

Esoteric Theravāda Buddhism in Burma/Myanmar

The achievement of independence in 1948 was in many ways a watershed in Burma's history. At this time, a variety of Buddhist movements emerged that were part not only of a 'Burmese Buddhist revival', in which even the government was involved (see Brohm 1957), but also a general re-enchantment of Asia. In the period following World War II, projects of nation-building and further modernization were implemented in many newly independent Asian nation states. The theories of modernization adopted by the rulers had presupposed that a new, rationalized and secularized order that had set them on the path of 'progress' would entail a decline of religion. However, instead there was a widespread resurgence of religion, and a variety of new, eclectic religious movements emerged in Southeast Asia (Keyes *et al.* 1994).¹ Charles Keyes, Helen Hardacre, and Laurel Kendall (1994) explain this phenomenon as being related to a 'modern crisis of authority' which was brought about as a result of the tensions between these movements and the modernization and nation building projects.

In the thriving religious field of postcolonial Burma, two lay Buddhist movements associated with two different meditation techniques emerged, *viz.*; the insight meditation movement and the concentration meditation movement. The latter consisted of a variety of esoteric congregations combining concentration meditation with esoteric lore, and some of these were characterized by fundamentalist trends.² At the same time, the supermun-

1 Among these movements can be mentioned Cao Dai in Vietnam and Dhammakāya, Santi Asoke, and the Hupphaasawan Movement in Thailand (Keyes *et al.* 1994, Schober 1995); some of these movements were fundamentalist Buddhist movements (see Swearer 1991; see also Foxeus 2011).

2 The most important features of the 'esoteric style' of the esoteric congregations are initiation rituals, the master-disciple (*hsayā-tapyi*) relationship, and secrecy. The latter may refer to genuine secrets that should remain hidden due to sociopolitical conditions, but is mainly concerned with the social dynamics of a rhetoric of secrecy, and serves to a large degree as a proselytizing strategy (see Foxeus 2011: 3–10). Secrecy in the latter sense should, following Hugh B. Urban (1998), be understood less in terms of its content than of its forms. Being employed as a discursive strategy, it 'transforms a given piece of knowledge into a scarce and precious resource', and

dane form of Buddhism became increasingly influential in the entire field of religion. The aim of the present article is to discuss how this supermundane dimension has reshaped the complex religious field in Burma, with particular emphasis on the esoteric congregations; to present the Burmese form of esoteric Theravāda Buddhism, and to situate the fundamentalist trends which are present in these contexts.

The Liberation Era: enlightenment and *weizzāhood* for anyone

In pre-modern Burma, it was generally regarded as impossible to attain the higher stages of the path to nirvana and enlightenment because the Buddha's *sāsana* was perceived as being too degenerated.³ From the mid-eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the view that it was possible to attain nirvana as a Buddhist saint (P. *arahant*) in the present era gradually developed and spread (see Pranke 2011, Turner 2009, Braun 2008).⁴ In early postcolonial Burma, there was a general expectation of the possibility for anyone to achieve soteriological success on the path to enlightenment and nirvana, and this was associated with a seemingly novel notion, *viz.* the Liberation Era (*wimoutti-yuga-khayt*) that was popular at the time, at least in some communities.

Different cosmological schemes seem to have been used by Burmese people to make sense of changes brought about in the colonial and post-colonial periods respectively. At the end of the nineteenth century, a linear scheme of gradual *sāsana* decline in five stages, as Alicia Turner (2009) has demonstrated, became popular among Buddhist lay associations and served as a conceptual framework to interpret and explain the crisis of the perceived decline of Buddhism under colonialism. Such a scheme is inherently pessimistic since the *sāsana* is explained as undergoing a gradual and inevitable

the possession of such knowledge 'bestows status, prestige, or symbolic capital on its owner' (Urban 1998: 210).

- 3 *Sāsana* – 'instruction' – refers to 'Buddhism' as it is grounded in society: monks, texts, pagodas, monasteries, relics, Buddhist learning and practice, and so forth. Reflecting how this notion is generally understood in Theravāda Buddhist countries, Heinz Bechert (1970: 762n3) defines it as 'the totality of the Buddhist institutions in a lawful unbroken succession from the time of the Buddha onwards'.
- 4 In this article, 'P.' is an abbreviation for Pāli. All foreign words are Burmese, unless otherwise indicated. The term 'nirvana' will be used instead of the Pāli *nibbāna*, since the former word has been adopted into English as a loan word.

decline. While that scheme is supported by the Pāli commentarial literature,⁵ the cyclical scheme of the Liberation Era appears not to be. Around the 1940s, many Burmese envisioned Gotama Buddha's period as an auspicious Liberation Era, a time when it was exceedingly easy to attain enlightenment and nirvana. It was widely expected that this era would return in 1957, the first year of the second half of the Buddhist era (see Houtman 1990, Foxeus 2011).⁶ This view therefore reflected the optimism among Burmese Buddhists regarding the new political situation of an independent Burma. It was expected that the Buddha's *sāsana* would flourish, and many events during this period could be seen as a confirmation of that. For instance, the celebration of the 2,500-year anniversary of the Buddha's final nirvana was held in 1956; a 'Buddhist revival' was carried out by the parliamentarian government led by Prime Minister U Nu, involving events such as the Sixth Buddhist Synod in 1954–6, and Buddhist lay associations strove to bring about flourishing of Buddhism (see Brohm 1957). The cyclical view of *sāsana* decline could thus be said to have served as a conceptual scheme by which the Burmese people could explain, interpret, and make sense of their contemporary situation.

Furthermore, the different views of the meaning of the Liberation Era seem to correspond to the interests of two predominantly lay Buddhist movements in the post-independence period: the insight meditation (P. *vipassanā*) movement and the concentration meditation (P. *samatha, samādhi*) movement. Accordingly, the Liberation Era was envisioned by some as the *Vipassanā* Era, the 'Era of Insight Meditation' (see Foxeus 2011). It was widely assumed that it was now possible to attain enlightenment and nirvana in a single lifetime, or at least attain the lower stages of that path; the cult of living Buddhist saints (P. *arahant*) reached its peak in these years (see Pranke 2011), and a mass meditation movement practising insight meditation emerged and was supported by the state (see Brohm 1957; Houtman 1990, 1999; Jordt 2007).⁷ Ingrid Jordt (2007) has referred to this lay Buddhist movement as the 'New Laity'. On the other hand, some esoteric communities envisioned the Liberation Era as the 'Great *Weizzā* Era', at which time it would be easier to attain success on the path of esoteric knowledge and become a semi-immortal, accomplished

5 The linear scheme was originally outlined by Buddhaghosa in his commentary *Manorathapūraṇī* to the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (see Turner 2009, Foxeus 2011).

6 The cyclical scheme comprised five stages, as follows: 1) the Liberation Era, 2) the Era of Concentration Meditation, 3) the Era of *Suttas*, 4) the Era of Buddhist Precepts, and 5) the Donation Era (see Houtman 1990, Foxeus 2011).

7 With regard to this movement, Gustaaf Houtman (1999: 8) therefore spoke of a democratization of enlightenment (on the path to *arahanthood*).

esoteric master by practising Gandhāra lore combined with concentration meditation (see Foxeus 2011).⁸ In this way, the concept of the Liberation Era, in its two versions, could provide legitimacy for two different soteriological orientations. The state – especially the parliamentary government led by Prime Minister U Nu – supported the insight meditation movement, while the semi-military, socialist government (BSPP) under General Ne Win suppressed the esoteric congregations in the early 1980s (see Tosa 1996, Foxeus 2011, Pranke 2011).

The supermundane *Ariya* discourse in the field of religion in contemporary Burma

The main currents of the religious field in Burma are, roughly; ‘traditional’ mainstream Buddhism, supported by the state and the Buddhist lay people; the Buddhist esoteric congregations; and the spirit cults (*nat*), whose religious specialists are female and male spirit mediums, or *natkadaws* – ‘wives of the spirits’. The esoteric congregations are situated hierarchically somewhere in between the mainstream Buddhism and the *nat* cults. Moreover, we should add at least two varieties of ‘modern’ Buddhism: rational modern Buddhism, which to a large degree corresponds to the popular insight meditation movement, and esoteric modern Buddhism, which corresponds to some esoteric congregations in the concentration meditation movement (see Foxeus, forthcoming). However, the reality is not as neat as this picture might suggest, and there are many overlaps, tensions, and interlinkages between the various currents and established forms of the religion. Moreover, these segments or subfields do not only stand in hierarchical relationships to one another, but also form hierarchies internally.⁹

The versions of Buddhism associated with the monastic community are generally ascribed greater authority, and represent different facets of an ideology with a more or less hegemonic status in Burmese society. Being naturalized, its privileged status is taken for granted (see Brac de la Perrière 2009a). These facets are mainly constituted by traditional mainstream Buddhism and rational modern Buddhism (cf. Gravers 2012, Schober 2011). In Burma, just as in other Theravāda Buddhist countries, the varieties of modern Buddhism

8 For more on the concept of *weizzā/weizzādhour* and the Gandhāra lore, see below. For a comparison of these two movements, see Foxeus, forthcoming.

9 For more on hierarchies among the *nat* cults, see Brac de la Perrière 2009b.

emerged in response to colonization and modernization in the nineteenth century (see Lopez 2002, Braun 2008, Houtman 1990, Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1990, King 2002, Kirichenko 2009). The most typical and well-known form of modern Buddhism is the rationalist version, which is strongly informed by a Protestant model of religion and emphasizes doctrines, anti-ritualism, canonical texts, and religious experience, and which is regarded as compatible with Western science; it downplays supernatural powers and the miraculous and mythological dimensions of Buddhism. Moreover, rational modern Buddhism represents an adaptation to modernity and Western post-Enlightenment rationality.¹⁰ In response to criticism raised by Protestant missionaries against Buddhist ‘superstition’ in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some scholastic monks, especially Ledi Hsayādaw (1846–1923), presented Buddhism as a kind of rational philosophy, claimed to be not merely compatible with Western science, but superior to it and to Christianity. Ledi Hsayādaw emphasized the relevance of a doctrinal form of Buddhism for the Buddhist laity (see Braun 2008, Kirichenko 2009). Accordingly, he disseminated to the lay people a simplified version of what had previously been the prerogative of the elite community among the monks, *viz.* sophisticated and intricate Abhidhamma philosophy and insight meditation.¹¹ He was the first person to organize lay people in the study of the Abhidhamma, and created lay groups to this end throughout Burma. In the idiom of modern Buddhism, this study would enable the Buddhist laity to make spiritual progress ‘in this very life’ (Braun 2008: 295). This rational and doctrinal form of Buddhism was initially popular among the emerging middle-classes in Burma, and a comparable development occurred in Sri Lanka during the same period (see Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1990). It was not until the early post-independence period, starting in 1948, that the two currents of Buddhist meditation turned into large-scale movements.

10 Traditional mainstream Buddhism presupposes a clear and unambiguous divide between the monastic community and the Buddhist laity; it stresses the merit-making activities of the Buddhist lay people, especially giving alms to the monks, and the observance of a few Buddhist precepts. This is Buddhism as *sāsana* – that is to say, as grounded in society and as a social fact. Modern Buddhism, by contrast, is ‘Buddhism’ as a *bhāthā*, a ‘religion’, *viz.* as informed by the Protestant model, emphasizing a set of doctrines, and able to be separated from its social context (see Kirichenko 2009, Houtman 1990, see also Brac de la Perrière 2009a).

11 For more on the history of insight meditation in Burma, see Pranke 2011.

In contemporary Burma, especially in urban areas, rational modern Buddhism is very influential, and is manifested in what I elsewhere (Foxeus, forthcoming) have referred to as the *ariya* discourse, a ‘discourse on the noble’. This discourse is coextensive with the supermundane (P. *lokuttara*) dimension of Buddhism, and is contrasted with the mundane dimension (P. *lokiya*). The latter is concerned with worldly matters such as luck, protection, success in life, curing ills and afflictions, and acquiring supernatural powers (cf. Tosa 1996). While the supermundane dimension is typically perceived as a superior form of Buddhism, the mundane is at best viewed as a lower form of Buddhism, or even as non-Buddhist. The practices of the esoteric congregations are mainly concerned with this mundane dimension. The supermundane dimension, as articulated in the *ariya* discourse, emphasizes ‘doctrines’ extracted from the canonical texts, Abhidhamma, and the practice of insight meditation, both by the monks and the lay people. Linked to the expectations concerning the soteriological prospects opened by the Liberation Era, the early postcolonial period was sometimes envisioned as the *Ariyā Weizzā* Era – the ‘Era of Noble Knowledge’ (see Foxeus 2011). The gradual noble path (P. *ariyamagga*) to enlightenment and nirvana is typically understood in terms of the four noble truths, the three characteristics of existence, the eightfold path, the practice of meditation, and the four noble ones (P. *ariyapuggala*) who attain various degrees of enlightenment, viz. the stream-entrant, once-returner, never-returner, and the Buddhist saint (P. *arahant*).¹² The last of these has attained nirvana, and the highest possible form of enlightenment for the Buddha’s disciples, viz. his ‘hearers’ (P. *sāvaka*). This path is what Ledi Hsayādaw (1985: 293) refers to as *ariyā-weizzā* (P. *ariyavijjā*), the ‘noble knowledge’, in his well-known *Vijjāmagga Dīpanī*, ‘Explanation of the Path to Knowledge’. It could be added that this form of Buddhism is similar to what could be called ‘textbook Buddhism’, that is, a simplified, doctrinal form of Buddhism as described in the introductory books on Buddhism which are typified by Walpola Rahula’s seminal book *What the Buddha Taught*, originally published in 1959. From the point of view of this *ariya* discourse, even traditional mainstream Buddhism may be downgraded (see Houtman 1990, Foxeus 2011).

In Theravāda Buddhism, this supermundane *ariya* path was originally intended for the ordained, viz. monks and nuns, but in contemporary Burma

12 In this scheme, meditation today is almost exclusively understood as the insight meditation (P. *vipassanā*) which may be practised at the meditation centres found throughout Burma.

many lay people have embarked on this path. In the early postcolonial period, insight meditation was favoured by the urban middle-classes, but has later spread to people from all social strata (see Brohm 1957, Jordt 2007).¹³ This form of supermundane Buddhism is therefore frequently regarded as being situated at the top of the hierarchy, and the *nat* cults at the bottom. Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière (2009a) has even described the latter as having a subaltern status, disparaged by both Burmese Buddhists and Western scholars alike.

In contrast to the insight meditation movement, the esoteric congregations emphasized the practice of concentration meditation, which has been ascribed a more dubious Buddhist identity (see Houtman 1990). This movement attracted people of various backgrounds – the middle-classes, politicians, peasants, etc. – but it could be conjectured that the lower strata in society dominated. Both of these soteriological movements consisted predominantly of the Buddhist laity, and represented different versions of modern Buddhism in the sense of being communities of lay Buddhists who have embarked on the path to enlightenment and nirvana, emphasize the practice of meditation to this end, and expect immediate results (see Foxeus, forthcoming). As noted above, I have referred to these forms of Buddhism as rational modern Buddhism and esoteric modern Buddhism. These two forms of lay Buddhism have tended to blur the boundaries between the monastic community and the Buddhist lay people, thereby entailing a ‘monasticization’ of the laity (see Houtman 1990, Turner 2009).

In contemporary Burma, the *ariya* discourse serves, at least in urban areas, as the measure of normative Buddhist values. The lower segments in the hierarchy of the religious field tend to appropriate elements from the supermundane *ariya* discourse as a discursive strategy – or a rhetorical strategy – for acquiring legitimacy, authority, status, and respectability.¹⁴ In post-independence Burma, there seems to have been an increasing tendency to emphasize this supermundane dimension of Buddhism.¹⁵ The esoteric con-

13 Mahāsi Hsayādaw’s insight meditation technique has remained the most popular technique in postcolonial Burma, and goes back to Mingun Hsayādaw (1869–1954) (see Braun 2008: 396–7; Houtman 1990; Jordt 2007).

14 Here ‘discourse’ refers mainly to the ‘official’ presentation of a congregation, in its books as well as by its leaders and some members; it does not necessarily entail that the practice of the members is informed by it, although it can have that implication.

15 The popularity of the insight meditation movement is not the only evidence for the increasing stress on the supermundane dimension; the latter is rather a tendency that pervades the entire religious field. The intervention of the state in the affairs of the Sangha in the early 1980s followed that line (see Schober 2011). Keiko Tosa (2006: 2) maintains that new esoteric congregations tend to underscore a supermundane

gregations are ascribed higher status in proportion to the degree of their assimilation of the *ariya* discourse. The variegated esoteric congregations in particular have been competing with one another over claims to authority, and their success is directly related to the degree to which they have – or claim to have – incorporated the *ariya* discourse into their tenets and practices (cf. Tosa 1996, 2006). However, as Tosa (1996: 242) observes, in some strategic uses of the Burmese words for the supermundane (*lawkuttara*) and mundane (*lawki*) the exact meanings of these words are not always important.¹⁶

The esoteric congregations which have been accorded the highest status are therefore those defining themselves as supermundane congregations and displaying a high degree of *ariya* discourse incorporation. Those with the lowest status, and with the correspondingly lowest degree of assimilation of this discourse, are the mundane, so-called Gandhāra congregations (see below). Dialogue, in terms of mutual exchange, does occur between esoteric currents, and to a certain extent between lower esoteric congregations and the *nat* cults (see Brac de la Perrière 2012). While the supermundane congregations tend to exclude the lower *nats* (the 37 Lords, etc.) altogether, but incorporate the Buddhist gods (P. *deva*) known from the Pāli texts, the lower mundane congregations tend to include both (see Tosa 1996, 2006; Foxeus 2011).¹⁷ At the same time, representatives of rational modern Buddhism, monastic and lay, tend to criticize the esoteric congregations (see Houtman 1990, Patton 2012), especially those of the Gandhāra kind, which are closer to the *nat* cults at the bottom of the hierarchy. The *nat* cult represents the main ‘Other’ in relation to which those who perceive themselves as representing ‘authentic’ Buddhism define and differentiate themselves (cf. Brac de la Perrière 2009a).¹⁸ In this sense, the *nat* cults are indispensable for such identity strategies. Moreover, I agree with Brac de la Perrière (2009a: 188) that all the segments of the religious field, which are distinguished in terms of

orientation. Buddhicizing trends have grown since the 1950s (see Bekker 1989), and have recently entailed situations where many spirit mediums have switched to being mediums of the accomplished Buddhist esoteric masters (see Brac de la Perrière 2012).

16 For instance, some representatives of esoteric congregations may claim to be supermundane as a way to say that they are pious or true Buddhists while maintaining that some other congregations are too mundane as a way of criticizing them (see Tosa 1996: 242).

17 For more on the *nats*, see Spiro 1996.

18 For more on the relationship between the esoteric cults and the *nat* cults, see Brac de la Perrière 2012.

organization, religious/ritual specialists, tenets and practices, and so forth, are 'part of the overarching framework of Burmese Buddhism.'

Burmese esoteric Theravāda Buddhism¹⁹

Let us take a phenomenological view of the notions, practices, and forms of organization of esoteric Buddhism, particularly in contemporary Burma. The practices and notions of the esoteric path represent a curious, creative synthesis or hybrid of a range of sources, such as Theravāda Buddhism, (Indian) alchemy, Daoism (see Pranke 2011), and local practices and concepts. Some of these concepts and practices are shared with other countries in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia (see Crosby 2000). In general, the esoteric congregations represent the most flexible, hybrid, and variegated segment of the Burmese religious field. This could partially be explained by the prevalence of charismatic authority being ascribed to the cult leaders, which tends to enable innovations, as well as the supernatural sources of authority represented by the accomplished esoteric masters. It is the latter to whom we will now turn.

The Burmese word *weizzādhour* (often abbreviated as *weizzā*) is derived from the Pāli *vijjādhara*, 'bearer of knowledge', 'expert in crafts', etc., and will henceforth be glossed as 'accomplished esoteric master'. In contemporary Burma, the path of esoteric knowledge (*weizzā-lan:*) represents an alternative soteriology by which final extinction and enlightenment (P. *bodhi*) as a Buddhist saint or a buddha can ultimately be attained. A mundane accomplished esoteric master is a Buddhist layman or a monk who has attained success in various mundane arts or crafts, typically the Gandhāra lore, and has thereby acquired supernatural powers (P. *siddhi*) such as being able to fly, to be present in two places at the same time, to materialize objects, to predict the future, and so forth.²⁰ This practice is combined with Buddhist morality (P. *sīla*), concentration meditation, and occasionally the observance of vegetarianism. Moreover, to attain success a practitioner should receive instruc-

19 The presentation of the esoteric currents below is based on my own material (see also Foxeus 2011). For other discussions of this phenomenon, see Mendelson 1961a, 1961b, 1963; Ferguson and Mendelson 1981; Pranke 1995, 2011; Rozenberg 2010a, 2010b.

20 In Burma, the 'Gandhāra lore' (P. *gandhāri-vijjā*) usually comprises alchemy based on mercury or iron, esoteric squares, syllabic figures, and medicine (with mantras sometimes being added to this category).

tions from a cult leader, usually through initiation into an esoteric congregation, and/or from an accomplished esoteric master in dreams or during meditation. The latter is a kind of supernormal cognition that is usually referred to as ‘hearing and seeing’ (*akyā-amyin*).

An accomplished esoteric master has undergone an ontological transmutation by which his (for he is invariably a male) lifespan has been immensely prolonged, and he has thereby exited the round of rebirth. Two varieties of this transmutation, or ‘reaching the place of exit’ (*htwek-yap-pauk*), are distinguished: ‘going out alive’ (*ashin-htwek*) and ‘going out [apparently] dead’ (*athay-htwek*). In the former case, typically represented by Bho Bho Aung, the accomplished esoteric master exits the round of rebirth with his mind and body intact. While absorbed in meditation the practitioner may, for instance, suddenly disappear from view and leave his clothes behind. In the latter case, of which one example is Bho Min Khaung, his living consciousness is separated from the body. Having attained the transmutation, the accomplished esoteric master leaves for a hidden abode – typically Mahāmyaing, the ‘Great Forest’, or the slopes of Himalaya, etc. – which only accomplished esoteric masters can see and enter. From such abodes the esoteric masters can communicate with their disciples; they can leave the abode temporarily to enter the human world and possess a human, or they may appear in visual form as apparitions before their disciples to deliver a message or give them orders. In some rare cases, an accomplished esoteric master may even possess a human more or less permanently, thereby making a human body his new embodiment (see Mendelson 1961a, 1961b; Spiro 1982; Foxeus 2011). Having prolonged his lifespan, the accomplished esoteric master will be able to remain in one and the same existence until he attains enlightenment and nirvana as a Buddhist saint or a buddha in the remote future.

In many esoteric congregations in Burma, the myth of the appearance of the Phantom Buddha and the nirvana of Gotama Buddha’s relics at the end of the Buddhist era is very popular. In contrast to the Pāli commentarial tradition (Buddhaghosa), the Burmese version of this cosmic drama is associated with a soteriological eschatology, in the sense that it will provide the last auspicious opportunity for accomplished esoteric masters to attain enlightenment and nirvana as Buddhist saints (see Spiro 1982, Pranke 1995, Foxeus 2011).²¹ Other semi-immortal accomplished esoteric masters seek to

21 In the Theravāda commentarial tradition, Gotama Buddha’s final extinction (P. *parinibbāna*) is divided into three stages: 1) ‘extinction of the impurities’ (P. *kilesa*), which he attained at the time of the enlightenment, 2) ‘extinction of the mental and

attain nirvana when Arimetteyya Buddha arrives.²² Still other accomplished esoteric masters have embarked on the path to buddhahood, and will fare on during innumerable lives until they attain buddhahood (see Pranke 1995, 2011; Foxeus 2011).

An accomplished esoteric master does not only seek to achieve his own personal salvation, but is essentially regarded as a champion of Buddhism and its adherents. Like the Burmese kings, he should work ceaselessly to carry out his duties to promote and defend the Buddha's *sāsana*, on the one hand, and to save all beings, on the other.²³ In this latter duty, he assumes the role of a compassionate *bodhisatta*, a 'future buddha', who saves the beings from suffering, both in the here and now and ultimately. In the former case, he (or an intermediary) typically alleviates their suffering in terms of afflictions caused by supernatural agencies, such as evil spirits, witches, sorcerers, etc. by means of exorcism; and in the latter case, he helps them to achieve release from the round of rebirth.

The majority of the still existing esoteric congregations seem to have been established during the late colonial and early postcolonial eras (1940s–60s), respectively (see Tosa 1996, 2006).²⁴ An esoteric (*weizzā*) congregation (*gain*) is founded either by a person who is considered to have attained complete *weizzāhood* himself or by a person who is able to receive messages and instructions from an accomplished esoteric master operating from a hidden dimension. The esoteric congregations may range from small, loosely organized cult groups with only a few adherents to large-scale congregations with thousands of members.

The accomplished esoteric masters may also transfer power and knowledge to their disciples, either from afar or through possession. This process is called *dhāt-sī*, being 'ridden by power' (or *dhāt-kein*, etc.). As for possession,

bodily factors' (P. *khandhā*), which he achieved when he passed away, and 3) 'extinction of the relics' (P. *dhātu-parinibbāna*) which will take place 5,000 years after the extinction of the mental and bodily factors. According to Buddhaghosa, an image – the Phantom Buddha (*buddha-rūpa*) – will emerge from the relics whereupon the latter will attain nirvana (see Foxeus 2011).

- 22 The hope of attaining enlightenment and nirvana in the presence of Metteyya Buddha is in accordance with the traditional, pre-modern Buddhism of South and Southeast Asia.
- 23 These two tasks are encapsulated in the two phrases *thāthanā-pyu*, which could be rendered as 'work to maintain the Buddhist dispensation', and *thatta-wā-keh*, 'to save all beings'. For more on the duties of the kings in Burma, see Koenig 1990.
- 24 In contrast to monastic organizations, the esoteric congregations are not registered with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Tosa 2006: 2).

a cult leader – male or female – may temporarily transform into an accomplished esoteric master, acquiring his supernatural powers and knowledge. In this way, the esoteric cults mediate between the spirit cults and mainstream Buddhism, and thus represent something in between the two. In a sense, these esoteric cults represent a kind of Buddhicized spirit cult; that is, the idiom of the spirit mediums is appropriated in a context that is defined as Buddhist by practitioners themselves.²⁵ In addition, this hybrid is perceived as more acceptable and legitimate by some urban, middle-class Buddhists. However, the concomitant blurring of boundaries may risk undermining not merely the Buddhist identity but also the status, authority, and respectability of the esoteric cults. Some urban cult leaders today therefore tend to maintain that accomplished esoteric masters never possess their disciples, thereby establishing a distinct boundary *vis-à-vis* the *nat* cults.²⁶

The better-organized congregations require initiation before providing access to their tenets, practices, and books. Through esoteric initiation rituals, in the idiom of transmitting esoteric ‘knowledge’ (*P. paññā*), the initiate acquires supernatural powers (*P. siddhi*) and potencies by means of tattoos, esoteric diagrams (*in, sama*) inscribed with syllables or numbers, power-transfer by slapping the initiate’s hands, and recitation of texts; sometimes the initiation master serves as a mediator between the accomplished esoteric masters and the initiate, transferring powers from the former to the latter. Through the initiation rituals, the initiate is authorized to serve as an exorcist and to initiate others. For instance, the popular esoteric congregation Shway Yin Kyaw Gain has nine initiation levels. The initiates are tattooed with ‘medicine’ of a red colour, saturated with supernatural powers, which is said to have been produced by the congregation’s accomplished esoteric masters. The tattoos of various Buddhist motifs are inscribed on various parts of the upper body, but the colour disappears after some time. Moreover, the initiate ingests water-containing ash from burnt esoteric diagrams (*sama*) inscribed on paper. Women are only allowed to be initiated up to the fifth, while men can reach the higher levels and be entrusted with a tattooing instrument (a long pointed

25 In this way, the exchanges between the esoteric cults and the *nat* cults, determined by the relation of domination and subordination, are sometimes concealed or masked when elements from the latter are incorporated into the esoteric cults, while the reverse holds the other way around.

26 I observed this tendency during fieldwork in upper Burma which I conducted periodically between 2005 and 2008. For more on the relationship between esoteric ritual specialists and the spirit mediums, as well as their respective forms of possession, see Brac de la Perrière 2012.

stick of metal) and medicine, and thereby become authorized to initiate new members. Both women and men can nevertheless serve as exorcists to alleviate disturbances or afflictions (*payawga*) instigated by supernatural agencies such as evil spirits, etc.²⁷ All esoteric congregations offer healing by means of exorcism which is a way of saving the beings, and combating such evil is a way of protecting Buddhism in the world. Moreover, esoteric congregations may offer clients not only exorcism but also healing with traditional medicine.²⁸

It is frequently thought that members' wishes can be granted by the specific accomplished esoteric masters linked to the esoteric congregations (see Foxeus 2011). Moreover, members can learn certain tenets and practices in order to acquire supernatural powers and to attain enlightenment and nirvana. Smaller cult groups that do not require initiation may offer some of the above-mentioned felicities, but may also provide counselling regarding business or family problems, exams, and so forth. Such services are similar to those provided by the spirit mediums (*natkadaw*) of the *nat* cults. For these and other reasons, the cult groups are in general ranked lower than the better organized congregations, and evince more affinity to the *nat* cults.

The historical, pre-colonial background of esoteric Theravāda Buddhism in Burma remains to be investigated. According to John P. Ferguson and Michael E. Mendelson (1981: 74), the cult of the accomplished esoteric masters – as it is known today – represents a relatively late development in Burmese Buddhism, and should be understood as having originated as a 'symbolic reaction to the shock of colonization.'²⁹ In canonical, commentarial, and apocryphal Pāli texts, as well as in local Burmese texts from the eighteenth century onward, the *weizzādhour* is sometimes portrayed as a martial figure holding a sword and furnished with supernatural powers, such as being able to fly in the sky (see Foxeus 2011). Given the sense of threat Burmese people felt regarding the survival of Buddhism under British colonialism in the late nineteenth century (see Turner 2009, Braun 2008), it is not surprising that the powerful figure of *vijjādhara*, armed with weapons, was partly utilized as an anti-colonial figure, and a protector of Buddhism and local traditions. That

27 For more on esoteric initiation rituals and exorcism, see Foxeus 2011, Rozenberg 2012, Spiro 1996.

28 For more on exorcism and healing, see Tosa 2006, Foxeus 2011, Rozenberg 2012. For more on Shway Yin Kyaw Gain and initiation rituals, see Rozenberg 2012, Foxeus 2011.

29 No convincing evidence has yet been presented to disprove their thesis. For a different hypothesis about the origin of this phenomenon in Indian Mahāsiddha cults, see Pranke 2011.

was particularly the case with the figure of Sekyā Min, the world emperor (see below).

The esoteric congregations with the explicit purpose of maintaining and propagating the Buddha's *sāsana* seem to have emerged *ad hoc* as a response to the British colonization of Burma, and its abolition of the monarchy in 1885. The colonization dissolved the symbiotic relationship which had existed between the king and the monastic community and represented the Asokan model's two wheels of the *Dhamma*. According to that model, the king had a duty to promote and maintain Buddhism, and offer the monastic community lavish gifts. Moreover, the kings of Burma were considered to be *bodhisattas* and were bestowed the title of a *cakkavattin* (*sekyā-min:*), *viz.* a world emperor. As a response to the British colonization, a variety of Buddhist lay associations emerged from the late nineteenth century onwards. Perceiving Buddhism to be in danger due to the colonization of the country by non-Buddhist foreigners, these associations sought to assume the responsibility to maintain and promote the Buddha's *sāsana* in the absence of a king (see Turner 2009). As we have seen, another kind of Buddhist lay organization also emerged during this period, *viz.* a number of esoteric (*weizzā*) congregations which likewise sought to support and maintain Buddhism. Some of the esoteric congregations founded in the early post-independence period were characterized by nationalist and fundamentalist trends, and it is to one of these we will now turn.

The *ariyā-weizzā* organization: fundamentalist Buddhism

Colonial powers introduced modernization projects in the colonies which continued in the independent states, and fundamentalist movements later emerged as a reaction to the modern predicament (see Marty and Appleby 1991a, 1991b; Swearer 1991).³⁰ Using religion as a source of identity is frequently considered the hallmark of fundamentalist movements (see Marty and Appleby 1991a, 1991b; Swearer 1991). The *ariyā-weizzā* organization fulfils most of the criteria that Donald K. Swearer outlines for fundamentalist Theravāda Buddhist movements in South and Southeast Asia, such as

30 The diversity of fundamentalist movements has led scholars to speak of similarities between these variegated and heterogeneous phenomena in terms of Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblances' (Marty and Appleby 1991a). Alternatively, we could refer to a set of polythetic criteria to cover this diversity (see Foxeus 2011).

Dhammakāya and Santi Asoke in Thailand. Such movements represent a negative or even aggressive response to modernization; they display a quest for identity (individual, national, and communal); their search for identity assumes the character of a ‘return to the roots’, viz. restoring a primordial condition of unity, certainty, and purity; they have strong, often militantly aggressive, charismatic leaders whose followers perceive themselves to be under threat – as individuals, a community, or a nation; they may have an almost obsessive sense of their unique role or destiny, and can be millenarian in nature; etc. (Swearer 1991: 678, 633; see also Foxeus 2011, 2012).³¹ Moreover, these movements are typically characterized by a nationalism based on religious identity which must be protected against foreign influences, such as postcolonial modernity (see Swearer 1991). As a nationalist slogan of the early twentieth century stated, ‘To be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist.’³² That is, Buddhism has been the main medium through which individual, local, and national identity have been forged. This quest for identity is a focal concern in the *ariyā-weizzā* organization which sought to restore the pre-colonial aristocratic or royal Buddhism, thereby fostering a royal identity among the members. While rationalist modern Buddhism tends to affirm modernization and Western rationality, fundamentalist movements are negative towards it and reject it.

Sekyā Min: an anti-colonial hero

Throughout most of the colonial era, the figure of Sekyā Min (P. *cakkavattin*), the world emperor, mainly represented anti-colonial resistance, and a series of rebellions against the British colonizers were led by people claiming to be this mysterious personage. In postcolonial Burma, millenarian expectations of his return were held in many communities. Sekyā Min was expected to establish a Buddhist utopia of material abundance; for instance, there would be plenty of gold, silver, and rice, and Buddhism would flourish (see Foxeus 2011, Sarkisyanz 1965). According to one prophecy, when Sekyā Min arrives he will ride on an elephant, his queen will ride on another elephant, and a third elephant will carry a *Tipiṭaka* (see Foxeus 2011). Sekyā Min will thus arrive together with his queen to restore both the monarchy and the authentic form of Buddhism, as represented by the *Tipiṭaka*. Some esoteric congrega-

31 For the *ariyā-weizzā* organization, the primordial condition of unity and certainty was represented by the pre-colonial royal traditions of Burma.

32 This nationalist slogan was allegedly coined by the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA) in the early twentieth century (Schober 2011: 66).

tions were founded by individuals believed to be embodiments of this millenarian figure, who was considered to be a powerful accomplished esoteric master, a righteous king (P. *dharmarāja*) and a *bodhisatta*. These congregations typically combined royal symbolism, insignia, pretensions, and conduct, on the one hand, and esoteric notions and practices, on the other. I have referred to these as ‘royal esoteric congregations.’ After a long period of colonization, the royal esoteric congregations aimed to ‘restore’, at least in a minimalist manner, the monarchy that had been abolished by the British in 1885 (see Foxeus 2011, 2012).

The religious currents in early postcolonial Burma were a response not only to the disenchantment with the state’s projects of modernization and nation building, but also to the ongoing impact of the previous colonial period. Such vestiges of colonialism were frequently viewed as a threat, as undermining or contaminating the indigenous culture and Buddhism (see Houtman 1990, Foxeus 2011). The influence of the colonial legacy and the prevalence of Westernizing trends in early post-independence Burma led Michael Aung-Thwin (1989) to speak of ‘Burma’s myth of independence’ or its ‘pseudo independence’ at the time.³³ To gain ‘real’ independence, he explains, it was necessary to purge Burma of its colonial past so that the people could recover their lost identity (Aung-Thwin 1989).

Accordingly, the influx of Western and other foreign ideologies was sometimes perceived as a threat to the survival of Buddhism in postcolonial Burma. Some esoteric congregations, especially the *ariyā-weizzā* organization, used military terminology and titles to underscore the gravity of their mission to defend and support Buddhism, which had been the traditional duty of the Burmese kings.³⁴ Furthermore, Sekyā Min was expected to inaugurate the Liberation Era, a Buddhist millennium in which it was expected that Buddhism would flourish, Burma would be peaceful, and the foreign ideologies would be expelled.

The fundamentalism of the *ariyā-weizzā* organization is partly concerned with some extreme and nationalist features in its ideology. It sought to revive

33 English was still the *lingua franca* in higher education, etc., and Western projects of modernity were dominant in the areas of the economy, politics, culture, law, etc.

34 For instance, in the 1970s and 1980s, the founder of the *ariyā-weizzā* organization conferred military titles on the leaders, and they constituted an ‘army’. Filled with a ‘spirit of patriotism’, they were to protect the Buddha’s *sāsana* and their culture, traditions, country, nationality/race, etc., irrespective of whatever dangers they might encounter, and were not to hesitate to sacrifice their lives in their work for Buddhism (see Foxeus 2011, 2012).

the royal traditions and the pre-colonial form of Buddhism, at least as they were perceived in the early postcolonial period. For the members of the *ariyā-weizzā* organization, the pre-colonial form of Buddhism in combination with esoteric notions and practices mainly served as important sources of identity at a time when Buddhism and local traditions were perceived as being threatened by foreign influences. Furthermore, the members were constituted as the Great Elect, and represented a moral, millenarian, royal, and nationalist community, with the responsibility of safeguarding the survival of Buddhism in the face of the threat of the forces of secularism and modernization in post-colonial Burma. As an implicit criticism of some other forms of Buddhism in post-independence Burma it claimed to represent 'authentic Buddhism'. I have argued that the *ariyā-weizzā* organization constituted an opposition – a counter-discourse – to the prevailing socio-political conditions (in U Nu's Burma and especially during the Ne Win years), and a criticism of the place of Buddhism in society in post-independence Burma (see Foxeus 2011).

Since the 1950s, the *ariyā-weizzā* organization in Burma has waged a Buddhist 'war' against what it perceives to be the enemies of Buddhism. The alleged conflict between Buddhism and its enemies is perceived as a cosmic battle between good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, *dhamma* and *adhamma*. The enemies are here mainly to be understood as foreign, Western ideologies, errant religions, such as Islam, as well as errant governments, and so forth. Although the esoteric organization's discourses on the cosmic battle against the destructive forces are framed in military terminology and the rhetoric of militancy, the 'battle' is mainly fought by members seated in a cross-legged position in pagodas performing ritual violence. Members employ solely supernatural weapons and rituals in their battle. Whether or not there is a battle, and if it has claimed any victims, however, is a matter of belief. The *ariyā-weizzā* organization is, in fact, just as anti-colonial and anti-Western as the anti-colonial rebellions during the British era, but its battle has taken on cosmic proportions and is waged by supernatural means (Foxeus 2011, 2012).

The ariya discourse in the ariya-weizzā organization

Traditional esoteric congregations are not primarily concerned with soteriology but are typically limited to the apotropaic dimension of Buddhism, such as exorcism and traditional medicine. For instance, the mundane Gandhāra congregation Shway Yin Kyaw Gain does not give instructions for practice designed for the attainment of enlightenment and nirvana. The members are merely provided with the means to serve as exorcists (see also Rozenberg

2012). We could refer to these congregations as traditional esoteric congregations with an apotropaic orientation. By contrast, the *ariyā-weizzā* organization represents a modern form of Buddhism; more precisely esoteric modern Buddhism. Like the representatives of rational modern Buddhism in the insight meditation movement, the congregation consists predominantly of Buddhist lay people who have embarked on the path to enlightenment and nirvana, practice meditation, and expect immediate results (here: transmutation, supernatural powers, etc.). This is a supermundane congregation with both a soteriological and apotropaic orientation (the members can serve as exorcists).

The *ariyā-weizzā* organization was founded by a layman – a former military officer – in the late 1940s, and the members refer to him as the ‘Exalted Royal Father’ (*khamedaw-hpayā*).³⁵ The founder, who was ascribed charismatic authority by his followers, was – and is still – believed to be an ‘incarnation’ of Sekyā Min, as well as a future Buddha, a *dhammarāja* and an accomplished esoteric master.³⁶ Symbolically restoring the monarchy in accordance with the Asokan model and its two wheels of the *Dhamma*, the hierarchical organization of the congregation was – at least nominally – complete with minor vassal kings and other royalties, such as a chief queen and crown prince at each local centre, and it also had a small community of monks with its own hierarchy. Moreover, the members were ascribed a royal identity and understood to be part of a royal family. The congregation’s practices are part of a fully-fledged Theravāda Buddhist *bodhisattayāna*, a ‘vehicle of future buddhas’ (see Foxeus 2011). Adopting the soteriological model of the Burmese kings, the *ariyā-weizzā* organization’s self-image is one of a moral community of *bodhisattas*.³⁷

The tenets and practices of the *ariyā-weizzā* organization are claimed to represent ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ Buddhism³⁸ as distinguished from traditional or inherited Buddhism.³⁹ Some leaders described the latter as a rather simple

35 I conducted fieldwork in Burma periodically from 2005 to 2008, both in Upper and Lower Burma. Due to the nature of the *ariyā-weizzā* organization, I have decided to alter its name and render my informants anonymous.

36 The founder passed away in 1999, but the members believe that rather than dying he underwent a transmutation and left for a hidden abode.

37 The kings modelled their soteriological careers on the narrative of Gotama Buddha. For more on this model for the kings, see Koenig 1990. For more on Gotama Buddha’s path to buddhahood as a model for esoteric congregations, see Foxeus 2011.

38 *ta-keh.bouddha-bhāthā*.

39 *mi-you:hpalā-bouddha-bhāthā*.

form of practice in terms of merit-making (giving alms-food to the monks, etc.) and the observance of some Buddhist precepts.⁴⁰ While that represented a kind of passive form of Buddhist practice, both the esoteric congregation and the insight meditation movement, by contrast, claimed to represent more active forms of practice requiring effort, resolution, and commitment (see Houtman 1990, Foxeus 2011). The esoteric congregation's 'authentic' form of Buddhism is said to be largely derived from a supernatural and likewise esoteric source of authority, *viz.* the accomplished esoteric master U Dhammasāri and his Golden Book.⁴¹ The founder claimed to have learnt about the content of this book in the hidden country of the semi-immortal accomplished esoteric masters. In contrast to pre-colonial Buddhism, but like modern Buddhism in general, the *ariyā-weizzā* organization is 'doctrinal', framing its tenets in *Abhidamma*-style terminology.

The *ariyā-weizzā* organization's tenets and practices are thus characterized by a high degree of *ariya* discourse assimilation. In line with the quest for authentic Buddhism, its esoteric tenets and practices – by which both mundane and supermundane *weizzā*hood, as well as *arahanthood* and buddha-hood can be attained – are qualified as *ariyā* (P. *ariya*) 'noble', 'pure'.⁴² For instance, the founder's 'second book', entitled *Ariyā-weizzā Paṭipāt Dhāt-tek-sin-kyan* (1997), 'The Development of Dhāt and the Practice of Noble Esoteric Knowledge', underscores doctrines such as the four noble truths, the eightfold path, the noble path of the four noble ones, the wrong notion of personality belief (P. *sakkāya-ditṭhi*), and so forth. Moreover, the members must vow to observe the rather austere 'noble discipline' (P. *ariya-sikkhā*), an essential element of which is the vow to seek to fulfill perfections (P. *pāramī*) to attain final release from the rounds of rebirth in one of five modalities of enlightenment.⁴³ The emphasis on moral discipline is in accord with several

40 This form of Buddhism is what has been referred to as traditional mainstream Buddhism above.

41 U Dhammasāri is regarded as a monk. Hence, like the modern lineage of insight meditation monks (see Houtman 1990), monastic authority is emphasized in esoteric Buddhism as well. In general, many founders of esoteric congregations are said to have been monks, or the esoteric knowledge disseminated in esoteric congregations is claimed to be derived from monks (see Tosa 2006).

42 A variety of supernatural powers can also be acquired by means of these practices (see Foxeus 2011).

43 At the initiation rituals, every member must make a vow to observe the noble discipline for the rest of their lives as follows: 1) to observe the five Buddhist precepts (P. *sīla*), 2) to take refuge in the Three Jewels, 3) to pay respect to the Five Eternities (Buddha, *Dhamma*, *Sanḅha*, teachers, and parents), 4) to support and defend the

new Buddhist movements in Southeast Asia (see Schober 1995), including fundamentalist ones (see Swearer 1991). Moreover, the congregation's most important practices are its own meditation techniques, the generic name of which is *ariyā-weizzā-paṭipāt*, the 'noble esoteric practices'. These consist of five main meditation practices and three auxiliary ones, most of which are peculiar 'tantric' visualization techniques classified as concentration meditation.⁴⁴ Such visualizations include the practitioner temporarily transforming into the Buddha, a cosmic Buddha influencing the whole world, or into a mighty world emperor combating the anti-Buddhist forces (see Foxeus, forthcoming).⁴⁵

The *ariya* discourse represents a purist orientation, aiming to criticize or eliminate what are perceived as non-Buddhist elements, such as the Gandhāra practices. For the *ariyā-weizzā* organization, qualifying its tenets and practices as *ariya* thus serves as a discursive strategy to present itself as a supermundane congregation. This discourse therefore posits the congregation as being superior to the majority of the other esoteric congregations, which are typically concerned with mundane Gandhāra lore.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Since the colonial period in Burma, the supermundane *ariya* discourse spread and became increasingly relevant for the Buddhist lay people, especially through the effort of the famous monk Ledi Hsayādaw. His dissemination of a simplified version of the abstract and scholastic form of Buddhism which had previously been reserved for an elite in the monastic community was to

Buddha's *sāsana* and save all beings, 5) and to seek to attain one of five kinds of enlightenment (P. *bodhi*) and nirvana as a Buddha or a saint. These vows are renewed at every communal ritual. The majority of the male members have made *bodhisatta* vows to attain enlightenment as a buddha.

44 All but two of these altogether eight practices are visualization techniques. According to the congregation, to attain sainthood and buddhahood it is also necessary to practice insight meditation, at least in the final stages.

45 Moreover, like other supermundane congregations, the *ariyā-weizzā* organization excludes the lower *nats* but includes the Buddhist gods (P. *deva*, *brahmā*) in its rituals.

46 For other supermundane esoteric congregations employing this strategy, see Tosa 1996: 242. In its more or less explicit criticism of the Gandhāra lore, the *ariyā-weizzā* organization sides with many practitioners of insight meditation, who disparage these practices as being non-Buddhist (see Houtman 1990: 186; Patton 2012).

a large extent motivated by an urge to defend Buddhism against criticism from Christian missionaries. In the postcolonial period, the *ariya* discourse – this simplified, doctrinal textbook Buddhism – was disseminated by the insight meditation movement, etc.; it represented a rational form of modern Buddhism and became an influential force in the religious field. In the colonial era and the early post-independence period, the *ariya* discourse seems mainly to have been popular among the Burmese middle-classes, but today has spread to people across all the social strata. The notion of the Liberation Era – specified as the Era of Insight Meditation – served as a conceptual framework to make sense of the Buddhist resurgence in the early postcolonial period, and as a rationale for the relevance of the *ariya* discourse among the Buddhist lay people. Moreover, it provided legitimacy for the concomitant view that anybody could make soteriological progress. Throughout the post-independence period in Burma, we can thus see an increasing trend toward emphasizing the supermundane *ariya* dimension of Buddhism, and a corresponding criticism of the ‘Others’ of this discourse, such as the Gandhāra congregations, the *nat* cults, foreign elements, etc.

For the congregations representing esoteric modern Buddhism that view themselves as supermundane with a soteriological orientation, the *ariya* discourse has served as a discursive strategy to acquire legitimacy, authority, and status. That is, it has served as an idiom by which congregations can claim high status for themselves while criticizing others. As a case in point, the *ariyā-weizzā* organization, characterized by fundamentalist features, sought to revive a simplified form of what was perceived as the authentic aristocratic, pre-colonial form of Buddhism, untainted by foreign ideologies, and it assimilated the *ariya* discourse to a very large degree. At the same time, the congregation’s eclectic form of Buddhism served as a Buddhist bulwark in the congregation’s cosmic ‘battle’ by ritual means against what it feared to be anti-Buddhist forces (Western ideologies, errant religions, technology, etc.) endangering the existence of Buddhism in the world. However, this contest should largely be understood as a way of dealing with (Western) modernity and the corrosive force it was feared to be exerting on the indigenous traditions, culture, and religion. In general, the *ariya* discourse could be said to represent a purist trend in a quest for an authentic Buddhism, one that has had an immense influence on the field of religion in postcolonial Burma.

References

The ariyā-weizzā organization [pseud.]

1997 (1957) *Ariyā-weizzā Paṭipāt Dhāt-tek-sin-kyan*.

Aung-Thwin, Michael

1989 1948 and Burma's myth of independence. In Josef Silverstein (ed.), *Independent Burma at Forty Years: Six Assessments*, 19–34. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University.

Bechert, Heinz

1970 Theravada Buddhist sangha: some general observations on historical and political factors in its development. *Journal of Asian Studies* 29(4): 761–78.

Bekker, Sarah M.

1989 Changes and continuities in Burmese Buddhism. In Josef Silverstein (ed.), *Independent Burma at Forty Years: Six Assessments*; pp. 51–61. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University.

Brac de la Perrière, Bénédicte

2009a An overview of the field of religion in Burmese studies. *Asian Ethnology* 68(2): 185–210.

2009b 'Nats' wives' or children of Nats': from spirit possession to transmission among the ritual specialists of the cult of the Thirty-Seven Lords. *Asian Ethnology* 68(2): 283–305.

2012 Spirits versus Weikza: two competing ways of mediation. *Journal of Burma Studies* 16(2): 149–79.

Braun, Erik Christopher

2008 *Ledi Sayadaw, Abhidhamma, and the Development of the Modern Insight Meditation Movement in Burma*. PhD diss., Harvard University.

Brohm, John Frank

1957 *Burmese Religion and the Burmese Buddhist Revival*. PhD diss., Cornell University.

Crosby, Kate

2000 Tantric Theravāda: a bibliographic essay on the writings of François Bizot and others on the Yogāvacara tradition. *Contemporary Buddhism* 1(2): 141–98.

Ferguson, John P., and Michael E. Mendelson

1981 Masters of the Buddhist occult: the Burmese weikzas. In John P. Ferguson (ed.), *Contributions to Asian Studies* 16; pp. 62–80. Leiden: Brill.

Foxeus, Niklas

2011 *The Buddhist World Emperor's Mission: Millenarian Buddhism in Postcolonial Burma*. PhD diss., Stockholm University.

2012 The world emperor's battle against the evil forces. *Journal of Burma Studies* 16(2): 1–26.

(forthcoming) "I am the Buddha, the Buddha is Me": Concentration Meditation and Esoteric Modern Buddhism in Burma/Myanmar.

Gombrich, Richard, and Gananath Obeyesekere

1990 (1988) *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Gravers, Mikael

2012 Monks, morality and military: the struggle for moral power in Burma – and Buddhism's uneasy relation with lay power. *Contemporary Buddhism* 13(1): 1–33.

Houtman, Gustaaf

1990 *Traditions of Buddhist Practice in Burma*. PhD diss., London University, SOAS.

1999 *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy*. Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

Jordt, Ingrid

2007 *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement: Buddhism and the Cultural Construction of Power*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Keyes, Charles F., Helen Hardacre, and Laurel Kendall

1994 Introduction to Charles F. Keyes, Laurel Kendall, and Helen Hardacre (eds), *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*; pp. 1–16. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

King, Richard

2002 (1999) *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and the 'Mystic East'*. London: Routledge.

Kirichenko, Alexey

2009 From Thathanadaw to Theravāda Buddhism: constructions of religion and religious identity in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Myanmar. In Thomas David DuBois (ed.), *Casting Faiths: Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia*; pp. 23–39. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Koenig, William J.

1990 *The Burmese Polity, 1752–1819: Politics Administration, and Social Organization in the Early Kon-baung Period*. Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, the University of Michigan.

Ledi Hsayādaw

1985 (1898) Vija-magga-dipani. In *Ledi Dipani-paung-hkyup*, vol 2. Yangon: Thathana-yay-u-si-htana-pon-hneik-taik.

Lopez, Donald S., Jr

2002 Introduction. In Donald S. Lopez, Jr (ed.), *Modern Buddhism: Readings for the Unenlightened*; pp. ix–xliii. London: Penguin Books.

Marty, Martin E., and R. Scott Appleby

1991a Conclusion to Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds), *Fundamentalisms Observed*; pp. 814–42. The Fundamentalism Project, vol. 1. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- 1991b Introduction to Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds), *Fundamentalisms Observed*; pp. vii–xiii. The Fundamentalism Project, vol. 1. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Mendelson, Michael

- 1961a The king of the weaving mountain. *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 48: 229–37.
- 1961b A messianic Buddhist association in Upper Burma. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24(3): 560–80.
- 1963 Observations on a tour in the region of Mount Popa, Central Burma. *France-Asie* 19: 780–807.

Patton, Thomas

- 2012 In pursuit of the sorcerer's power: sacred diagrams as technologies of potency. *Contemporary Buddhism* 13(2): 213–31.

Pranke, Patrick

- 1995 On becoming a Buddhist wizard. In Donald S. Lopez, Jr (ed.), *Buddhism in Practice*; pp. 343–58. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 2011 On saints and wizards: ideals of human perfection and power in contemporary Burmese Buddhism. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 33(1–2): 453–88.

Rozenberg, Guillaume

- 2010a *Renunciation and Power: the Quest for Sainthood in Contemporary Burma*. Transl. Jessica L. Hackett *et alia*. New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies.
- 2010b *Les Immortels : visages de l'incroyable en Birmanie bouddhiste*. Vannes Cedex: Sully.
- 2012 Powerful yet powerless, powerless yet powerful: the Burmese exorcist. *Journal of Burma Studies* 16(2): 251–82.

Sarkisyanz, E.

- 1965 *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Schober, Juliane

- 1995 The Theravāda Buddhist engagement with modernity in Southeast Asia: whither the social paradigm of the galactic polity. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26(2): 307–25.
- 2011 *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Spiro, Melford E.

- 1982 (1970) *Buddhism and Society: a Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1996 (1967) *Burmese Supernaturalism*, expanded edition, with a new introduction by the author. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Swearer, Donald K.

- 1991 Fundamentalistic movements in Theravada Buddhism. In Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appelby (eds), *Fundamentalisms Observed*; pp. 628–90. The Fundamentalism Project, vol. 1. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Tosa, Keiko

- 1996 A consideration of *weikza* belief in Burma: the meaning of *lāwki* and *lāwkok-tara* for the *gaing*. *Mizokugaku Kenkyu* 61: 215–42.
- 2006 Weikza beliefs and healing: rituals for the prevention of disease and disaster. Unpublished paper presented at the 2006 International Burma Studies Conference, Singapore.

Turner, Alicia

- 2009 *Buddhism, Colonialism and the Boundaries of Religion: Theravada Buddhism in Burma, 1885–1920*. PhD diss., University of Chicago.

Urban, Hugh B.

- 1998 The torment of secrecy: ethical and epistemological problems in the study of esoteric traditions. *History of Religions* 37(3): 209–48.