 213

75 Sangharakshita, *Moving Against the Stream: The Birth of a New Buddhist Movement* (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 2003), 128.

76 I thank the anonymous reviewer for providing me with a broader reference of these activities found in Beatrice D. Miller, "Lamas and Laymen: A Historico-functional Study of the Secular Integration of Monastery and Community," (PhD diss., University of Washington, Seattle, 1958), 224, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/301892426> [Accessed on 27. June 2016].

post-Independence India also led to complications, and over the years he was accused of being a spy and a Communist, and many of his foreign friends also left. He describes the situation at the beginning of the 1960s thus:

Kalimpong had indeed changed in the course of the last few years. The fresh influx of Tibetan refugees, the rumours of impending invasion by the Chinese, and the presence of troops and tanks on the streets, had all affected the atmosphere of the town. What was more, the authorities had become more suspicious of foreign visitors, especially Europeans and Americans, seemingly finding it difficult to believe that anybody could come to Kalimpong simply for the sake of the view. This meant that one's movements were watched, one's letters were intercepted, and though personally I had nothing to fear I was glad that I now had a British passport.⁷⁷

This situation, along with an invitation to teach in England and ambitions to start a new Buddhist movement in the West, were behind his decision to return to England in 1964, where he founded the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (now the Triratna Buddhist Community), a new Buddhist tradition that now has centres in over sixty countries.⁷⁸ While his local activities are now largely forgotten, his time in Kalimpong set the stage for his further activities and contributed to the intellectual, social, and even economic networks that facilitated the development of his reputation as a teacher on a global scale.

Conclusion

The YMBAs of Darjeeling and Kalimpong represent an important link in the global history of modern Buddhism, where attempts to create translocal, inter-traditional identities and forms of Buddhist cosmopolitanism were part of multiple intellectual networks and projects. These networks and projects were inspired by the cracks that had appeared in colonial hegemonies with the assertion of local agency and by intellectuals and local elites who longed for agency in their societies. These local branches were therefore often tied to anti-colonial activity while they reasserted reformed local identities and practices.

⁷⁷ Sangharakshita, *Precious Teachers*, 169.

⁷⁸ Regarding Sangharakshita's activities after he left Kalimpong, see Sangharakshita, *Moving Against the Stream*; Alan Sponberg, "TBMSG: A Dharma Revolution in Contemporary India," in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, ed. Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 73–112; and Martin Baumann, "Work as Dharma Practice: Right Livelihood Cooperatives of the FWBO," in *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, ed. Christopher S. Queen (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 372–393.

While figures such as Pak Tséring and Sangharakshita were determined to create new global forms of affiliation by invoking connections between Buddhist practitioners, newly forming national “imagined communities” loomed large over their efforts.⁷⁹ Just as many Asian countries gained their independence, new forms of control and empire appeared. Communist China had little space for Buddhism as an ideology compatible with Marxist modernity, and a nervous India sought to consolidate its boundaries, as Buddhism was co-opted by new political movements that sought to actualise citizenship rights for all members of the new nation, most notably the Dalits. Despite two world wars, new boundaries were drawn up during the Cold War, and Darjeeling and Kalimpong, which had flourished on the boundaries between empires, saw a sharp decline due to the loss of trade and the closing of the border with China.⁸⁰ This also affected the transnational communities found in these cities. Many new Tibetan monasteries in exile were set up in the late 1950s, but these institutions did not have the same cosmopolitan aims as earlier Buddhist institutions in the area, which had emphasized social and economic connections across borders even from an early period. Instead, these new monasteries concentrated on survival and the preservation of cultural heritage, and were often used to reassert group identity rather than destabilise it. Buddhism became a powerful component of different forms of nationalism that developed throughout Asia at this time, and the opportunities presented by earlier associations with global goals, such as the YMBAs in the eastern Himalayas, no longer seemed as relevant or desirable. These forms of Buddhist cosmopolitanism, predicated on networks facilitated by movement and exchange, were limited by the drawing of boundaries, and ironically, by political independence in India and the new People’s Republic of China.

This does not mean that the legacies of Kazi Pak Tséring and Sangharakshita have been altogether forgotten. Their inter-traditional and global connections continue to be present in some limited ways. Sangharakshita has become an internationally known teacher. On a smaller scale, the Darjeeling YMBA School continues to provide education to junior students from some of the most economically marginalised sections of society at the site of its original home in Bhutia Busti. Its influence is felt beyond North Bengal as well. A few hours up the road and over the border in western Sikkim, the historical home of Pak Tséring, Chakung remains a booming small town, responsible for

79 The nation as an imagined community here is adopted from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006).

80 The impact of the loss of trade on Kalimpong in particular is discussed in Tina Harris, *Geographical Diversions* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013).

much of the ginger production in the state. Beyond the bazaar, up on a hill, there is a large Government Senior Secondary School. Behind this school, up a narrow lane, are two buildings that were once home to the YMBA and now form the Rev. Jinarasa Memorial Atis Dipankar Destitute Home. The Home is now managed by the Kripasaran Buddhist Mission, based in Bangladesh, which grew out of the Bengal Buddhist Association founded in 1892. Today it is affiliated with the branch of the mission in Darjeeling that was established in 1919 and is managed by a Himalayan Theravada monk named Pema Wangdi Sherpa.⁸¹ In the mornings and afternoons, children swarm into the buildings for breakfast and dinner, and play football on the high school grounds next door. Distinct among these children are several who wear the bright orange robes of Theravada monks. These monks are from Bangladesh, and their presence at the humble orphanage remains as a vivid reminder of its unique transnational heritage, and the potentialities provided by a distinct moment in global Buddhist history.

81 More on the Bengal Buddhist Association can be found in Rama Kundu, ““In Thine Immeasurable Mercy and Goodness:’ Buddha in Tagore’s Imagination,” in *Studies on Rabindranath Tagore*, vol. 1., ed. Mohit Kumar Ray (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004), 215. The current Mission’s website is at <http://kbn1.wordpress.com/about-us/> [Accessed on 3. July 2016].