

Taking up the Practice:
Conversion and Buddhist identity in New Zealand

By

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Abstract

In a similar fashion to other Western nations, Buddhism is gaining traction in New Zealand. This thesis seeks to answer the question “why do New Zealanders convert to Buddhism?” Implicit within the question is “*how* do New Zealanders become Buddhists?” My chief concern however, is to address the subsequent question “what identity do convert-Buddhists construct for themselves as New Zealanders?”

Employing qualitative sociological methodologies (formal and informal interview with participant observation) I demonstrate a variety of pathways New Zealanders take as they journey towards and embrace Buddhism. While initially using the word “conversion”, I demonstrate that this is not a word (or concept) with which the interviewees easily identify. Rather, “taking up the practice” is a more readily accepted conceptual field of the transformation one undertakes from being “not-Buddhist” to becoming “Buddhist”.

Using methodology informed by narrative analysis, I conceptualize the content of interviews around four factors informed by *Weltanschauung* – worldview – and explore their inter-relationships: practice/ritual (PR), selfhood (SH), belief (BL) and involvement (IN). I demonstrate that having “taken up the practice of Buddhism” interviewees continued to find meaning chiefly in practice/ritual and involvement.

I then locate the interviewees’ auto-narratives within a larger socio-historical narrative, that of Arcadia. I take a position on Arcadia, arguing that it is not only a seedbed for a clearly recognizable myth that shapes New Zealand worldview, but it also serves to be fertile socio-cultural soil into which Buddhism is readily planted. The Buddhist practitioners whom I interviewed, in the main, believed New Zealand to be a “good place to practise Buddhism”. I explore this notion by drawing on Arcadian images, and by identifying four socio-cultural locales where Buddhism can be seen to be taking on parochial New Zealand characteristics.

One articulate interviewee has envisaged New Zealand as a Buddhist Pure Land. I develop the potential of this idea, arguing that the notion of the ideal society, embedded within Arcadia and the Pure Land offer to practitioner-Buddhists a “home” in New Zealand landscapes and social context. In the use of arguments informed by the

field of semiotics, I appropriate the current international marketing slogan of “100% Pure” New Zealand, to conceptualise that Buddhist practitioners may indeed seek to create a “100% Pure Land”. It is in a new “imaginative order” that practitioner Buddhists in New Zealand will continue to create their own identity and find a turangawaewae, a place of identity in which to stand.

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Introduction

“The Western adventure with Buddhism has begun”

Jeffery Paine (2005, 31)

On June 19th, 2007, more than four thousand people filled the Wellington Convention Centre to hear His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama. Around twenty monks and nuns of various Buddhist traditions were clearly recognisable due to their attire. But what of the others in the audience? Were they all Buddhists too? What interest did they have in the Dalai Lama? Had they come to hear the Dalai Lama because he was Buddhist, or for some other reason?

The Dalai Lama has not been the only foreign high-profile Buddhist to visit New Zealand. Others in various traditions, while not commanding the same numbers, visit New Zealand regularly. For example, on December 2nd, 2004, around 120 people attended a public lecture by Stephen Batchelor, well known Buddhist author, in the National Library Auditorium, Wellington.

While New Zealanders’ interest in Buddhist speakers may be readily observable, New Zealanders’ relationship with Buddhism is varied. For example, Tim has been “a Buddhist for thirty years, practising for ten years, although seriously for eight”. Kaye explains why she lives at a Buddhist centre: “I’m here [as a Buddhist at this centre] because of *karma*. I have no other meaning for my existence”. Noel relates: “I had a life changing experience through [Buddhist] meditation teaching. [When I heard the lama

teaching], something just clicked inside and I knew it was for me”. Jenny reveals: “I am only a beginner [in Buddhism]. I don't know much. It will take aeons”. John says: “[my tradition] has its own unique ceremony of going for refuge in the three jewels”.¹

What does it mean for Tim to say that he had been a Buddhist for thirty years, but only practising seriously for eight, or for Kaye to say that *karma* alone is the cause of her “existence”? What “just clicked” inside Noel when he heard the lama’s teaching, and why is Jenny content with such a long time span in gaining knowledge of Buddhism? Indeed, when there is such variety in the way people tell of their relationship to Buddhism, why does John speak of his entrance into Buddhism in the more traditional language of the Buddhist scriptures, that of “going for refuge”?

In the Buddhist scripture *Vinaya-pitaka*, Anathapindika listens to the Buddha expound the Four Truths. When “dhamma-vision, dustless, and stainless” arose within him he declared:

I myself, Lord, am going to the Lord [Buddha] for refuge, to Dhamma, and to the Order of monks. May the Lord accept me as a lay disciple going for refuge from this day forth for as long as my life lasts (in Conze 1954, 20).

In a similar passage, General Siha, a Jain, hears the Buddha preach and in response requests that “the Lord accept me as a lay disciple going for refuge from this day forth”. The Buddha responds: “Now, Siha, make a proper investigation, for it is good that well-known men like you should do so” (in Conze 1954, 21).

I introduce this thesis with these stories to give notice of the possibility of becoming a Buddhist in some sense: both Anathapindika and General Siha chose to take

¹ These are all quotes from notes taken from actual interviews. These interviewees were variously from Napier, Palmerston North, Christchurch and Nelson.

refuge in the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha,^{2,3} as did John, in 2003. Are Anathapindika and General Siha examples of conversion to Buddhism? If so, is the rite of “taking/going for refuge” prescriptive for all subsequent conversions to Buddhism, or are these two examples unique in as much as this was the beginning of Buddhism and all who embraced the Buddha’s teachings were “converts”? Or, as the stories of Tim, Kaye, Noel and Jenny suggest, are there other ways one can become Buddhist and subsequently find new meanings and identity?

While not wanting to delve into the historicity of the two scriptural accounts, I do wish to take up the Buddha’s invitation to “make a proper investigation”, not so much into the dogma of Buddhism or the ontological validity of the Four Truths, but rather into the social outworking of what it means to become a Buddhist. The New Zealanders I interviewed above all understood that they had become Buddhists in some sense. Buddhist scriptures talk of “taking refuge” as an entry rite ritualising conversion. Buddhist tradition offers further possibilities: King Ashoka (r. 273-231 BCE), the Greek King Menander (r. ~155-130 BCE) and more recently Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891-1956),⁴ are all well known examples of conversion into Buddhism.

² Dharma (Sanskrit) equates to Dhamma (Pali). I revert to the English spellings based on Sanskrit rather than Pali throughout the thesis to minimize confusion and ambiguity. Very broadly, “the Buddha” is the awakened one, historically, Siddhartha Gautama, or Shakyamuni. The “dharma” is the teachings of Buddhism, and the “sangha”, in early Buddhist tradition, is the community of ordained monks/nuns. It is common in the literature and practice of Buddhism in the West to use the word “sangha” loosely to include any community of practitioners. Various Buddhist traditions nuance these definitions. I use these terms generically throughout this thesis, with little further definition.

³ I have chosen not to italicize Buddha, dharma, and sangha throughout the thesis acknowledging that these are becoming so much part of mainstream English, that they hardly seem foreign anymore. Likewise with “lama”, which now appears in the Oxford dictionary. I have chosen not to italicize Maori words because Maori is an official language of New Zealand, and Maori words are plainly evident in the New Zealand English dialect.

⁴ Ambedkar was a Hindu untouchable who was the chief architect of India’s post-British constitution. He became India’s first Minister of Law after Independence, and converted to Buddhism on 14th October 1956. He did this formally by taking refuge and the precepts from U Chandramani Maha Thera. He then administered the same rite to approximately 380,000 Hindu untouchables, thus effecting a mass conversion into Buddhism. The ongoing vitality of these conversions has attracted much debate. Nevertheless, today’s Ambedkarite Buddhists could number as many as 7 million.

While conceding that myth has grown around these more notable converts, these examples do demonstrate that conceptually and practically, conversion into Buddhism is possible. How is conversion to Buddhism to be understood in a very different society in a very different time, that is, the society of early 21st century New Zealand? This thesis seeks to reflect on this. This thesis is a sociological enquiry, drawing on qualitative research methodologies to explore what it means to convert to Buddhism, that is, to move from “not-Buddhist” to “Buddhist”. In short, the thesis question is “why do New Zealanders convert to Buddhism”? I wish to explore this question in order to throw some light on what identity so-called convert-Buddhists make for themselves as New Zealanders.

The Project

William James (1842-1910), the pioneering and influential psychologist of religious experience, rightly cautions in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902,1997), that one should distinguish between the origin of religious phenomena and their value: in other words, to judge differently their roots and their fruit. James leans towards the latter, arguing that religious phenomena should preferably be judged by their fruit. Although allowing for overlays of legend, judging from the fruit of Ashoka’s, Menander’s and Ambedkar’s lives, it is reasonable to conclude that their conversions to Buddhism entailed a publicly recognised change from one religious framework of belief and practice to another, that is, Buddhism (the “fruit”). Similarly, in this study, the “fruit” of conversion is the identity that New Zealand converts make for themselves. How now are Tim, Kaye, Noel, Jenny and John going to live as New Zealanders and Buddhists? The “roots” are those effects, both proximal and distal, that led up to the conversion, or in most cases, influenced the process of converting. I seek

not to judge either root or fruit, but to reflect on where the fruit may fit within a New Zealand context.

Buddhism's translation into western contexts is now being well examined by many scholars. I will call on two scholars in particular, Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann, to summarize this western context. Similarly, a vast quantity of academic reflection has been undertaken with regard to religious conversion. Douglas Shantz (2006) has briefly summarized the history of this literature. He concludes firstly, that scholarship has demonstrated that conversion is a very complex matter, "with wide variation in the nature, causes and consequences of conversion experiences" (2006, 29). He also concludes that scholarship has demonstrated that the very meaning of conversion changes in different historical and social settings. This thesis will demonstrate that "conversion" to Buddhism in the historical and social setting of New Zealand is nuanced and innovative.

The unique contribution that this thesis makes to scholarship is that it brings these two areas together – Western Buddhism and conversion theory – and locates this conjunction in the New Zealand context. It is in this three fold intersection that this thesis contributes to the study of New Zealand socio-cultural history. To the best of my knowledge, no study has been done conceptualising these three dimensions, although scholarly reflection on the initial translation of Buddhism into the New Zealand context has been started (see Spuler 2002).

The structure of the thesis

I have structured the thesis in a conventional way consisting of six main chapters and a conclusion. In chapter one I introduce the issues vis-à-vis conversion to Buddhism

in New Zealand and locate this in its broader western Buddhist context, by reviewing the literature. I discuss the methodology I use, and introduce the interviewees of my field research.

Drawing from interviews, published accounts, archaeological data, and archival material, I offer an history of Buddhism in New Zealand in chapter two, arguing that the 1970s was the decade in which the arrival of Buddhism in New Zealand gained momentum. I also discuss what the five-yearly census can reveal in chapter two, raising issues of who might be called a Buddhist.

In chapter three I extensively explore Buddhist notions of conversion, and how the interviewees perceived of their own pathways into Buddhism. I discuss a number of ambiguities that emerge, and conclude that the interviewees indeed reject the notion of “conversion” *per se* and prefer, on the whole, to understand themselves to be “taking up the practice” of Buddhism. Chapter four follows with further discussion of what meaning and identity these “practitioners” then create for themselves. Drawing on narrative theory, I discuss the interviewees’ auto-narratives which reveal they construct a variety of identities as they seek to stabilize their own selfhood.

Interviewees often spoke of New Zealand as a “good place to practise Buddhism”, and I explore this in chapter five, conceptualizing New Zealand social history within the notion of Arcadia, a metaphor of ideal place, drawn from the genus of utopia. I take a position on Arcadia, arguing that it is embedded in New Zealand worldview, and that it offers to Buddhism a socio-cultural framework in which Buddhism can find its place in New Zealand.

To this end I offer in chapter six, four socio-cultural locales in which a parochial New Zealand Buddhism can be identified. In the thesis' concluding section I review my argument emphasising various possibilities for ongoing Buddhist identity and expression. I tie the thesis together by suggesting that a “new imaginative order” in New Zealand may allow Buddhist practitioners a place to stand – turangawaewae – and thus offer them a home in which the self can be stabilised, and identity can be created.

Chapter 1: Sources and Methodology

“The multiple methodologies of qualitative research may be viewed as a bricolage, and the researcher as bricoleur. The bricoleur produces a bricolage, that is, a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation”

Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (1998, 3)

Contemporary Buddhism in New Zealand

This study is chiefly based on the personal stories of Buddhists in New Zealand. I have endeavoured to locate these stories in their socio-cultural context. Buddhism in New Zealand is relatively easy to locate, both at a popular level and within the academy.

An electronic search can turn up over 27,000 hits,⁵ representing over forty distinct Buddhist groups in New Zealand.⁶ Up-to-date websites imply sanghas which are educated and well-resourced, having regular access to computers. Websites function internally to inform sangha of activities, and externally to invite web-surfers and/or seekers to the group. I myself made initial contact with several Buddhist groups this way. Disappointingly, there is no up-to-date attempt to organise an internet Buddhist site where groups and/or individuals can exchange information within the New Zealand context. This seems unusual, as this media has been developed into some sophistication elsewhere (for a Canadian example see Klima 2006).

A number of Buddhist centres send out regular electronic or printed newsletters. Thus one can ascertain “what is going on” and “who is coming to town”. For example,

⁵ On May 1st, 2007, there were 37,600 within “New Zealand only” category of Google’s web search function, when entering “Buddhism”. On June 17th, 2008, there were 27,500 listed. There is nothing significant in this variation, other than to indicate the volume of material available.

⁶ A list of the Buddhist sanghas and centres I refer to in this thesis appears as Appendix 1.

Wellington Insight Meditation sends out a comprehensive electronic monthly email to a mailing list of over 450.⁷ A very small number of centres publish their own magazines. For example, Soka Gakkai (SGI-NZ) publishes a monthly magazine entitled *Focus*, and the Zen Institute of New Zealand publishes a quarterly magazine, *Manawa*. Additionally, both these and several other groups distribute the literature of their international parent bodies. This may imply that they are not yet rooted well in New Zealand, and that New Zealand branches have yet to find a unique identity. For example, when I visited Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO)⁸ centres, my host encouraged me to resource myself with various works of its English founder Sangharakshita; there was nothing they offered me written by any New Zealander.

This derivative characteristic of New Zealand Buddhism should not be surprising. All the Buddhist centres do have a larger global context. Nevertheless, published works are starting to appear that demonstrate a growing degree of local voice. For example, to celebrate the opening of its main meditation hall in 1993, Bodhinyanarama Monastery (Stokes Valley, Lower Hutt) published a commemorative booklet entitled *Community and Responsibility: Buddhist Reflections on Right Living*. Similarly, following the Dalai Lama's 2002 visit to New Zealand, two books were published. *Warm Heart, Open Mind* (2003) contained the edited texts of the Dalai Lama's speeches, published "for a [New Zealand] society searching for means other than aggression and materialism to achieve ... a happier healthier life ... and in order to create a harmonious, peaceful and compassionate society" (2003, 9). The other,

⁷ Wellington Insight Meditation (WIM)'s newsletter is called *Insight Aotearoa* and is perhaps the most widely distributed Buddhist newsletter in the country with a mailing list in mid 2006 of 458 people. 273 of these were to people in the wider Wellington metropolitan area. See <http://www.insightaotearoa.org/>

⁸ There is some ambiguity around the nomenclature for the Western Buddhist Order. It is generally known as "FWBO", that is Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, although technically a "friend" is a title within the Order, and hence the WBO is the sangha of the friends of the Western Buddhist Order. Throughout the thesis I have chosen simply to use the nomenclature FWBO. See Vishvapani, 2001. *Introducing the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order*. Birmingham: Windhorse Publications.

Happiness in a Material World (2002), aimed to “offer practical ways to maintain your relationship with the Dalai Lama, whether he is physically present or not” (Lafitte and Ribush 2002, 10).

These publications serve as depositories of collective memories: they are commemorative, anecdotal, even polemic, with sectarian nuances. I would expect to see more of these publications in the future if the sanghas grow and become more of an explicit market themselves, with significant milestones to commemorate. Indeed, the activities of these groups are varied and often public, and it falls to newspaper reports to provide “a first rough draft of [their] history”.⁹ The Fairfax Group, which owns many of New Zealand’s newspapers,¹⁰ had fifty-two articles in twelve newspapers regarding Buddhism, in the two year period between December 2004 and December 2006. As Buddhism continues to gain a higher profile, I would expect to see more frequent newspaper articles.

Perhaps the most significant popular resource to date has been the production of the film *Buddhism in New Zealand* (2003). This documentary offers an analysis of Buddhism’s emerging cultural place. In some sense it has set an agenda for further study of Buddhism. It demonstrates that interviewing can be a rewarding methodology in not only compiling a historical narrative, but also giving voice to adherents of the Buddhist groups. Hence the documentary also serves as a study in cultural adaptation. In a flyer that accompanied the video, the producers explain:

⁹ This quote is attributed to Phil Graham (d. 1963), former editor of the *Washington Post*.

¹⁰ The Fairfax Group owns *Waikato Times*, *Sunday Star Times*, *Sunday News*, *The Dominion Post*, *The Evening Post*, *The Press*, *The Timaru Herald*, *Evening Standard*, *The Daily News*, *Truth*, *The Southland Times*, *Taupo Times*, *Nelson Mail*, *Whangarei Leader*, *Stuff*, *NZ Herald*, and *Radio New Zealand Newswire*. This covers the urban centres of Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch, Timaru, Invercargill, Taupo, Nelson, Whangarei, Palmerston North and Auckland. National coverage is achieved through its two Sunday papers. <http://www.knowledge-basket.co.nz/newztext/welcome.html> (Accessed 13th February 2007.)

New Zealand is no different to other Western countries which, mostly within the last thirty years, have seen a great influx of Buddhism, resulting in a great array of traditions, ethnicities, and practices. We believed that due to the moderate numbers of centres and temples spread amongst the population here [in New Zealand], we could represent most of the groups and traditions, thereby giving some kind of overview of the country.

Meeting so many people and seeing so much of the different traditions, both ethnic and kiwi¹¹ throughout the country [gave us an] appreciation of just how different the communities are, each keeping to their own tradition and with only the Buddha-dharma in common. We were very often welcomed in with no questions asked, and provided with great hospitality (Broadhurst and Moore 2003).

Twenty two interviews featured in the final one hour cut. The producers, Cameron Broadhurst and Geoff Moore edited the footage thematically: Origins, History, Monastic life, Differences, Tradition and The Future of Buddhism in New Zealand. By choosing these themes, they offer some critical categories by which Buddhism in New Zealand can be understood. In addition, they allowed a bi-partite taxonomy of “ethnic” and “kiwi” Buddhists. This resembles the “ethnic” and “convert” taxonomy originally proposed by Charles Prebish (1979, 1993), or the “immigrant” and “convert” categories of Paul Numrich (1996), which I will take up in chapter two. Both producers are Zen Buddhists and they positioned themselves from inside Buddhism to make the film. This film is a good first attempt at giving an emic voice to Buddhists – both “ethnic” and “kiwi” – as they seek to understand themselves and create meaning and identity. This thesis acknowledges Broadhurst and Moore’s work: it uses similar methodology (interview), but focuses on the convert Buddhists. The documentary does not claim to be an academic analysis of Buddhism. Rather, it serves as a depository of personal interviews from which I also draw. I introduce further categories, namely conversion and identity, and so broaden and deepen this first comprehensive account.

¹¹ I seek throughout the thesis to attempt to avoid using the adjective “kiwi”. However, often it is simply unavoidable, and in some cases will make the context clearer if used. When I do use it (or allow it) – technically it is slang at worst, or colloquialism at best – then it behaves as an adjective or noun pertaining to New Zealand.

In sum, while Buddhism is not voluminously reported on, it is nevertheless easily accessible. New Zealand is not unique in this respect. If one googles Buddhism in any other western country, a similar plethora of possibilities present themselves. Buddhist groups are using electronic, print, and film media to represent and promote themselves, and it is from these that one can start to gain a conceptual picture of Buddhism at the popular level. I have located myself within this popular media to “get a feel” for what is going on in New Zealand. My own methodology draws primarily on interviews of people who are influenced by this popular Buddhism, but who also play a role in shaping it. The most significant popular account to date, and perhaps broadest in its scope, is Broadhurst and Moore’s documentary. However, there is additional critical reflection emerging.

Critical reflection on Buddhism in New Zealand

In the twenty-five years between 1980 and 2005, only six published critical works appeared that included reflection on Buddhism. The first and the last of these were essentially lists of religious groups in New Zealand, edited by Peter Donovan (1980) and Bronwyn Elsmore (2005) respectively. Although using different methodology to arrive at their lists, they both provide time-referenced snapshots as to what religious groups – and for our interests, Buddhist groups in particular – were in New Zealand at the time, or rather, what traditions the authors were able to locate and describe.

Donovan’s book, entitled *Beliefs and Practices in New Zealand* (1980) is originally based on a survey between 1977 and 1980. Contributors did not necessarily speak “officially” or with “binding statements” regarding their group’s belief and

practice. Donovan concedes that the work is “not complete. Some groups preferred not to contribute [and] others we were unable to make contact with” (1985, 1). Regardless of these limitations, the book gives explicit notice that Buddhism was in New Zealand and serves as a first attempt to catalogue Buddhist traditions. Donovan recognized two Tibetan, two Zen, two uniquely “western” forms (FWBO and the Sphere Group¹²), along with two generic Theravadan groups, and two immigrant groups (Sri Lankan and Vietnamese).

Twenty-five years later, Bronwyn Elsmore published *ReligioNZ: A Guide to Religions in New Zealand* (2005). Like Donovan’s work, it is essentially a list of religious groups in New Zealand. However, where Donovan’s work was based on a survey of informants, Elsmore herself wrote the first draft of the entries, then invited each group to check these. She included religions due to “their obvious presence in society” or their “emerging presence, thus presenting a need for fuller description” (2005, 5). To this end she lists sixteen Mahayana groups (excluding Tibetan groups), eighteen Theravadan, and fourteen Tibetan Buddhist. In the short entries, she lists four further Buddhist groups, and three further groups informed by Buddhism. Clearly, the number of traditions had increased in twenty-five years: from ten to fifty-two. I too have sought to identify the groups in New Zealand. I discuss the increase in numbers of individual Buddhists in chapter two. Apart from physically locating each centre, it is difficult to ascertain how many there are, and at what rate they continue to be founded.¹³ Assuming that most can be identified by websites, then sixty identifiable lineages or key centres seems a reasonable number.

¹² The Sphere Group was the group which originally purchased the land which was to become the Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre, Wangapeka valley, south-west of Nelson city.

¹³ How one counts them is also problematic. In my own town of Palmerston North, would I count the Amitabha Buddhist Centre (New Kadampa Tradition) as one centre, or as a dozen or so, due to its wide network of regional home-based weekly meditation and teaching sessions? Alternatively would I count New Kadampa Tradition as only one tradition, or three centres, considering it has major representation in Wellington, Palmerston North and Auckland?

Other descriptive works appeared in the years between 1980 and 2005.

Noteworthy are two attempts to reflect on Buddhism from within a confessional standpoint, a development which in and of itself signals a growing presence of Buddhism. Upasaka Priyananda¹⁴ presented a paper at the Seventh Auckland Religious Studies Colloquium (1981) entitled “The Buddhist Spiritual Community Today” in which he suggested that the future of Buddhism in New Zealand would be based on “fundamental commitment and on appropriate responses to Western culture” (1982, 81).

Implicitly Priyananda pinned his hope on converts, or to use his words, those who “stand alone”, who “make a break with the past, their old way of life, and the groups with which they have been associated” (1982, 81). We know from Donovan’s survey (1980) that there were ethnic/immigrant groups already formed and constituted in New Zealand by 1981. Despite this, Priyananda suggests only one particular non-immigrant Buddhist group – the FWBO – as the potential exemplar of the future of Buddhism in New Zealand. On the basis of this, he calls for an understanding and practice of Buddhism in New Zealand not as an “eastern religion” or “western [religion]” but “universal, applying to all men at all times” (1982, 83).

Priyananda’s hypothesis was not really examined until 2007, when Sally McAra published her work on FWBO’s retreat centre Sudarshanaloka, near Thames (McAra 2007). McAra’s conclusions are consistent with Priyananda’s foresight, in that she demonstrates how a global movement is made local in the New Zealand context (2007, 153). While not explicitly discussing any of the ethnic/immigrant groups, Priyananda implied that they would be deficient in providing an “appropriate response to western

¹⁴ I regret that I have been unable to identify the gender of Upasaka Priyananda. I wish to cause no offence in using male pronouns.

culture” in general, and by implication, to New Zealand culture in particular. Whether this has been the case or not is still open for investigation. In addition, Priyananda may have been naïve to have expected Buddhism amongst New Zealand converts to be shaped within only one tradition. He could be excused however when one recognises that he was speaking in 1981, merely a year after Donovan had attempted to document Buddhism for the first time: Priyananda may simply not have known of any other groups.

The second inside reflection on Buddhism in New Zealand appeared in another edited work by Donovan in 1990, entitled *Religions of New Zealanders*. Ajahn Viradhammo, founder and senior monk at Bodhinyanarama Buddhist Monastery in Stokes Valley, wrote the essay on Buddhism. Viradhammo gives a brief narrative history of Buddhism commencing with the Otago Chinese goldminers of the 1860s. He is the first to distinguish explicitly between the Buddhism brought by Asian immigrants and the Buddhism of converts. First proposed by Charles Prebish in 1979, this distinction had by 1990 become more widely accepted in western countries (Baumann 2002b, 52). Viradhammo demonstrates the possibilities of these categories by including two lengthy personal testimonies: Robin, a convert from a fifth-generation Canterbury sheep-farming family, and Ramani, a Sri Lankan immigrant. Perhaps Viradhammo was well placed to make this distinction, himself being of Latvian refugee descent, and born in Germany. In sum, Viradhammo recognised that there were two types of Buddhists in New Zealand, namely immigrants (“those who have grown up within countries steeped in Buddhist civilization”), and “those who are New Zealand born” (1990, 35). By 2003, Broadhurst and Moore used the distinction to give structure to their video documentary.

Robert Ellwood, writing in 1993, made this bifurcation as well, but only implicitly. In *Islands of the Dawn: The Alternative Spirituality of New Zealand* (1993), he locates the emerging Buddhist expressions as “types of 1960s alternative spiritual groups”, classifying them with those of “eastern religious background”, together with groups of Indian origin, yoga schools, and Baha’i (1993, 215). Ellwood was concerned to write a bigger narrative of alternative spirituality, and hence the Buddhism of immigrants was outside the scope of his book, presumably because he deemed it not to be “alternative” in some sense. In 1993, Ellwood identified (i) Theravadan Buddhism (particularly the Bodhinyanarama centre), (ii) Vipassana Meditation, prioritizing the S.N. Goenka tradition, (iii) Zen, identifying several emerging strands, and (iv) Vajrayana, naming the Dorje Chang Institute, and the Karma Kagyu Trust. All of these were traditions of Western expression, rather than locations of immigrant (or “ethnic”) identity. Like Priyananda (1982), Ellwood particularly notes the potential role of FWBO, because he believed it to be “modern, eclectic but effective Buddhism” concerned with “overcoming traditional divisions of Buddhism” (1993, 238).

Ellwood was perceptive to note that Buddhism in New Zealand in the 1960s was in some sense part of the hippy movement. He argues that New Zealand’s social receptivity to “alternative religions” (including Buddhism) may well be due to its similarities to the nineteenth-century American West, particularly California (1993, 191). New Zealand was settled by a working class which was being alienated from the church. Additionally, like the American West, New Zealand’s miners, loggers and cowboy cultures precluded much priority on religious institutionalism: religious institutions made little mark on the hinterland. Additionally, New Zealand tended to be settled by individuals, rather than large groups of immigrants, and therefore there was

little impetus to gather around church or synagogue (Ellwood 1993, 191).¹⁵ Hence any institutional presence of Buddhism was only faintly noticeable in the mainstream culture by the 1950s, where at best a loose network of enthusiasts were reading the Beat poets from America (~1948-1959), or more general Eastern literature. This was also well before the days of liberal immigration policies which allowed entry to comparatively large numbers of Asian immigrants (from the mid-1980s) who were to bring their Buddhism with them. Michelle Spuler (2002) draws some similarities with Australia during these early years, suggesting that there were a number of study groups in both Australia and New Zealand, mainly secular in orientation, which were meeting to study translated Buddhist texts and to debate eastern philosophy, although there is no evidence to suggest there were any formal links between the two countries (2002, 140). I build on Ellwood's preliminary history in chapter two, and argue that the 1970s was a decade in which these initial Buddhist stirrings took shape in an institutional presence.

Indeed it was Michelle Spuler who began to conceptualise Buddhism in New Zealand as more than a derivative of the 1960s' appropriation of things Eastern. In 1998, she gave notice to the American Academy of Religion that Buddhism in New Zealand was now worthy of unique critical reflection. Spuler noted that there were "few historical accounts exploring the reasons behind the current state of affairs [of Buddhism in New Zealand]" and she regarded Viradhammo's essay (1990) as "the authoritative (that is, only) published work in this area" (2002, 139). Spuler began to fill this gap. She drew on census data, interview and archival sources, and contrasted Buddhism in New Zealand to the growth of Australian Buddhism in particular. She

¹⁵ Whether Ellwood's thesis about individuals settling New Zealand is defensible or not is debatable. There is much debate amongst New Zealand historians as to how "atomized" – to use Miles Fairburn's word – immigration actually was. I pick up on this debate in chapters two and elsewhere.

assumed an inevitable conversation between each country: “many major events occurred approximately ten years later in New Zealand than in Australia” (2002, 141).

In bringing critical reflection to the study of Buddhism in New Zealand, Spuler notes that Christopher Queen’s threefold identification of emerging American Buddhism, namely democratization, pragmatism and engagement (Williams and Queen 1999, xix), are “similar to those identified elsewhere”, that is, in other Western countries (2002, 145). She comes to similar conclusions for Australia, but she is wary that this threefold paradigm is still only germinal. Whether Queen’s threefold model is transportable to the New Zealand context is yet to be determined. Suffice it to say that Spuler was the first to theorize about the development of Buddhism in New Zealand, and opened the door for others to follow.

Since Spuler wrote in 2002, much has happened in the development of Buddhism in New Zealand. In my own essay *How the Dharma Landed: Interpreting the Arrival of Buddhism in New Zealand* (2007), I sought to build on Spuler’s work by doing three things: conceptualizing the historical arrival of Buddhism in New Zealand, interpreting the emerging contours of both ethnic and immigrant Buddhist traditions, and locating Buddhism in New Zealand’s socio-cultural context, raising possibilities for its future expression. This thesis continues to develop these ideas into a more robust framework. My underlying aim is to respond to the call for “new theoretical frameworks, approaches, analytic tools, and ways of doing scholarly work” (Koppedrayar 2003), by addressing issues of conversion to Buddhism by New Zealanders and subsequently to explore what identity New Zealanders appropriate from Buddhism.

To this end, some work has recently been done. Sally McAra did an anthropological study of Sudarshanaloka, a FWBO centre located in the Tararua valley, north of Thames. Her study was published in 2007, entitled *Land of Beautiful Vision: Making a Buddhist Sacred Place in New Zealand*. McAra does not explicitly articulate that she has responded to or is testing Priyananda's or Ellwood's prediction that FWBO would be in the forefront of Buddhist cultural adaptation to New Zealand. Nevertheless, she argues that members of FWBO "transform their property into what they call a 'spiritual home'" (2007, 65). I too have found that "home" is a concept of which convert Buddhists readily talk. By appropriating Buddhist traditions alien to the dominant culture, McAra argues that in Sudarshanaloka, the members are critiquing their wider socio-cultural situation, "especially what they see as Western society's characteristic alienation from the Truth, and its consequent spiritual lacunae". By consciously employing narratives about the "mythic dimension", and by referencing themselves in relationship to the land, McAra argues that "in their use of both 'native' FWBO and 'alien' knowledge, they engage in a bricolagic creation of a Buddhist environment and community. Through these practices, members are inventing a Buddhist 'sacred place' while creating themselves as a community" (2002, iii).

The possibility of Buddhists finding meaning in sacralizing New Zealand landscapes was raised earlier by Erich Kolig, who did field work in 1996 with regard to the building of a *stupa* on the Otago peninsula. His paper "Recycling Charisma and the Sacralization of the Landscape: A Buddhist Stupa in Dunedin, New Zealand" (1997), describes the context and process for the "controlled and meticulously planned creation of a 'sacred site'" where both landscape and architecture are sacralized, and personal charisma – in this case, that of the deceased Geshe Dhargyey – is incorporated. The project was multi-intentional: the *stupa* served as reliquary, memorial, and votive

offering (Snodgrass in Kolig 1997, 2003), with the hope that the *stupa*, as a fixture in a particular place, would become a pilgrimage site and an object of veneration. Kolig places the event in a broader social context than the Dunedin Dhargyey Buddhist community which sponsored the construction. He demonstrates that three groups of people interpreted the establishment of the *stupa* differently: the Buddhists, the Maori (as represented by elders of the local tribe), and pakeha¹⁶ (as represented by both converts and local regional planning regulations), thus allowing for a “multi-vocality of ritual [and] sacred site” (1997, 201). This conceptual challenge, particularly Buddhists’ sacralization of location (particularly landscape) and the imagining vis-à-vis “home”, I too pick up and expand in this thesis, broadening both Kolig’s and McAra’s ideas.

This “multi-vocality of ritual [and] sacred site” (Kolig 1997) presumes a transferability of ideas and values, both in the shaping of the event of the establishment of the *stupa*, and its ongoing significance as a fixture on the Otago peninsula. These and similar concepts of identity and meaning have been highlighted by Suzette Major (2003). Major explores the domain of ideas as “a type of product”, seeking to demonstrate the “distinctiveness of ideas” vis-à-vis marketing. While the inclusion of a Buddhist group did not dominate her research project, Major none the less demonstrates that Buddhist ideas are “marketable”, or at least able to be promoted within categories more familiar to marketing.

¹⁶ I have chosen to use this term periodically in the thesis as it has become part of accepted New Zealand English dialect. It is originally a Maori word, believed to mean “non-Maori”, but in common usage it means New Zealanders of European (usually British) descent, that is “white”, or more often than not, ethnically Caucasian New Zealanders born in New Zealand. I am making a distinction between “European New Zealanders” (relatively recent immigrants) and “pakeha New Zealanders” (third, fourth, fifth generation New Zealanders who are ambivalent about their European ancestry and who identify primarily with a south Pacific identity). Pakeha are descendents of what Keith Sinclair calls the “native born”. Keith Sinclair, 1986. *A Destiny Apart: New Zealand's Search for National Identity*. Wellington: Allen and Unwin New Zealand Ltd.

Major offers five conceptual domains of ideas, summarised as immateriality, interminability, omnipresence, transferability and *Weltanschauung* (worldview). These are what set ideas apart from goods and services. More precisely, immateriality concerns the intangibility of ideas; they have no physical properties. Interminability concerns the temporal property of ideas, in particular “their timeless and endless nature”. Omnipresence is about the metaphysical realm of ideas where ideas have spatial properties but nonetheless are universally accessible and not tied to any one individual or organization. Transferability indicates “the portable and viral nature of ideas”, and *Weltanschauung* describes fundamental shifts in a person’s lens through which they see the world as they consume an idea (Major 2003, 228).

Developed in a New Zealand context with New Zealand institutions, Major offers to the study of Buddhism a conceptual framework for its potential for dissemination as “an idea”. Major suggests that “idea offerings may be limited to those products which concern a way of looking at the world” (2003, 241). In other words, the “marketing” of Buddhist ideas in a New Zealand context is a theoretical possibility: could the building of the *stupa* on the Otago peninsula be a test case for Major’s thesis, in that it could be argued that all five conceptual domains of ideas were at play? In other words the intangible “idea” of Buddhism, with its “timeless and endless” characteristics has been authenticated in New Zealand by the building of a *stupa*, demonstrating a worldview shift in a group of local Dunedinites (associated with the Dhargyey lineage), as well as offering a multivocal sacralized site that will continue to influence new possibilities vis-à-vis worldview for those who wish to access it.

This transferability of Buddhist ideas and worldview has been well noted in a study conducted in 1991 by Margaret McKee, entitled *Taking the Dharma into their*

Lives: A Study of New Zealand Women who have Chosen to Undertake Buddhist

Practice. McKee used both quantitative and qualitative methodology, limiting the project to sixty two women living in Christchurch and Dunedin, and “exclude[d] those who were born into a Buddhist family” (McKee 1991, 6), implying a tacit agreement with the convert/ethnic bifurcation. In effect McKee’s study is the first project specifically researching conversion into Buddhism *per se*. While defining her sample as women “who have chosen to undertake Buddhist practice” – as opposed to believers, or adherents – she unequivocally argues that the word “conversion” is both acceptable and usable for their movement into Buddhism, where “conversion” is defined tightly within William James’ classic definition¹⁷ and James Fowler’s stages of faith (1981). While consistent with these definitions, her discussion of conversion is only part of a broader discussion of New Zealand women’s appropriation of Buddhist techniques for a variety of psychological and social ends. She concludes that

their conversion tends to be gradual and volitional. Since most of the women in the survey have approached Buddhist practice through disillusionment with their lifestyle or after years of searching other spiritual paths, a gradual acceptance of it is to be expected. A gradual acceptance is also in accordance with the supposedly logical nature of Buddhist teachings which are usually taken in steps (1991, 54).

McKee’s work prefigures much of my own in this study, and at first reading could well be interpreted by Lewis Rambo’s process model of conversion (1993), which I also discuss. Where McKee prioritised a quantitative methodology of survey, I have arrived at my conclusions using different analytical tools. I have then taken my findings

¹⁷ “To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denoted the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. This at least is what conversion signifies in general terms, whether or not we believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring a moral change about”. In William James, 1997. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Touchstone/Simon and Schuster. 186.

further than McKee's by exploring subsequent identity that New Zealanders create for themselves, especially with respect to socio-cultural and geographical location.

I have also chosen to look at Buddhism in New Zealand from a new angle. An in-depth examination of the lives of Buddhists in New Zealand has not been attempted before using narrative methodology. To elicit narrative from interviewees, I have used qualitative strategies. I acknowledge that both qualitative and quantitative methodologies provide unique and valuable insights into social phenomena, but also note that the types of conclusions each reveal are methodologically beyond the reach of the other. Thus I understand them to be complimentary. Qualitative methodology has been used in studies on religion in New Zealand (for example Rountree 2004) and in other studies of Western Buddhism (for example Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994, Capper 2002, Kennedy 2004).

In summary, I have outlined the New Zealand sources available for the study of Buddhism in New Zealand, and described in more detail those in which I locate this project. Michelle Spuler (2002) was the first scholar to make an attempt to interpret the bigger picture vis-à-vis Buddhism in New Zealand. She has done this informed by theory drawn from American sources, and while explicitly making comparisons with Australian Buddhism – if for no other reason than “geographical and cultural proximity” (2002, 139) – she does outline and highlight a unique New Zealand history and demographic. What is clear from both the popular media and the critical literature, is that “Buddhism in New Zealand” is recognisable. There is also an acceptance – sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit – of the convert and ethnic juxtaposed categories. Additionally, a variety of methodologies have been used: simple lists, surveys, and qualitative strategies. The paucity of research generally has precluded a

robust development of any of these methodologies. The work that has begun is located loosely within the academic sub-field of “Western Buddhism” (Prebish 2002), and is in response to the call for the study of Buddhism outside of Asia. This is a call to recognise “new configurations of Buddhist expressions resulting from adaptations, adoptions, appropriations, [and] immigration patterns [which] demand the use of new theoretical frameworks, approaches, analytic tools, and ways of doing scholarly work” (Prebish and Baumann 2002, Koppedrayar 2003).

This thesis primarily works with new empirical data and locates this within three fields: Western Buddhism, conversion theory, and New Zealand social history. The above discussion has outlined the context for this thesis within the popular media, and the historical development of the critical appraisal of Buddhism in New Zealand. I will further note the relevant literature of conversion and New Zealand social history in the context for my discussion later in the thesis. I turn now to locate this study in the context of Western Buddhism.

Western Buddhism

In its global expansion over the last 2500 years, Buddhism has made noticeable impact in the West only in the last few hundred years. Stephen Batchelor’s *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (1994) narrates this journey in detail, as does Martin Baumann’s *Global Buddhism: Developmental Periods, Regional Histories, and a New Analytical Perspective* (2001). Baumann suggests four periods for the expansion of Buddhism: canonical, traditional, modern and global. It is in the global period, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, that Buddhism was “internationalized” with a subsequent rapid pluralisation in the 1970s (2001, 6,10). Buddhism’s arrival in New Zealand is consistent with Baumann’s scheme.

I will demonstrate in chapter two that the 1970s was a defining decade for the arrival of Buddhism in New Zealand, both in a temporal sense and with regard to the cultural context.

Other works document the arrival of Buddhism in the West. Brief summaries abound, often as chapters in larger works (for example Harris 1998, Obeyesekere 2003), or as introductions (for example Fields 1992, Muck 2000, Coleman 2001, Kingsbury 2004), or as final sections in more general works (for example Gethin 1998, Harvey 2001). In addition there are now studies of the adaptation of specific traditions to the West (for Tibetan Buddhism for example, see Lopez 1995a, 1998, Paine 2004), as well as specific country studies (for the United States for example, see Fields 1992). These studies all seek to address a common challenge, that is, how does a 2500 year old tradition adapt to a new cultural context, or, in more popular language, how did the West become “infatuated” with Buddhism (Paine 2005, 378)? Implicit within these studies is the question “how does one actually study the translation of Buddhism into the West?” To date, Buddhism in New Zealand has not had a profile that researchers deemed significant enough to warrant the publication of a unique historical or cultural study. As noted in the previous section, research on New Zealand has only recently commenced, and it is therefore well under the radar – except perhaps for Michelle Spuler’s essay (2002) – of international Buddhist studies. Nor has there been sufficient momentum to develop any agreed methodologies or schools of enquiry. I reference this work to a variety of methodologies – case studies, surveys, participant observation and interview – undertaken elsewhere in the West.

Daniel Métraux’s *The Lotus and the Maple Leaf* (1996) represents a case study methodology, where he has taken only one particular Buddhist tradition, Soka Gakkai,

and extrapolated into the wider Canadian context, locating Soka Gakkai as a “self-help support group” and “new religious movement”. These, incidentally, are the same categories that Robert Ellwood (1993) used of Buddhism in New Zealand of the 1960s. This category to which Métraux assigns Soka Gakkai is due to the “changing needs of North Americans and the social changes of the 1960s” (1996, 129). McAra’s study of Sudarshanaloka is the first published case study of a particular lineage in its own centre in New Zealand (McAra 2007). My methodology has been to start with the individual, but I do not ignore their contexts. My fieldwork could be considered to be a broad collection of small case studies, where, having interviewed someone, I then spent considerable more time with them “on location” in their context.

Another approach has been to take a group of several traditions in the one location and examine similarities, differences and trends. As an example of this, Andrew Kennedy (2004) draws out implications for Buddhism in Britain from a study of several traditions in the city of Leeds. Kennedy examines Buddhism in the context of “notions of Western Buddhist identity [and] religious practice most congenial to Western individualists” (2004, 143). In a similar vein to Métraux, Kennedy’s is a study *a priori* in cultural transformation: an Eastern religion making a home in a Western context. However, unlike Métraux, Kennedy argues that mere cultural categories are inadequate: “most practitioners [in Leeds] have no interest in cultural analysis. The provenance of descriptions of therapeutic experiences in Western Buddhism is of less importance than whether or not such experiences occur and can usefully be described” (2004, 154). Allowing Kennedy some methodological precedence, I have been opportunistic in whom I have interviewed. Ultimately, the thesis question is about identity in the New Zealand context, and so I have had in mind questions of “cultural transformation” and psychological experience, especially with regard to the notion of

“home”, and therefore have considered as wide a range of lineages and traditions as was possible.

Métraux’ and Kennedy’s are only two methodologies representative of strategies used within what is now widely acknowledged as Western Buddhism (or “Buddhism in the West”). Since the 1990s a prolific number of books, articles and journals have continued to appear documenting the growth of Western Buddhism. These vary in genre, from compilations of personal testimonies on one hand, to more academic historiographies and critical social reflections on the other. Moreover, not only have resources been written *about* Western Buddhism, but much is appearing now *for* Western Buddhism (for example Khema 2000, Brazier 2001, Goldstein 2002, to name only a few).

Indication of this growing popularity of Buddhism in the West can be ascertain by a random flick through any issue of any popular Buddhist magazine. One example is the popular quarterly magazine *Tricycle*, which claims to be a broad “review” and an “independent voice” of Buddhism chiefly for Western Buddhists.¹⁸ In the Winter 2006 issue, forty-eight newly published books were advertised, seven new books were reviewed, and four new films or DVDs were advertised. In addition to this, twenty five retreat and teaching centres advertised along with nineteen commercial entities (offering accessories like *zafus*, timers, incense, images, calendars and the likes). Five tour companies offering tours to significant Buddhist places, and one Buddhist dating service also advertised. In the classifieds, a further 136 Buddhist centres in the United States and Canada, along with four non-North American centres were listed, and there were a further twenty-nine classifieds in nine different categories.

¹⁸ These quotes are taken from the tag line of the title of the magazine.

Tricycle is primarily about and for the American traditions of Buddhism, but its circulation, which exceeds 60,000, takes its influence outside of America. For example, Wellington Public Library subscribes to *Tricycle*, and Wellington Insight Meditation Group's newsletter *Insight Aotearoa* periodically refers to articles from *Tricycle*, or quotes from it, conferring a primacy on it. In the Winter 2006 issue, *Tricycle*'s lead article was on the ordination of women, an issue with which all sanghas in the West, including New Zealand, must eventually grapple.

I refrain from further cataloguing the vast quantity of resources on Buddhism in (or for) the West. This has been attempted elsewhere, with varying degrees of success (see Coleman 1993, Baumann 1997 for early examples). In saying this, I am locating New Zealand in the West, recognising that other socio-geographical descriptors are also valid. We are close to Asia and successive New Zealand governments have prioritised Asian relationships. New Zealand is also a Pacific nation, with responsibilities and affinities to countries as diverse as Chile, Indonesia, and Samoa. Buddhism itself has a history throughout the Pacific, starting with Japanese immigration to Hawaii in the late 19th century (Hunter 1971). The editors of *Journal of Global Buddhism*¹⁹ deem the emergence of a more located Buddhism in the Pacific as significant, assigning a special issue to "Buddhism in Oceania" (2008).

However, a new Pacific/Asian/Oceania orientation as a unique Buddhist category is yet to be fully conceptualised. For the purposes of this thesis, New Zealand is Western in a religio-cultural and historical sense, having British colonial commonalities with Australia and Canada, and to some degree the United States

¹⁹ The *Journal of Global Buddhism* is an electronic journal and can be located at <http://www.globalbuddhism.org/toc.html>

(Ellwood 1993, 187). New Zealand is open to common globalising forces as mediated through its socio-cultural traditions and economic networks, both historical and current. I will demonstrate in chapter two that Buddhism has come to New Zealand from both Asian and Western sources. As a culturally Western nation in proximity to Asia, the conditions have been conducive for a warm welcome and rapid entrance of Buddhism into New Zealand.

I will also demonstrate that a particular type of Buddhism in New Zealand, namely “convert” Buddhism, is a result of the globalisation of Buddhism. I wish to do this by drawing on survey and summative materials by two scholars, Martin Baumann and Charles Prebish. I will first examine the summative trends proposed by Baumann and Prebish. In chapter two, I then offer an history of Buddhism’s arrival in New Zealand, demonstrating that so-called convert Buddhism in New Zealand is in broad continuity with Western Buddhism.

Theorizing about Western Buddhism

Martin Baumann observed in his essay “The Dharma has Come West: A Survey of Recent Studies and Sources” (1997), that there had been “dramatic growth [of Buddhism] in Western countries, observable for about the past three decades” (1997, 194). He calls on the geographical and chronological surveys of Ernst Benz (1969), Roger Corless (1975) and Heinz Bechert (1984) to demonstrate that Buddhism’s move into America and Europe was novel, and that geographical criteria can be legitimately used to conceptualise its movement.

Baumann notes that by 1987 a bias had crept into critical reflection on Buddhism. He identifies an article in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, in which Robert

Ellwood (1987) defined “the West” merely as the United States, with little reference to any developments in Europe (or elsewhere) after the 1930s. Ellwood could be excused for this, in that the proliferation of traditions and the founding of Buddhist publishing houses in the United States was more rapid than in Europe. The quantity of both popular and critical literature on Buddhism became quickly dominated by American writers. The United States was one of the first Western countries to embrace Buddhism enthusiastically in this global era, and consequently had opportunity to shape it for the rest of the West.

Despite this emerging American dominance, Baumann offers a table, perhaps the first to appear in the Western literature, attempting to count the number of “Buddhists, and Buddhist groups in the mid-1990s” (1997, 198). Fifteen countries appear in this table: the United States, Australia, and South Africa, and twelve European countries, including four from the former Eastern bloc. Of the total 6.28 million Buddhists, 1.17 million were “European/American” (18.6%).²⁰ Baumann’s criterion for identifying Buddhists in the West was geographical, and he explicitly differentiates “European/American” from “Buddhists (sum)”. In other words, “European/American” is a sub-set. They are converts of some sort, that is, they have chosen to embrace Buddhism out of their own volition. The remainder (5.11 million) were Buddhists presumably from an original Asian homeland. Here Baumann implies “two Buddhisms” – convert and ethnic/immigrant.

Disappointingly, Baumann excludes New Zealand on this table, even though New Zealand data was freely available in 1997. In the 1996 census, New Zealand’s overall Buddhist population was 23,687 – this would equate to Baumann’s “Buddhist

²⁰ This excludes Switzerland which has no entry for “European/American” Buddhists.

(sum)” category – and the category comparable to “European/American”, that is, the convert – was 4,444. This is higher than South Africa, the Czech Republic, and Poland, and comparable with the Netherlands, Denmark and Austria, all of which are listed on Baumann’s table. Surely then, Buddhism had a high enough profile in New Zealand – another Western nation – to warrant recognition in a global forum by the mid-1990s?

Despite this omission, Baumann demonstrates that “Buddhism has set up home in many Western countries” (1997, 204). Is it legitimate in New Zealand then also to identify “convert” and “Asian immigrant” Buddhism, categories which Baumann alludes to, and Charles Prebish made explicit (Prebish 1979)? In other words, should New Zealand Buddhists be classified in categories derived for elsewhere, and which are implicitly geographical/historical and explicitly ethnic? Who then is a Buddhist in New Zealand, or more particularly, who is converting, and why? Moreover, if Buddhism has come to New Zealand in the sense that it is a Western country, then in what way has it “set up home”?

These themes need testing “transnationally”, Baumann believes, and I begin to explore them for New Zealand in this thesis. Analytical tools, derived from researchers’ models need applying right across the Western context to include New Zealand, if for no other reason than New Zealand has similar numbers of convert Buddhists as some other Western nations. Baumann suggests that Thomas Tweed’s typology of conversion motivation, specifically (1) rational, (2) esoteric and (3) romantic, drawn from Tweed’s study of Buddhism in the United States between 1879 and 1912 (Tweed 1992), could be a candidate for making sense of conversion motivation in European Buddhists. Recognising the era in which Tweed proposed the model, should this typology nevertheless apply to New Zealand? Moreover, if Baumann believes that the very

dichotomy of convert and ethnic/immigrant categories is legitimate because distinct communities are readily recognisable in the United States, then are there similar dynamics in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand? What about the exceptions? By 2001, Baumann was conceding that these categories had become blurred (Baumann 2001, 24). Is this the case for New Zealand?

Baumann further calls for research on the spread of particular Buddhist traditions and lineages. Heterogeneity amongst Western Buddhism has arisen due to the transplant of Asian communities through immigration, alongside those lineages seeking to adapt and contextualise to the West. Buddhist traditions that would rarely have had contact in Asia, are now close neighbours in the West. An hour's drive through the sprawl of urban Auckland (pop. 1.2 million), for example, reveals at least eighteen Buddhist centres in a dozen different traditions.²¹ In 2001, Baumann included New Zealand in an updated version of his table (2001, 21). His numbers demonstrate that he is drawing on census information (28,000 Buddhists in total), although there is no indication from where he has sourced "60" to indicate the number of "groups and centres" in New Zealand.²² In effect he gives notice that by 2001 Buddhism in New Zealand had made it onto the global stage, or at least into his consciousness.

To summarize, Baumann posits a methodology (chronological and geographical history), and describes some emerging commonalities and new terms (convert and ethnic/immigrant). He is the first to summarize some statistics, and goes on to propose

²¹ For example, New Kadampa Tradition in Devonport, Fo Guang Shan in Botany Downs, Auckland Zen Centre in Royal Oak, Auckland Shambhala Centre in Parnell, Dorje Change Institute in Avondale, Trashigomang in Mangere, Tsi Ming in Greenlane, Dhamma Medini Meditation Centre in Kaukapakapa, Orewa Meditation Centre in Orewa, Wat Khemara Phirataran in Takinini, Giac Nhien Temple in Otahuhu, Srilankaramaya in Otahuhu, Quan Am Buddhist Monastery in Bombay, Karma Choeling Monastery in Kaukapakapa, Zhyisil Chokyi Ghatsal Trust in Ponsonby, Auckland Buddhist Centre (FWBO) in Grey Lynn, Nyima Tashi in Ponsonby, and Vimutti Monastery in Bombay.

²² "Sixty", nevertheless, is what I have estimated in my own research from conversations, participant observation, websites and the likes. Baumann has not indicated where he got "sixty" from.

various research priorities. In so doing he describes a context for Buddhism in New Zealand: it is the result of a geographical and historical process, and it can also be considered to be part of a new “Western Buddhism”, or “global Buddhism”.

This emerging “new Buddhism” (Coleman 2001) found full expression in 2002 when Baumann joined Charles Prebish in editing the volume *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*. The book is an attempt to document both breadth and depth of the emerging field of the study of Western Buddhism. It is this volume in which Michele Spuler’s essay on Australian and New Zealand Buddhism has voice (Spuler 2002). However, the book is more than a mere Buddhism in such-and-such a place. Rather, it offers essays on sociological strategies, explores self definition and the wider spectrum of Buddhist practice, and contextualisation issues. It also addresses new directions, including Gay Buddhism, Black Buddhism, family management issues, second generation challenges for Western Buddhists, pop culture and Buddhism, to name a few. These are all issues that Buddhists in New Zealand are beginning to face for themselves, and to which, no doubt, researchers will be drawn. Therefore, this thesis serves as prelude. I reflect on the origins of Buddhism in New Zealand and seek to outline some initial and unique socio-cultural contours on which New Zealand Buddhists seek to build identity.

However, it may be presumptuous even to consider that Buddhism in New Zealand warrants a unique category this early in its development. Charles Prebish (2002) posits that the academic study of Buddhism in America came of age between 1995 and 2000, and argues for the birth of the academic sub-discipline of Western Buddhism. Here is an implicit challenge to the study of Buddhism in New Zealand. Is there yet a unique category of Buddhism in New Zealand and is it worthy of the time

and energy of academics in studying it? If in fact there is the possibility of a unique “New Zealand Buddhism” – something that is indigenous at best, or at least contextualised in some sense – then when did that happen, or is it yet to happen? What defining moments have there been in New Zealand Buddhism (or in its study) and what categories of knowledge would be deemed acceptable if New Zealand Buddhism was to be understood in any holistic sense? Does the fact that so few New Zealand academics are studying Buddhism put the whole endeavour at risk?

Western Buddhism, both as a defining academic term and as a phenomenon, is now widely accepted. New Zealand Buddhism – if, and/or when it is located – must surely be included. I argue in this thesis that Buddhism is not only *in* New Zealand, but that there are also indicators it is becoming *of* New Zealand as well. Defining “Western Buddhism” – or “New Zealand Buddhism” (as opposed to merely “Buddhism in New Zealand”) – will prove to be problematic. *Westward Dharma*’s chapter allocations have defined the field somewhat already. In a similar fashion, the on-line *Journal of Global Buddhism* (founded in 2000) has implicitly defined the field by its nine subject classifications it considers for publication: Historical studies, Transnational studies, Issues in the Development of Buddhist Traditions, Case Studies and Biographical Studies, Survey Results and their Interpretation, Research Bibliographies, Human Rights Issues and Socially Engaged Buddhism, Interfaith Dialogue, and Theoretical and Methodological Studies. I have sought in this thesis to cross several of these categories. The thesis describes and locates today’s Buddhist traditions vis-à-vis their history in New Zealand, it reflects on issues of the development and adaptation of Buddhist traditions – particularly conversion and identity – while interacting with trans-national issues, and draws on theory informed by qualitative research.

Prebish (2002) goes on to note that the source material for studying this “Western Buddhism” or “Global Buddhism” is varied in its genre. He argues that attention should be paid to at least four sources other than academic reflection: firstly semi-scholarly journals sponsored by various Western Buddhist communities; secondly, “popular, but literate” magazines; thirdly, the World Wide Web; and fourthly, film. Prebish in effect legitimises the sources I use in this thesis (and have already outlined). The study of the “transformation of an ancient tradition” – to use Coleman’s subtitle of his book (2001) – is perhaps the *raison d’etre* of the discipline in its Western context. Buddhism is no longer solely an Asian religion. Rather, it is maturing within different Western countries, with uniquely Western commonalities, yet parochial innovations and peculiarities. I will demonstrate that New Zealand Buddhism has some commonalities with “Western” and/or “Global” Buddhism, yet is also showing signs of a growing parochialism.

Prebish focuses on a number of examples of the transformation that makes this new Western Buddhism different from its Asian roots. Firstly, in the American context, the proliferation of Buddhist tertiary educational institutions. This he posits, secondly, as a reason for the high level of “Buddhist literacy” among American practitioners, who are, consequently, mainly lay people. While many of the leaders of the American Buddhist communities have had monastic training, their followers have not, yet are highly educated and literate with respect to things Buddhist. This is an American innovation, even a commonality of Western Buddhism which Prebish notes is in fact the “*converse*” (his italics) of the traditional Asian model. With lay practitioners as literate, or even more literate in things Buddhist than their leaders, this potentially leads to a leadership “gap” (Prebish 2002, 79).

It is widely recognised that American Buddhism is almost exclusively a lay movement and that its leadership is the “scholar-practitioner” (Prebish 2002, 79). Ordination is no longer a criteria for leadership, but rather Buddhist-literacy (the “scholar”) and practice (the “practitioner”). This again is an innovation, as the leadership in Asia is the ordained “scholar-monk”. Hence the scholar-practitioners will “fulfil the role of quasi-monastics, or at least treasure-troves of Buddhist literacy and information, functioning as guides through whom one’s understanding of the Dharma may be sharpened” (Prebish 2002, 79). Rick Fields, one of the so-called fathers of American Buddhism, noted early that “lay practice is the real heart of American Buddhism” (1992, 371).

Similar transformations can be expected for New Zealand, with some well on the way: the laity is generally well educated in things Buddhist and most “convert” Buddhist centres have a regular teaching programme. Leadership is varied, with both lay and ordained in high profiles. Further New Zealand innovations are appearing in areas consistent with Buddhism in the West, although I would suggest with less ideological urgency. For example, in several “convert” centres, I observed leadership to be female, but this seems to be for pragmatic reasons, rather than ideological. I also observed that social engagement – or “Engaged Buddhism” – is ideologically known and understood, yet seems to have less formal impetus than elsewhere in the West. It is too early to say whether these are innovations. Perhaps, because of New Zealand’s small size and isolation, developments may simply lag behind other Western countries.

Conceptualizing Buddhism in New Zealand

It is quite justified to acclaim Baumann and Prebish to have “helped define and conceptualize this field [of Western Buddhism]” (Koppedrayar 2003, 4). Their work

offers to this thesis some contextual paradigms. I suggest six patterns of fit demonstrating how New Zealand Buddhism is in continuity with, and also poses a challenge to Western Buddhism.

Firstly, there is a precedent which allows New Zealand to be simply identified as a geographic location for Buddhism. Michelle Spuler (2002) was the first to locate Buddhism “in New Zealand” in an academic forum. Hence “New Zealand Buddhism” has become a possibility, located in a unique place, but also as a unique socio-cultural phenomenon. This is taken up by Sally McAra who suggests in her study of Sudarshanaloka, that a unique New Zealand place is “re-visioned” by a Buddhist presence in general and a *stupa* in particular (McAra 2007). My thesis clearly locates Buddhism in a place – New Zealand – but in this I allow for a variety of re-imaginings as to what that place actually is (or how it is perceived), drawing on both socio-historical imagery (Arcadia in particular) and also notions of the Buddhist Pure Land.

Secondly, the writing of a critical history of Buddhism in New Zealand is possible and desirable. Both Baumann and Prebish call for country-specific data and socio-cultural reflection. Related to this is the call to document dates, personalities, milestones, specific periods, issues and the likes. There is an explicit descriptive process that needs to be ongoing. What traditions are in New Zealand? What numbers of adherents are there? Where are Buddhists located? What ethnicities are they? These and more are all potential areas where ongoing description needs to be occurring. This has been started already, but is limited to a small number of graduate essays (Allan 1990, Jones 1990, Melrose 1991, Savage 2003) and a handful of research projects (Rowell 1987, McKee 1991, Kolig 1997, Major 2003, McAra 2007). I draw on this preliminary work to weave together a critical assessment of Buddhism in New Zealand up until

2008, but also expand from these and propose new ways of understanding the relationship of “convert” Buddhism in particular to its unique New Zealand socio-cultural context.

Thirdly, if there is a unique New Zealand Buddhism emerging, is it significant enough to be noteworthy in any critically robust way? How do Buddhists talk about themselves rather than being talked about by others? If, according to Michelle Spuler, Buddhism in the West “was considered [in its early days] an alien religion”, then how (and when) did it become “more mainstream” in New Zealand, if indeed it has already done so? (2003, 139). At what point will “Buddhism in New Zealand” become “New Zealand Buddhism”, that is, move from being an import to being a unique self-generating New Zealand phenomenon? Is this even deemed possible, or desirable? Prebish identified both the time and the context for this shift with American Buddhism. What socio-cultural threshold might there be to warrant a unique “New Zealand Buddhism”? I will demonstrate that there is a critical mass and a high enough social profile to warrant a category of “Buddhism in New Zealand”, but will argue that Buddhism’s integration into the New Zealand socio-cultural context is more than just a “cut-and-paste” from Asian and/or other Western sources. New Zealand convert Buddhists are forming identities informed by deeply embedded cultural ideology of place and identity on the New Zealand side, with Pure Land and “best place” imaginings on the Buddhist side.

Fourthly, if “New Zealand Buddhism” is a definable religio-cultural innovation, then what continuities (and discontinuities) might it have with Western Buddhism? In other words, in what ways would “New Zealand Buddhism” be culturally innovative and hence unique? What conversations might New Zealand Buddhism have with Maori,

for example, considering that Maori make up around 16% of the population and some have shown an interest in Buddhism? The thesis offers a history (chapter two) demonstrating historical source and influence from both the West and Asia. I also offer a unique discontinuity with Western Buddhism in describing how a Maori sub-tribe is imagining alleged religio-ethnic continuities with Tibetans, and how one Tibetan Buddhist group (Dhargyey lineage) is possibly utilizing this speculation for its own legitimacy (in chapter six). If Western convert Buddhism in general is a white, middle/professional class phenomenon (Fields 1998, Nattier 1998, Baumann 2002a), then this Maori-Tibetan conversation in New Zealand poses new possibilities for conversations between Buddhists and indigenous peoples in other nations.

Fifthly, what specific growing pains might Buddhism in New Zealand face? Several developmental issues have been mentioned by Prebish and Baumann in a broader Western context: lay practitioners and leadership dynamics, the education of the laity, class, gender, ethnicity, and so on (Prebish and Baumann 2002). Does New Zealand Buddhism face these same issues (and why), or does it have its own unique issues to face (and why)? For example conflict has arisen in the Kaukapakapa Kagyu centre over ownership of the land due to the intrigues that have unfolded due to two claimants to the 16th Karmapa's rebirth (Brown 2004, Terhune 2004).²³ Sexual improprieties in the national leadership of the New Kadampa Tradition in late 2007 has also ruptured that sangha. These are reminiscent of leadership issues in some traditions in America (see for example Hori 1998, Gross 1999, Bell 2002).

Lastly, issues around methodology must be considered in any study of Buddhism in New Zealand. If the *Journal of Global Buddhism's* nine acceptance

²³ Court Halts Buddhist Case: Dispute a Spiritual not Legal Matter, say Appeal Judges 2006. *The Dominion Post*, June 19th. 2.

categories define the field somewhat, then any academic study of Buddhism in New Zealand could draw on any one, or any combination of them. Hence, if a significant presence of Buddhism in New Zealand can first be identified, then the methodological possibilities open up considerably on the road to critiquing a unique New Zealand Buddhism. It is a description and justification of the methodology I adopt to which I now turn.

Methodology

This thesis primarily examines conversion and identity. I use qualitative research strategies of interviewing, and participant observation. In doing this, I am in good company. Andrew Kennedy (2004) used “the testimony from interviews” to “scrutinize notions of Western Buddhist identity” in his study of Buddhists in Leeds. He called these testimonies “religious autobiographies” (2004, 143). Closer to home, Sally McAra’s study of Sudarshanaloka (2007) was shaped by a “participatory approach” through which she explored “a core group’s narratives” (2007, 9).

I interpret my data by prioritising narrative theory. I do this in response to Prebish and Baumann’s call for new theoretical frameworks and analytic tools in the study of Buddhism in the West (2002). In using narrative, I wish to effect a robust conversation between conversion theory, the spread of Buddhism into the West, and New Zealand social history. How interviewees bring these three categories together in their own life narratives is unique for each.

I suggest their life narratives would be at risk of being simplified if constrained by predetermined categories on a prescribed questionnaire. A qualitative approach, on the other hand, allows for a degree of inductive enquiry. By “inductive” I mean that I do

not propose to test any particular theory. Rather, I seek to probe the social constructions that convert Buddhists have made (or are making) for themselves. To this end I elicited what I will call “auto-narratives” through interviews, and have drawn on field notes from participant observation in order to conceptualise theory from a grounded base (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Nevertheless, I do concede that a quantitative approach is perfectly valid, as McKee’s study (1991) on New Zealand Buddhist women has demonstrated. However, in this particular moment in the translation of Buddhism into a New Zealand context, a theoretical methodological framework is not strong. Therefore I do not exclude quantitative data, but rather employ an opportunistic process, where I not only interview and undertake participant observation, but also interact with census data, and use a couple of short answer surveys by email.

This apparent methodological eclecticism is not without precedence, in that Wendy O’Flaherty (1980), in her study of Tamil religion, unapologetically uses a “toolbox” of methodologies, arguing that this is justified because of the already existing variety of methodologies of scholars which illustrate the richness of a variety of approaches, but also because the data itself, because of its newness and ambiguities, warrants it. I therefore not only draw on narrative theory, but also semiotics, and psychological models. At times I employ a more generalist anthropological approach to data collection and analysis. Perhaps overall, to use John Lofland’s more constrained words, I undertake a “patient empiricism” (1977, 342).

This “patient empiricism” has an epistemological foundation. I assume that “human social action depends on the beliefs and intentions of the actors”, and hence

interviewees' behaviours (and their own telling of their behaviours) are best understood in terms of "the meanings which those actors themselves attribute to them" (Tolich and Davidson 1999, 25). Thus I allowed the interview process to be self-modifying. As interviews progressed and stories emerged, so I formulated further questions. I also compared these stories with published primary and secondary sources, and subjected them to the spotlight of theoretical constructs that currently appear in the literature on Western Buddhism.

I made contact with Buddhists "cold turkey", usually by emailing them from addresses I found on websites or by attending public events. I was not driven by or constrained by quantifiable and statistically valid sample sizes or demographics. Once a gatekeeper had let me into a sangha, I made further contacts through personal referrals (Tolich and Davidson 1999, 94). It is inevitable *a priori* that the inclusion of a researcher into the life of an interviewee will influence outcomes. While the formal interview allowed me to be in control of the process (Jones 1985), I recognised that an interview is a social event in its own right. Because I could potentially influence the shape and content of the elicited auto-narrative, I chose to interject as rarely as possible. I therefore always sought to put the interviewee at ease. Some interviews were undertaken in homes, or in a favourite café. One was conducted on a sunny day on the lawns of Parliament House! Most interviews were done in the context of the interviewee's own temple or Dharma-centre. The outcomes were comprehensive and in a general chronological sequence, that is, a story.

For those whom I interviewed in their own Dharma-centre context, I was more often than not able to supplement the interview with participant observation. My involvement in Buddhist events was located and unique: I was content with observer

status, attending twenty-eight events between 2003 and 2007. These included tours of Buddhist sites, attendance at public talks, participation in weekend meditation and teaching retreats, a number of *pūja*, workshops, academic lectures, and one book launch. At each event I annotated as much as possible, photographed any salient features, and collected promotional literature. Hence this study is more cross-sectional than longitudinal. Buddhist events were also the context of informal interviews with individuals, and also some group conversations (usually around meals). For example, an overnight stay at Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre (near Nelson) on 14th and 15th July, 2006 meant I was able to participate in a long and detailed discussion about peoples' commitment to Buddhism in New Zealand over the evening meal with five residents. In prior communications, I informed interviewees and hosts that I myself was not Buddhist. This I discovered did not jeopardise my access.

Not being an insider did not mean that interviewees refrained from revealing deep information or that my findings are any less valid: both insider and outsider perspectives paint contributing hues on a larger canvas. Indeed my observational stance allowed me to ask naïve questions, and at times I found myself in the role of confessor and confidant precisely because I was an outsider. Comments like “I really think what you’re doing is important” and “the story of Buddhism in New Zealand really needs to be told” have meant that this project has become a partnership to a degree. Valerie Walkerdine (2002, 188) warns of the risk of transference and counter-transference in this stance. While some of the interviewees saw me as an advocate because they were “a people who would otherwise have no chance to be heard publicly” (Bertaux and Kohli 1984, 219), I resist this project becoming polemic or apologetic. The qualitative methodology of interview and participant observation overall has allowed for a process of discovery, rather than of verification (Bryman in Goulding 2002, 16).

The Interviewees

I have categorised the interviews into two groups, “formal” and “informal”. I also distinguish between “Buddhist” and “non-Buddhist”. When I commenced an interview, I was not always clear as to whether the person was a Buddhist or in what ways they would identify with and talk about their particular relationship with Buddhism. Hence I classified interviews after the event. Most interviewees readily gave themselves the label of “Buddhist”. Some gave ambiguous self descriptions: for example “I’m into the dharma”. These expressions of identity were precisely what I wished to examine.

Since this is a New Zealand project, I also differentiated between “New Zealander” and “non-New Zealander”. I relegated eleven interviewees to “non-New Zealander” because the interviewees were either very recent immigrants,²⁴ or they were transient commentators (for example a student or holiday worker), or they held a New Zealand passport but lived overseas. Nevertheless, because these eleven were all Buddhists, I kept these interviews on file to inform the wider context: several had some insightful observations to make about Buddhism in New Zealand, New Zealand culture, and/or the role of religion in New Zealand society.²⁵

Overall, I have not rigidly stuck to strictly defined categories. I regarded some interviewees as close-enough-Buddhists: they did and believed Buddhist things, and

²⁴ In noting this, I am referring here to immigrants from other Western nations like South Africa, England and Ireland, as well as those whom I interviewed as recent immigrants from Asian countries. Their first impressions of Buddhism in New Zealand, or their aspirations as to how they may fit in were noteworthy.

²⁵ Some interviewees were simply not New Zealanders, and I interviewed them knowing this. For example in 2005 I attended a conference of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian dialogue at St Ottilien, near Munich, Germany, and took the opportunity to interview as many people as were willing to talk to me. These interviews are not counted as part of this particular study, but do serve as a window through which I have been able to peer at Western Buddhism, and European Buddhism in particular.

were associated with Buddhist centres.²⁶ Some were close-enough-Kiwis.²⁷ Because there are ambiguities around what it means to identify as Buddhist – precisely what this thesis is reflecting on – I deemed it wiser not to be too prescriptive in initial definitions. Likewise with what it means to be a New Zealander: this is still contested. I also sought out three non-Buddhists (one an evangelical lay Christian, one a Christian clergyman, and one a Theosophist) to bring some potential contrast to the auto-narratives of Buddhists in general, but more particularly to explore issues around why they had looked at Buddhism and chosen not to convert to it.

I myself pre-arranged all formal interviews, introducing myself clearly, and pre-sending an explanation of the project (Appendix 5) and the university's ethics protocols (Appendix 6). All formal interviews were digitally recorded and names in formal interviews are withheld by mutual consent.²⁸ On the other hand, informal interviews were spontaneous: I was opportunistic in creating conversational space around tours of Buddhist sites, or loitering-with-intent-to-talk after Buddhist events. These informal interviews were undetermined and open ended, and usually shorter. Consequently they were not comprehensive, and were only about one particular immediate topic (the Buddhist event or temple with which we were then engaged, or some unique aspect of the research I was triangulating).

²⁶ Anthony Banner is an example of this. His religious practice was clearly buddhistic and his worldview had been shaped by Buddhist teachings. He confessed he had “been informed by Thich Nhat Hanh”. The iconography at the centre of which he was a custodian was clearly Buddhist. The small library there was full of primarily Buddhist books. However, he was quite emphatic in not wanting to identify himself “as Buddhist”.

²⁷ For example, when I visited the Buddha's Light International Centre of Fo Guang Shan in Botany Downs, Auckland in 2006, I informally interviewed several ethnic Chinese in the Centre's tea shop. I differentiate between the officials of the centre (clergy, tour guides) who were transient and “sent” from Taiwan for a season, and the local ethnic Chinese adherents, who were being quite intentional about becoming New Zealanders, having immigrated as early as the mid-1980s when New Zealand immigration policy became more favourable towards them.

²⁸ I have substituted pseudonyms for most names. Some real names do appear in this thesis because I am quoting from or alluding to published works, or sources in the public domain, or the interviewee has explicitly given written permission for his/her name to be cited.

Informal interviews often yielded up richer data than formal, as interviewees were more candid, and answers were unstructured, spontaneous, and often more emotive. There were no ethics protocols around the informal interviews, indeed, some of the interviewees understood that I was in the role of a journalist. These interviews were not recorded, but some were annotated. For others, I had to cultivate mnemonics to be able to memorise flow and salient points. I then wrote extensive notes and narrative of these informal interviews within an hour of the interaction.

For those who identified themselves as New Zealanders, I collected nineteen “informal (Buddhist)” interviews and eight “informal (non-Buddhist)”. I revisited six interviewees to explore in more depth some issues which had been previously raised. The eight “informal (non-Buddhist)” I include as primary sources because all of them had been influenced by Buddhism in some way: they either revealed this themselves, or I met them in the context of tours of Buddhist sites, or after Buddhist events. I used these “informal (non-Buddhists)” to triangulate various ideas because of their outside perspective.

Table 1: Type of Interview

Formal (Buddhist New Zealander)	21
Informal (Buddhist New Zealander)	19
<i>Subtotal Buddhist New Zealander</i>	<i>40</i>
Formal (non-Buddhist New Zealander)	8
Informal (non-Buddhist New Zealander)	8
<i>Subtotal non-Buddhist New Zealanders</i>	<i>16</i>

Formal (Buddhist non-New Zealander)	1
Informal (Buddhist non-New Zealander)	10
<i>Subtotal of Buddhist non-New Zealanders</i>	<i>11</i>
Total number of people interviewed	67

Table one shows a summary of the interviews. I have interviewed sixty seven people associated with Buddhism in New Zealand: forty of these I consider to be core interviews elicited using formal and informal interviewing strategies. These are all New Zealanders who demonstrated an explicit and public commitment to Buddhism. It is this core of forty that I draw on for the argument of this thesis. However, it is the transcripts of the twenty-one “formal (Buddhist)” interviews on which I chiefly focus. My interview strategy can therefore be understood to be like concentric circles: I prioritise formal then informal core interviews with Buddhists, and locate these within a wider circle of marginal and peripheral interviews. This mirrors the very gradation of commitment that the thesis is exploring. All of these, whether “Buddhist” or “non-Buddhist” were self defined and classified only after the interview. I retained the non-Buddhists in the data because they had something relevant to say regarding their own relationship with Buddhism, or about Buddhism in New Zealand.

All but two of the forty core interviewees identified themselves as pakeha or New Zealander, that is, ethnically Caucasian. This is consistent with the “white and middle-class” demography which Rick Fields’ observed of “Euro-American Buddhism” (1998, 197). However, Fields readily concedes that the demography of Buddhists in the West has, more often than not, been caught up in a “classificatory bramble” (1998, 197). Because of this I did not pursue a unique demographic in this study. The study’s broad

demographic was a result of the opportunistic strategy I employed. The core interviewees ranged in age from early twenties to 64, and in financial context from university students to a retired specialist medical practitioner. For those who reflected on their political affiliations, most leaned left (voting Green and Labour), although one was a vocal ACT supporter, believing this stance to better fit Buddhist notions of personal responsibility. Two identified themselves as Maori.^{29,30} I managed to access equal numbers of male (20) and female (20) amongst the core group.

I have also refrained from locating this study in specific places. Margaret McKee (1991) studied Buddhist women in Dunedin, and Susan Jones (1990) studied five Buddhist groups in Wellington: specific location influenced the shape of each of these studies in unique ways. My geographical place is more generalist: this is a study of New Zealand as a whole. I managed to do some lengthy tours, interviewing people in Whangarei, Auckland, Thames, Hamilton, Napier, Palmerston North, Wellington, Picton, Nelson, Christchurch, Dunedin, and Invercargill. However, I was not attempting to cover the country on the assumption that geographical distribution of Buddhism may have been significant. Broadhurst and Moore in their documentary (2003) interacted with both convert and immigrant when they toured the length of the country. In contrast, I have sought out only convert-Buddhists. There may well be interesting questions regarding the geographical distribution of Buddhists in New Zealand, but I have not explicitly sought to identify and answer these.

²⁹ Note that this demography does not include the interviews of Maori in north Hokianga with regard to researching the stories of Te Waiariki hapu. The Maori of north Hokianga whom I interviewed or interacted with – around seventeen of them – all identified themselves as Catholic.

³⁰ When I discovered that some Maori did profess Buddhism – something that I found surprising in light of their renewed interest in their own Maoritanga – I did actively seek out Maori Buddhists to interview. However, even though the 2006 Census says there are over 1800 Maori who identify themselves as Buddhist, I was able only to find two from the networks into which I had been welcomed.

I have ring-fenced an aspect of the field research to both a place and a people. I undertook five days of field work on the north shore of Hokianga harbour (Northland) from March 23rd 2007. I did not seek interviews with Buddhists *per se*, but undertook a more generalist research strategy – what one might do in an anthropological research project – as I explored the imagined connection of the Maori sub-tribe (hapu) of Te Waiariki with Tibet. I will take this up in chapter six. I annotated interactions with seventeen people, although five stood out as seemingly authoritative. I conducted a formal interview by telephone five months later in August 2007 with a key gatekeeper to the hapu who was living temporarily in Auckland.

I have not extended this particularity to any other demographic group. Research has commenced amongst identifiable sub-groups already in other Western countries: for example Buddhism amongst children (Coleman 2001, Loundon 2001, 2006), women (for example Gross 1999, Campbell 2002, Simmer-Brown 2002) and gays (Corless 1998, Prebish 1999, 81). I am not suggesting that these exclusions are unimportant, or that study of these groups in New Zealand should be ignored. Time and space constrain me.

I have also declined a case study of one particular centre or tradition. Others have employed case study methodologies in studies of distinct entities within Buddhism in New Zealand, commencing with Christopher Rowell on the Dhargyey Centre in Dunedin (1987), then Margaret McKee on convert Buddhist women (1991), Erich Kolig on the building of the Otago peninsula *stupa* (1997), and most recently with Sally McAra on Sudarshanaloka (2007). My approach has not been to start with an entity or event, but rather with an individual. In the course of examining what meaning that person constructs for him or herself, then to explore his or her context in the tradition

with which he or she identifies. All individuals had a context, and the traditions in which they were located (and with which I interacted) are listed in Appendix 1. Where I perceive I have left gaps in the interviewing, I have attempted to rectify this by seeking out that organisation's printed material.³¹

I undertook this opportunistic approach for a further reason. Carolyn Kingsbury, (2004) in her study of four Buddhist groups who all shared the same hall in Bellingham (Washington state, U.S.A), found that there were few significant differences in beliefs, practices, and backgrounds between the individual members of these groups. Likewise James Coleman (2001), who had originally set out to study Zen practitioners, found overlap with Vipassana and Tibetan traditions. To know about one tradition informed research on another. Hence I have started with the individual, suspecting that there will be overlap, variabilities and adaptations that will not be confined to any one particular tradition. This thesis then expands on the case studies mentioned above by seeking not only to encompass them, but also to offer a place for them in a much broader conceptualisation.

This broader conceptualisation must surely begin with a history. Before discussing my data in chapter three, I examine how Buddhism came to be in New Zealand. In offering a history in the next chapter, I also discuss who might a Buddhist be in New Zealand, by drawing primarily on census data.

³¹ For example, I am aware that I had interviews with only two people from Insight Meditation. To balance this, I have monitored their monthly electronic newsletter very closely.

Chapter 2: The arrival of Buddhism in New Zealand

“Buddhism [in New Zealand] may have initially been attractive to some people because of its otherness; however, adaptation to Western cultural values is making it more and more acceptable to the mainstream”.

Michelle Spuler (2002, 149)

Introduction

How can we account for the presence of Buddhism in New Zealand? When and how did it arrive? If we can now say “there is a Buddhist”, then who is that person? Very little has been attempted in the way of writing a history of Buddhism in New Zealand. Ajahn Viradhammo (1990), Michelle Spuler (2002) and Gabriel Laffite and Alison Ribush (2002) have written short narratives each amounting to only a few pages. I offer in this chapter an historical account to locate today’s Buddhism in a broad socio-historical context. In the second part of this chapter, I reflect on census data in order to throw some light on how Buddhists may be identified.

There is some debate as to where a history of Buddhism might start. Laffite and Ribush (2002) suggest there is “little on record of the history of Buddhism in New Zealand before 1970” (2002, 215). However, Viradhammo notes “signs of interest in Buddhism” were in New Zealand by the mid-1950s (1990, 34). I suggest that the 1970s was a defining decade, before which there are two contours worth drawing: the Chinese goldminers of the 19th century, and the Theosophical Society (from 1893). In seeking to understand the mechanism for the arrival of Buddhism since the 1970s, I borrow terminology from Jan Nattier’s three fold model of the transmission of Buddhism – import (fetching), export (sending), and baggage (Nattier 1998, 189). I also explore more fully the two ethno-cultural categories of Buddhism that have developed in New Zealand, following Prebish (1979, 1993), that of “convert” Buddhism and “ethnic” Buddhism. These I have already introduced in the previous chapter. I demonstrate that

there is a unique interplay of sending and fetching mechanisms at work in both “convert” and “ethnic” Buddhisms. Indeed, it is this sending-fetching interplay which continues to be the ongoing mechanism for the arrival of Buddhism in New Zealand.

A History of Buddhism in New Zealand

I wish firstly to locate a history of Buddhism in New Zealand within a theoretical framework. I have already noted that Buddhism is *in* New Zealand, and that being *in* New Zealand, it is also part of a much broader movement which is Western. This local/global differentiation raises questions about particularities and generalities in the writing of New Zealand’s history.

Peter Gibbons (2003) and Kerry Howe (2003) have both chastised the tendency in New Zealand historiography to default to exceptionalism, that is, to view New Zealand’s history as exceptional, with little reference to international or even Pacific social contexts and currents. This may not seem to be an immediate issue in the writing of a Buddhist history, as Buddhism clearly comes from somewhere else. However, “like so much else in New Zealand”, writes Howe, “New Zealand history tends to have a home-grown touch” (2003, 55), and its historiography “is determined by an underlying ‘nationalist’ focus” (2003, 50). To counter this, Peter Gibbons appeals for a New Zealand historiography where New Zealand is “decentred as a subject” (2003, 39), and he imagines the possibilities of “suitable non-national explicatory frameworks” including a “world-history perspective” (2003, 40). Miles Fairburn (2006) bemoans the lack of debate regarding exceptionalism and cautions that in the absence of a good case for it, that historiographies are confused as to what events in New Zealand’s history have actually been important. Fairburn argues that because of New Zealand’s geographical isolation, its history of human occupation has been short, and therefore

there has been little time for its inhabitants to evolve major traditions of their own.

Because of this they have been predisposed to becoming “unusually heavy borrowers of other cultures” (2006, 167). In other words, if New Zealand is to be regarded as exceptional in any sense, then it is paradoxically so, in that it is a unique borrower of cultures, and particular combinations of culture.

I wish not to build an argument for or against exceptionalism, but to recognize the wisdom in locating the following history within this wider debate. Buddhism continues to come to New Zealand as part of a global movement, and, at the same time it is beginning to show signs of developing its own interpretive frameworks, unique contours and ability to innovate. How this tension eventually works out will be determined by researchers who follow, no doubt. Will it forever be a “borrowed culture” (Fairburn 2006, 167), or will iconic “kiwi ingenuity” take it in new directions?

The Early Period (pre-1970s)

The 19th century Chinese goldminers

Chinese goldminers, mainly from Guangdong province, arrived in Otago province to work the gold fields from 1866. They were invited by the provincial government to pick over fields already worked by European goldminers. The South Island gold rush had commonalities with rushes in California (1848-1855) and Victoria (~1851-1860s). It was Gabriel Read, experienced in both rushes who discovered gold in Otago in 1861, and all three gold fields attracted transitory Chinese workers. The number of Chinese goldminers in the South Island peaked at 5004 in the 1881 census (1% of the non-Maori population of New Zealand at the time), but then declined rapidly due to a poll tax instituted by the colonial government.

Lafitte and Ribush (2002) uncritically claim there “were certainly [Buddhist] practitioners” amongst the Chinese goldminers of Otago (2002, 215). This singularity may be unwise to claim, as over twenty different deities have been identified amongst them. Peter Butler (1977) has collected quotes and observations of the Chinese religious beliefs and practices made by a variety of European colonists, and this collection suggests a mixed, but predominantly Confucian worldview. Neville Ritchie (1986) draws on both Butler’s work and the diaries of Presbyterian missionary Alexander Don (who evangelised amongst the Chinese goldminers) and concludes that the “Chinese miners did not subscribe to any particular religion, but most adhered to a complex mixture of beliefs and customs drawn from the three major religious traditions of China: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, as well as animism and spiritism”(1986, 66). This is confirmed by Steven Young, one of their descendents:

My impression is that our grandfathers were not very religious people but may have observed certain festivals related to their ancestors (or [while] in New Zealand, even their friends) who had passed away. This was in the form of “Bai san”: setting up a temporary altar with food [and] tea and bowing three times. Usually not much more than that. It’s almost a secular or Confucian practice. (Personal email, 2007.)

Therefore, how Buddhist the Chinese goldminers were is open to debate. It is difficult to count Buddhists in this era, because early consolidated census reports nested Buddhism within the category of Confucianism, indicative perhaps that the dominant British culture – those who controlled the census process – perceived little difference between Confucianism and Buddhism. Moreover, from 1910, the Census and Statistics Act allowed people the freedom not to answer the question on religion. In 1926, when Buddhism first appeared as a distinct category on the census, there were 169 Buddhists, and 1194 Confucians, but a total of 3374 Chinese. Presumably they were describing themselves within other categories, or simply not responding to the question on religion.

Nevertheless, an excavation of Lawrence Chinese camp (Otago) has shed some light on the Chinese goldminers' religious practice. Two joss-houses were known to have been at Lawrence: Naam-Shun Joss House built in 1869, and a second one built in 1900, later relocated to 12 Maryport St., Lawrence in 1947, where it still exists as a private residence. A joss house in Bendigo (Victoria) also exists, maintained by the National Trust of Australia. The Trust's website calls it a "house of prayer" which "continues to be used as a place of worship".³² The archaeologists working on the Lawrence site define a joss-house as "a small community structure where ritual and religious activities take place" (Jacomb et al. 2006, 262).

A joss-house was not a temple, nor did it normally house monks or priests. Throughout Chinese-Asia, joss-houses have been places where a variety of indigenous deities were worshipped, along with saints and supernatural beings from Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and folktales. They were usually decorated with proverbs and sayings: two panels of characters from one of the Lawrence joss-houses are extant, displayed at the Otago Settlers' Museum in Dunedin.

These religious generalities – the broader Confucian worldview they probably held to – are put in their context by James Ng who argues persuasively in his comprehensive four-volume socio-cultural history *Windows on a Chinese Past* (1993-1999), that the Chinese goldminers were sojourners and nothing more, in Otago simply to extract the gold, then move on. Their social cohesion was pragmatic and nostalgic: prospectors clustered themselves in groups resembling their home village alliances. If Young's reflection regarding his grandfather is representative, then their religion offered life-stage rituals and little else, and the joss-house served as a location for

³² http://www.nattrust.com.au/trust_properties/affiliated_properties/bendigo_joss_house (Accessed 7th July, 2008.)

performing these. The joss-houses may well have had a niche or two with a Buddha in them, but were not exclusively Buddhist places as such. Ajahn Viradhammo (1990) concludes that the Chinese goldminers held to a “folk religion which had elements of Buddhist influence” (1990, 34), and it may be wisest to let this conclusion suffice.

Whatever the mix actually was, Chinese religious practice was very different to the dominant Christianity of New Zealand. With their cultural and linguistic isolation, together with the transience of goldmining, the Chinese struggled to participate in British colonial culture, just as British immigrants struggled to accept and integrate them. After the goldmining was over, a small number stayed on, sponsoring their families to immigrate from China.

In a broad sense, even though there was little cross-cultural interaction between the Chinese and the dominant culture, their very presence gave notice of the culturally “other”. This otherness offered the possibilities of a religious discourse outside of the dominant Christianity in New Zealand (or Presbyterianism in Otago), but this however was not taken up. The Chinese’ religion remained a private family matter, behind closed doors, excluded from public discourse by cultural prejudice. The arrival of explicit Chinese forms of Buddhism in New Zealand had to wait until the mid-1980s with a new wave of Chinese immigrants.

Theosophy in New Zealand

Palmerston North, a university town of 70,000, has an active Lodge of the Theosophical Society. It is one of four lodges (of a total of thirteen) in New Zealand which has its own building, signifying a stable and sustainable membership over the years (65 in 2006). A total membership of 1000 theosophists is well spread around the

country in lodges and study groups, and national conference draws about eighty to it. While the national centre of Theosophy is now in Auckland, the Palmerston North lodge nevertheless has historical and geographical proximity to the founding of Theosophy in New Zealand, which commenced in Woodville (near Palmerston North) and Wellington.

Aroon Parshotam, a member and informal custodian of the Palmerston North lodge, believes that Buddhism in New Zealand has strong roots in Theosophy and that the Society “was probably responsible for getting Buddhism going here”. Christopher Parr, writing in the Society’s journal *Theosophy in New Zealand* (2000), is more circumspect, acknowledging that even though theosophists did facilitate the arrival of a certain form of Buddhism, its influence, in the long term, was inconsequential.

Historically, Buddhism and Theosophy are entwined in the persons of Colonel Henry Steel Olcott and Madam Helena Petrova Blavatsky. Rick Fields (1992) has demonstrated the influence which Olcott and Blavatsky had in bringing Buddhism – or rather, their version of Buddhism – to America, and Europe. Olcott also toured Australia in 1891 lecturing on “Theosophy and Buddhism”. He co-founded the Australian Theosophical Society, the aim of which was “to disseminate Buddhist philosophy”. Paul Croucher (1989) notes that Olcott was “the first visiting lecturer to effectively popularise Buddhism, [finding] a receptive, highly respectable audience [in Australia]” (1989, 9).

Did Olcott have similar influence in New Zealand when he toured for a few weeks in 1897? Parr observes that Buddhism’s reception in New Zealand at this time “was strongly coloured by the Theosophical lenses which projected it here” (2000, 11).

According to Stephen Prothero, this “white Buddhism” that Olcott promoted “was not the tradition of the Buddhists but a ‘Buddhism’ of his own invention: a Buddhist lexicon informed by a Protestant grammar and spoken with a theosophical accent” (1996, 69). In other words, Buddhism, when promoted by Olcott, was not allowed to speak for itself. Rather, it was masked by Olcott’s unique interpretation of it.

Nevertheless, one could argue that Olcott’s version of Theosophy, as a “creolized Buddhism” (Prothero 1996, 7) has been a continuous Buddhist presence in New Zealand since the early 1900s. Perhaps it could be called “esoteric Buddhism” as some have suggested, due to Blavatsky’s early influence (Irwin 2001, 22). Theosophists themselves may take issue with this, understanding Theosophy to be broader and a synthesis of religion informed from various sources. However, Parr can find only scattered literary evidence of any enduring legacy of Olcott’s visit. Notes in the records of the Society’s journal, minutes and other literature indicate that the Society subsequently merely hosted talks on Buddhism by a variety of visiting speakers.

These visiting speakers addressed small but enthusiastic groups of European colonists, much like they had done in Australia and elsewhere. This dynamic still continues, after a fashion. For example, the Palmerston North Lodge hosted a four part lecture series on Buddhism in mid 2006 delivered by Massey University’s lecturer in Buddhist studies. The audience varied between twelve and forty-two over the four weeks, the majority of whom were “white” New Zealanders. Although the Lodge president prefaced each lecture with an explanation of what Theosophy is, there was no explicit attempt to interpret or contextualize Buddhism or Theosophy with respect to each other.

The Theosophical Society continues to host meetings of a variety of religious groups, and it does little more than this with Buddhist groups. While acknowledging this, Parshotam suggests that these groups were likely to have originally been primarily immigrant groups:

Today, not much would be remembered of the past, except for the fact that we always let [Buddhist groups] use our hall. It's very likely that our [Theosophical Society] members also come along [to Buddhist events] and participate. But in the early days, it was probably more tied in with ethnicity; now there [are] big enough [Buddhist] ethnic groups – Thai and so on – they would just get together themselves. They don't need the Theosophical Society (Interview, 2005).

Even today, when the monks visit Palmerston North from Bodhinyanarama (Stokes Valley, Wellington), they may meet their chiefly Asian adherents in the Lodge.

If, as Parshotam suggests, The Theosophical Society facilitated Buddhism's arrival in New Zealand, then the Lodge has only been a venue for a periodic lecture on Buddhism, or a venue where early Buddhist immigrants found a sympathetic host for their meetings. Parr concludes that "it appears that Buddhism has never struck a powerful chord with Theosophists in New Zealand, and so Theosophy doesn't play as seminal a role in bringing the Buddha dharma to this country as in Australia" (2000, 13). Neither it seems has the Theosophical Society managed to penetrate mainstream New Zealand society in a way that it could claim influence in the dissemination of Buddhism. The relationship of the Theosophical Society and Buddhism is more pragmatic than organic, at least as expressed at the Palmerston North Lodge.

The two phenomena I have placed in the early era – that of the religious practices of Chinese goldminers and the hospitality of the Theosophical Society – are somewhat ambiguous, and effect little ongoing significance in the broader New Zealand society. They are worthy of attention however, if for no other reason than to dispense

with mythologies surrounding them.³³ They both served to give notice to New Zealand of the religious “other”, and hence challenged Christian hegemony. The category of Buddhism started showing on the census forms from as early as 1891, but it is highly unlikely that the Chinese goldminers were responsible for introducing Buddhism to mainstream society. Any Buddhism that may have been recognisable prior to the 1970s may well have been fashioned more by Theosophy, with which, at best, it had a pragmatic if not ambivalent relationship.

Contemporary Buddhism: from the 1970s

A new, historically distinct, and explicit period of New Zealand’s relationship with Buddhism started to take shape in the 1960s. This was consistent with the timing of its emergence as a popular religion in America and Europe. Robert Ellwood (1993) described New Zealand Buddhism of this time as “a type of 1960s alternative spiritual group” (1993, 214). At best, individuals were exploring Buddhism in informal home meetings, or experimenting with meditation techniques, or reading the Beat poets of America (~1950s). Although some attempts were made to form a Buddhist Society as early as 1956, Buddhism had little significant institutional presence throughout the 1960s.

Perhaps the seminal modern event was the visit of Karma Tenzin Dorje Namgyal Rinpoche in 1973. Namgyal Rinpoche was a Canadian, trained in both Theravadan and Tibetan Kagyu traditions. He led a retreat on the shores of Lake Rotoiti, Rotorua. One participant, Terry Hearsey, remembers this fondly:

³³ In discovering that I was “doing a PhD on Buddhism in New Zealand”, friends and colleagues would more often than not say something rhetorical like “the first Buddhists in New Zealand were the Chinese goldminers, right?” Because of this assumption at the popular level which I have experienced on numerous occasions, I have wished to include this section to clarify the religious belief and practice of the Chinese goldminers, even though they have had little organic influence on the future shape that Buddhism was to take in New Zealand.

We [did] a three month, quite intensive retreat; twenty hours a day in meditation and discipline. We rented summer cottages. I think it's probably true [that this was a real milestone event. It got Buddhism in New Zealand launched]. I was part of that group. It was great. It was hard work. It was crazy.

This event sketched some tentative contours: New Zealand's Buddhism would be sourced from places other than just Asia (in this case, Canada), and would be led by teachers already schooled in "Western Buddhism"; it would be eclectic to some degree, and communal; it would have an explicit meditative impulse, and would be closely associated with the environment. In this sense, Buddhism would be more than a religion from Asia, limited to immigrant groups. Like Buddhism in other western countries, it could be for converts. This initial event metamorphosed into the Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre, located near Nelson. Tarchin Hearn, teacher at Wangapeka, continues to embody a momentum initiated by this first event. The centre's website describes his teaching style and content as somewhat "modern" – to use Donald Lopez' adjective (2002, ix) – where Hearn seeks to

blend the insights and understandings of science and ecology with the teachings of Buddha Dharma. Though well trained in Buddhism, Tarchin's way of teaching is thoroughly non-sectarian and universal in nature. Bringing together a wonderful balance of humour and seriousness, eclectic experimentation and classical tradition.³⁴

A second significant event happened two years later. In 1975, Tibetan lamas Thubten Yeshe and Thubten Zopa toured New Zealand. The establishment of the Dorje Chang Institute for Wisdom and Culture (DCI) followed in 1976. DCI is now located in Avondale, Auckland and has been the flagship of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), regarding itself to be "the oldest Tibetan Buddhist centre in New Zealand".³⁵ FPMT has roots in the Tibetan Gelugpa lineage and has

³⁴ <http://www.wangapeka.org/teacherbios/tarchinhearn.html> (Accessed 23rd July, 2006.)

³⁵ This claim is made on DCI's own website: <http://www.dci.org.nz/dci.shtml> (Accessed 12th September, 2008.)

deliberately positioned itself for the West. Lamas Yeshe and Zopa attracted large numbers of Westerners to their centre in Kopan, near Kathmandu, throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It was these Westerners, including New Zealanders, who invited them back to their home countries to teach and establish centres.

To borrow a concept from Jan Nattier, in some sense, both traditions were “imported” (1998, 189): Wangapeka from Canada, and FPMT from Tibet/Nepal. Nattier argues that “imported” Buddhism is the domain of those in the middle-class who have leisure time and disposable income. This may well be a conclusion that is appropriate for New Zealand in the future, but for now I use this word only to give notice of a mechanism for arrival, rather than using it to describe a sociological group. The mechanism for importing Buddhism to New Zealand has been the cultural icon of the “O.E.”, that is, the overseas experience. While travelling, often through Asia (or more often now, through Western countries) young New Zealanders, out to discover and experience a wider world than their perceived remote Pacific homeland, first discover Buddhism while they “do their O.E.” Because they generally travel cheaply, their discovery of Buddhism is not necessarily intentional, but rather coincidental. Ecie Hursthouse, founder of Amitabha Hospice (affiliated to DCI) has a representative story:

About thirty years ago, my husband and I were in Kathmandu and he ran into his old flatmates [from] Auckland. And they were going to do this course [at Kopan] and said ‘why don’t you come along?’ It was twenty-eight days, residential, and [it] really changed our lives. We were impressed with the teacher because he was so unusual, so warm and friendly, and funny and compassionate, and the teachings were so logical and made sense. And we started to do the practices and over the years it just grew (Broadhurst and Moore 2003).

Some of these travellers stayed on with their new-found teacher, whether it be in Asia or the West, and made a formal commitment to Buddhism. In this way Tarchin Hearn was once a student of Namgyal Rinpoche in Canada. Similarly, Ajahn Succino, a

resident monk at Bodhinyanarama, discovered Buddhism in India, then trained in Thailand, and can lead *pūja* in the Thai language. The New Zealand founders of the Thubtān Shādrub Dhargyey Ling (Dunedin) studied in Dharmasala, North India with Geshe Dhargyey. They then returned to Dunedin inviting Geshe Dhargyey to come and teach at their new Dunedin centre from 1985 (Rowell 1987).

In response to similar invitations, some Buddhist teachers have been explicitly sent with a “missionary” agenda. That Buddhism could be conceived of as a missionary religion may be a new idea for some, especially in the face of the popular perception that it is not a missionary religion.³⁶ An international conference in Boston in 2000 gave notice that indeed, Buddhism could be conceptualised as a missionary religion (Learman 2005). For example, the two long serving lamas at the Karma Choeling Buddhist Monastery (Kaukapakapa), Lamas Samten and Shedrup, were sent to New Zealand by their lineage masters. Lama Samten describes this:

In 1981, His Holiness the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa and His Eminence Beru Khyentse Rinpoche requested me to come to New Zealand. I have been here for more than seventeen years now. I’m really not sure how much benefit there is in my being here but there must be at least some benefit, otherwise His Holiness would not have sent me (Gyatso 2006).

Similarly in 2001, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, based in England, asked Kelsang Vajra – David Stewart, a New Zealander studying under him in England – to return to New Zealand and set up the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT). Vajra is explicit and enthusiastic as to NKT’s potential:

[NKT] has a great message, and we are motivated by compassion for all sentient beings, so we are going to start centres all over New Zealand. I think kiwis will respond to us because [NKT] is led by kiwis. We want to be kiwi. We don’t want to be a transplant. We know how to solve people’s problems. [We are going to] get rid of the bad *karma* in the nation. We want to [eventually] expand into the prisons (Interview, 2003).

³⁶ I note this solely on anecdotal evidence from many personal conversations with Western Buddhists who more often than not insist that Buddhism is “not out to convert anybody”.

This missionary impulse has resulted in “export” Buddhists, to borrow Nattier’s term again. Thus for a New Zealander now to have contact with Buddhism, he or she need not go to Asia. There are now New Zealanders who have become Buddhists having had Buddhism “sold” to them because of active proselytizing in New Zealand. New Zealand sanghas are growing around this export phenomenon: Tibetan lamas, or ordained Western Buddhists are sent to New Zealand, or alternatively, New Zealanders themselves, who have studied overseas in both Asian and Western countries are being ordained, returning and setting up new centres. Kelsang Vajra is a case in point. Amala Wrightson Sensei is another example. She returned to New Zealand in 2003 after a fourteen year absence in which she had done formal *koan* training, to be the teacher at the Auckland Zen Centre. With the consequent proliferation of lineages, dharma centres, and sanghas throughout New Zealand a landscape of many contours is emerging. “Introduction to Buddhism” classes are now readily available to the New Zealand public, offered not so much in community centres or High School community programmes, but located in Buddhist temples or dharma centres.

These centres and sanghas are the social and institutional context for the convert interviewees of this thesis. These are the places where practitioners can experience “stable belief structures” (Savage 2003). This “convert” Buddhism, first proposed by Charles Prebish in 1979 and taken up again in 1993, is juxtaposed with “ethnic” Buddhism as a category within a “two Buddhism” typology (Prebish 1979, 1993, Numrich 2006). “Ethnic” Buddhism is the collection of Buddhist traditions brought with immigrants. This does not mean that other typologies are not possible or useful, or that I have necessarily chosen an ultimate “best fit” typology for New Zealand. The

usefulness of these categories for the New Zealand situation is that they are essentially cultural categories, and describe what actually exists.

The interplay of demand (that is, import) religion and missionary (that is, export) religion is at work as a transmission mechanism. Indeed, I suggest that this very interplay is the fuel that feeds the ongoing arrival of Buddhist traditions in New Zealand. I have demonstrated thus far that those traditions which have been sent to New Zealand, were, on the whole, initially invited, due to a New Zealander “discovering” the tradition while travelling overseas. As the New Zealand sanghas mature, further teachers are invited (and thus sent), or sangha members are sent overseas to train, and then return to New Zealand to establish new centres or teach in the centre which sent them.

This interplay of imported and exported Buddhism is not the exclusive domain of so-called “convert Buddhism”, but is also at play amongst the Buddhist traditions brought by immigrants. Following the Immigration Policy Review of 1986, the Immigration Act (1987) broke from old paradigms of family and ethnic based immigration policies: priority would not necessarily be given to British immigrants just because New Zealand had been a British colony. Nostalgia gave way to pragmatism, and the new Act opened a more skills and wealth based conduit for immigration. In addition, a humanitarian conduit – hosting refugees – became more explicit and generous. Even though the Immigration Amendment Act (1991) adjusted and tightened some of these new policies, skills-based immigration policies were in New Zealand to stay. In effect, New Zealand turned her face away from Europe and more towards Asia and the Pacific. Immigrants from many of the Asian Buddhist countries have consequently arrived in New Zealand: Cambodian, Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Chinese,

Thai, Sri Lankan, Hong Kongese, Japanese, and more recently Korean. Borrowing a concept from Jan Nattier again, immigrants have brought various traditions of Buddhism with them “in their baggage” (Nattier 1998).

Over the subsequent two decades, a settlement pattern has emerged. Immigrants establish their families and develop social networks amongst their own ethnic group, and as these connections become stronger, each community builds its own culturally unique Buddhist temple. An invitation is then inevitably sent back to the homeland for a Buddhist monk to be sent to take up residency at the temple. The integration of these monks is not without its challenges, but in a sense their presence legitimizes the temple. This legitimation adds to the growing momentum and profile of the temple complex, attracting more adherents, offering an immediate location of religious and “cultural solace” for further immigrants (Moore 2004).

I refrain at this point from giving a deeper analysis of the “ethnic” Buddhism in New Zealand. I have done this already elsewhere, using the census data from 2001 (Kemp 2007). Suffice it to summarize at this point that the mechanism of arrival of Buddhism in New Zealand is similar for both convert and ethnic Buddhism, and to note that there is very little social or institutional overlap between the two. Very few non-Asian New Zealanders source their Buddhism from “ethnic” Buddhist centres. To illustrate this, in October 2006, when I visited Fo Guang Shan (sourced from Taiwan), my guide bemoaned the fact that there were few “locals” who actively participated in Buddhist event and ritual beyond a tourist-like curiosity. This was in spite of Fo Guang Shan’s explicit efforts to attract them. Nor do Asian New Zealanders, as a rule, source their Buddhism from “convert” centres. For example, when I visited the MRO (Zen) *sesshin* in St Arnaud in July 2006, there were only two Japanese participants amongst

forty-six Caucasian New Zealanders. Nevertheless, what is noteworthy here is that the import/export mechanism results in any and all forms of Buddhism arriving in New Zealand.

I have demonstrated to this point that Buddhism in New Zealand has a global context: Buddhism has arrived in New Zealand, not so much as a unique end point of 2500 years of Buddhist expansion, but concurrently with Buddhism's arrival in the West. Buddhism has made significant inroads into America and Europe at the same time. This is the Buddhism that the interviewees have embraced, and their context remains firmly in the flow of Western Buddhism, and hence there is, at first reading, very little that is different about it. Africa and South America are also hosts to Buddhist traditions (see for example Clasquin and Krueger 1999, Rocha 2006), prompting us now to consider Buddhism as a truly global religion, and New Zealand as part of it.

Ambiguities remain however. The "ethnic" and "convert" categories remain contested. Trying to define who a Buddhist actually is, or what it means to identify as a Buddhist continues to be problematic, even if one turns to census data for clarification.

The New Zealand Census

Quantitative data about religious life in New Zealand is not prolific. Where it does exist, it is well dated (for example Donovan 1985, 1990, Elsmore 2005). There has been, to the best of my knowledge, no statistically robust survey done amongst adherents of numerically minor or immigrant religious groups. Where there have been surveys, more often than not they have been initiated by Christian leadership for Christian reflection. One notable example is the 2001 Church Life Survey undertaken amongst 60,000 people from 1000 parishes/churches across twelve denominations.

However this is an exception and most commentators call on the data located in the five-yearly census. What sort of information does the census yield? Can the census tell us who a Buddhist is, and if so, in what ways? Furthermore, how authoritative can the census data be?

Statistics New Zealand is the government agency that conducts the five-yearly census in New Zealand, the most recent being in March, 2006. The first New Zealand census was in 1851, and the category of “Buddhist” appeared for the first time in the 1891 census, although the published summaries incorporated it within the category “Buddhist, Pagan and Confucian”. The word “Pagan” is most likely to have had the meaning of “non-Christian” at this stage, rather than the more precise meaning associated with today’s Paganism. If this was the case, then combining Confucianism, Paganism and Buddhism may well have been an attempt to simply list non-Christian religions together, acknowledging implicitly that at least the Chinese goldminers of Otago were “different” from mainstream colonial society. Greater precision appeared in the 1896, 1901, 1906 and 1911 censuses, the summaries of which nested Buddhism together with Confucianism in the category “Confucian (includes Buddhist)”.

It was from the 1921 census that Buddhism appeared as a unique category in the published summaries, recognising perhaps that the families of Chinese goldminers who had stayed on in New Zealand after the gold-rush were now a more easily identifiable social group. There was no census in 1931, or in 1941, but regardless of this, we have a remarkable resource in the census figures, in both longevity (from 1891) and precision (from 1921). Thus, including the most recent census (2006) there have been twenty-two

censuses, spanning 115 years, which offer information about Buddhist affiliation in New Zealand.³⁷

On census day in 2001 (March 6th), there were 41,106 Buddhists: 29,838 of Asian ethnicities, and 10,890 of European ethnicity.³⁸ On census day in 2006 (March 7th), 52,365 people declared themselves Buddhist (an increase of 27.4% over five years). Of these, 38,991 were of Asian ethnicities, and 10,755 were of European ethnicity (a decline of 1.25% over five years). The number of Buddhists of European ethnicities was comparable to the size of the Salvation Army (11,490). In March 2006, Buddhists were 1.3 percent of the New Zealand population.³⁹

This summary of the data reinforces differentiation on ethnic grounds. Is it legitimate to distinguish between the ethnicities of Buddhists, and if so, what does that actually mean? Additionally, why are Asian Buddhists growing in number while the non-Asians – presumably converts – have dropped slightly in number over the five years between 2001 and 2006? Possibilities of cross matching of categories appeared for the first time in the summaries of the 1996 census. The summaries of this census revealed that there were Buddhists who were “New Zealand European”, “European”, and “New Zealand Maori”. In the 2001 census more powerful cross-matching was possible. The category of Buddhism could be cross-matched with ethnicity, place of

³⁷ The frequency of enumeration is consistent with other Western nations. For example, Australia has a census every five years (August 8th, 2006 was the most recent); Canada too enumerates every five years (May 16th 2006 was the last, although the religion question is asked only every ten years; next in 2011); the United Kingdom has a census every ten years (the most recent was in 2001); the United States has a census every ten years (the most recent being in 2000).

³⁸ Census figures in this thesis have all been taken from <http://www.stats.govt.nz> unless otherwise noted. I have chosen not to challenge the term “ethnicity”, choosing to leave the term as Statistics New Zealand uses it. To list “European” as an ethnicity seems a misnomer. “European” is a geo-political category: when it is used by Statistics New Zealand, and in common parlance in New Zealand, it generally means “Caucasian” ethnicity, that is, those who have descended from (usually) white British colonial stock, or from Western Europe (for example, Holland).

³⁹ To gain some comparison, Australia’s 2006 census revealed that Buddhists were 2.1% of the Australian population. See <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au>

usual residence, financial income, country of birth, age, and gender. In 2006, rather than Statistics New Zealand posting set tables of cross-matched data, the researcher can now choose required categories and electronically generate multi-variable tables. For example, one can discover how many members of any ethnic group live in a particular location, who are Buddhists. I refrain from exploring the vast permutations possible with this data, but readily acknowledge that much interesting work could continue. An unprecedented degree of sophistication and precision is now possible with cross-matched variables.

With this capability, data for Maori is particularly noteworthy. In the 2001 census 1,686 Maori declared themselves to be Buddhist, and in 2006, this had increased to 1,836 (an increase of 8.9%). Nevertheless, this is only 0.32% of those who identified themselves as Maori. In comparison, Ratana continues to be the dominant Maori religion outside of mainstream Christian denominations, claiming 8% of the Maori population on the 2006 census. Australia paints a near identical picture for Buddhism amongst indigenous peoples. The 2001 Australian census⁴⁰ does not record any Buddhists who are “indigenous peoples” (presumably this means aboriginals who are not of white-colonial descent). If there were any, then they would have been hidden within the 3,281 “other religious groups” of “indigenous peoples”. In the 2006 Australian census, they appear explicitly as 1,417 “indigenous peoples” identifying with Buddhism. This is 0.31% of the Indigenous/Aboriginal population in Australia, close to the 0.32% of Maori who identify themselves as Buddhist. This is coincidental as there is no formal conversation that happens between Buddhist-Aboriginal peoples and Buddhist-Maori. It is symptomatic however, of the potential spread – perhaps due to the

⁴⁰ All Australian census data is acquired from <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au>

success of the “marketing of Buddhist ideas” that Suzette Major suggests (2003) – of Buddhism throughout society.

Comparisons with two other Western nations with similar populations to New Zealand are interesting. Ireland⁴¹ (population 4.3 million on April 30th, 2007) had 6,516 people identifying themselves as Buddhist in 2007. This had been a 67.3% increase since a 2002 count, but was only 0.15% of the total population. Norway,⁴² with a population in 2006 of 4.6 million, had 9,934 people identifying as Buddhists, or 0.21% of the population. Isolating who are “converts” and who are “ethnic” Buddhists is difficult for these two countries. Irish tables for 2006 list broad cross-matching of religion and “nationality”. Deductions from data about “nationalities” (as opposed to “ethnicity”, as New Zealand denotes) suggests about 4,257 of Ireland’s Buddhists are from China or “other” Asian locations, leaving approximately 2,259 “convert Buddhists”. Similarly for Norway, the data is listed as “immigration by country”. Deductions from this data suggest approximately 2,810 immigrants from Buddhist Asian countries, reducing the number of “convert Buddhists”, that is non-immigrant Norwegian Buddhists, to around 7,124. In contrast, New Zealand’s larger Buddhist population (1.3% of the population) can be accounted for by its proximity to Asia and its more generous policy towards Asian immigrants.

Statistics appear to have clarity, but they must be treated with caution. A census is a measure of peoples’ self perceptions, rather than being a measurement against an objective standard of religiosity or quantifiable membership. For example, a census does not distinguish between belief and practice. A census is also vulnerable to the tyranny of ideals: people may declare what they ought or would like to be, rather than

⁴¹ Irish census data is taken from www.cso.ie

⁴² Norwegian data is taken from www.ssb.no

what they are. How people perceive “what they are” may also be different to what the canonical or essentialist definition of their particular religious group may dictate. A census is open to politicization and abuse, both by those who determine the census categories (and those who compile the summaries), and those who are being enumerated. For example the vast array of denominations within the Christian category may not necessarily be representative of how Christian adherents perceive themselves.

A significant, if somewhat humorous example of the potential politicization of the census is illustrated by the 53,000 who declared themselves to be Jedi Knights on the 2001 New Zealand census. While “Jedi” was not a formal category, people were free to fill in the blank “other” option. Statistics New Zealand chose not to list Jedi on the official summaries, but rather listed it as “Answer understood, but will not be counted”. If “Jedi” had been counted – and why should it not have been? – then Jedism would have been 1.5% of the population, putting it ahead of Buddhism. In the 2006 census, the number of Jedi Knights dropped to a mere 20,000. That Dunedin has the highest per capita number of Jedi Knights in the world suggests that it was nothing more than a university students’ prank. Those with the power to consolidate and summarize the census deemed it so. At best then, a census is essentially a snapshot and only measures how people perceive themselves at the time of the enumeration.

If “Jedi” proved problematic, religions which are perceived to be either minor or new may not be listed in the census at all. People are free to declare their affiliation in the “Other Religion” category: there were 24,153 in this category in 2006. Neither is it compulsory to answer the question on religion. Hence in the 2006 census 1.29 million people declared “No Religion” and 239,571 declared “Object to Answering”. Those

with any sort of Buddhist predisposition may well be nested within any of these categories.

A census also has some ambiguous categories. In 2001, 14,331 people declared themselves to be in the category “Spiritualism/New Age Religions” rising to 19,506 in 2006 (an increase of 36% in five years). This is such an ambiguous category that it could include a broad variety of either believers or practitioners or both. Indeed there is no regulation that demands one declares affiliation in only one religion. A multiplicity of religious declaration is allowed. In sum there were over 1.5 million people in New Zealand (around 36% of the population) amongst whom some sort of Buddhist practice or belief may have theoretically been relevant, and yet they had chosen not to declare themselves explicitly Buddhist on census day, or had chosen to identify themselves in a variety of ways.

While it is easy enough to declare that there are over 52,000 Buddhists in New Zealand, of whom 10,755 are “converts”, these numbers remain problematic. Is there some sort of objective standard by which one can point to somebody and say “there is a Buddhist”? Thomas Tweed (2002) offers three strategies for defining religious identity: applying norms, counting members, and observing attendance (2002, 18). For Buddhism, the norms may be initiation (taking refuge in the Three Jewels), chanting/meditation (practising prescribed rituals) and affirming core beliefs (the Four Noble Truths). Counting members could be achieved by accessing mailing lists, referring to annual general meeting minutes and the likes. Observing attendance may be achievable by acquiring attendance records of regular events, if they are kept, or being involved with a Buddhist centre for a period of time and physically enumerating those who come and go. One would be a Buddhist if one did any or all of these things.

While these three strategies can yield up helpful information, overall, they are simplistic. Religious identity is complex, and religion itself, especially one that is in transition into a new culture may change radically and quickly. Tweed (2002) describes a number of categories which have been used by a variety of commentators, mainly in the United States context, to attempt to make sense of this: “old-line Buddhists” (descendents of early immigrants), “cradle Buddhists” (those who were brought up in a Buddhist family), “occult Buddhists” (those found within the spectrum of the Theosophical Society), “not-just-Buddhists” (those who acknowledge multiple identities), “lukewarm Buddhists” (those who may practise occasionally), “dharma-hoppers” (those who flit between traditions), and “convert-Buddhists” (those who choose Buddhism). If there is such variation and ambiguity in classification, then there is the possibility that any or all of these categories are represented in the New Zealand census data. Identifying as a Buddhist – or the adherent of any religion – must surely suggest some complexity, where hybridity is common and “ambivalence is the norm” (Tweed 2002, 19-29). In the previous chapter of this thesis, I have already had to resort to “close-enough-Buddhists” in describing whom I interviewed.

Because of this hybridity and ambivalence, Tweed (1999, 2002) attempts to reduce the categories by drawing a contrast between “adherents” and – introducing a new term – “sympathizers” or alternatively “night-stand Buddhists”. “Sympathizers” are those who have sympathy for Buddhism, but do not openly embrace it exclusively or fully. In fact, they usually do not identify themselves as Buddhist. Rather, they would identify themselves by means of a Christian denomination, or by some other mainstream referent, but they would acknowledge a significant interest in, and even practice of – even if rudimentary – aspects of Buddhism. So they may have a Buddhist

book on the “night stand” – the bed-side table in New Zealand English – and they may even practise some meditation, but they would not “come out” and declare themselves to be Buddhist. Tweed quotes a French study that illustrates this category of sympathizer, where 15% of the French – approximately nine million – express “an interest” in Buddhism and for two million it is the “religion they like best”, but less than 100,000 are “full-blown Buddhists” (2002, 20). This ambiguity allows Pico Iyer, a long term commentator on Buddhism, to suggest that there are now more Buddhists in France than combined Protestants (2008, 37). A study to extract similar information in New Zealand has yet to be done.

One other example of the possibility of being a “sympathizer” is illustrated by returning to the circulation claims of the magazine *Tricycle*. Although marketed primarily to American readers, it claims to be “the leading journal of Buddhism in the West”, and is “internationally distributed” to the “mainstream” and “explores the full range of Buddhist activity”. An indicator of its success is its winning of the 2005 Folio Award for Best Spiritual Magazine in the United States, and it continues to be “the best selling magazine in its field”. *Tricycle* claims to have a paid circulation of 60,000 of which 57% are Buddhists and 43% non-Buddhists.⁴³ If this is true, this circulation data (quite apart from bookshop sales) serves as an indicator of Buddhist interest, but lack of willingness to be labelled as such: 25,800 (43%) people regularly subscribe to *Tricycle*, yet are unwilling to be called “Buddhist”. These would be, to use Tweed’s word, “sympathizers”.

⁴³ <http://www.tricycle.com/advertising/> (Accessed 3rd April, 2008.)

I posit that there may well be a vast number of “sympathizers” in New Zealand.

At a Tibetan water purification ceremony at Little Beach, Ahuriri, Napier on 21st

September, 2003, I record in my field notes that I met Greg:

I was asked by a spectator what had been happening down on the beach as the crowd dispersed. Greg (white, late 20s?, bronzed skin, trendy sunglasses) had been just passing by. I explained to him what had been happening. He immediately expressed sympathy for the Tibetan cause, and was in high esteem of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan religion – “it’s all about peace and harmony and the world needs that”. Greg had been to India over a four month period as part of his O.E. and had been impressed with the temples, but not attracted to Hinduism. His attraction to Buddhism was not a committal, but only as a spectator or as a recognition that the “Tibetans have something for the world, and we all need it”. When pressed what “it” was, he offered “peace and harmony”. I probed for a deeper conversation, but the conversation drifted to rugby.

I suggest that Greg was a “sympathizer”. He was obviously interested in the *puja* on the beach – the highly visible Tibetan lamas caught his attention – but I do not know what he would have declared on the census. He had idealized what he perceived the Tibetans could offer the world, but he clearly had not committed himself to Buddhism.

Others whom I interviewed were also non-committal. I had presumed six of my interviewees to be Buddhist before interviewing them because I had met them in the context of a Buddhist practice, temple, or Dharma-centre. However, all six declined the label. The turnout to public meetings of the Dalai Lama in both 2002 and 2007 at the Wellington convention centre (which holds in excess of 4,000 people), suggests that the number of sympathizers could be quite high. There is of course no way of actually counting the number of sympathizers apart from conducting another survey, much like the French one noted above. Trying to define who the “actual Buddhists” are assumes some essentialist notion of Buddhist conversion or identity. For now, a minimalist definition will suffice: Tweed alludes to Lewis Rambo’s definition of religious

conversion (Rambo 1993, xiv) in suggesting that “Buddhists are those [people] who say they are” (Tweed 2002, 24).

However, Tweed himself is uncomfortable with his own conclusion here, conceding that he has revised his insistence on the efficacy of self-identification. At the same time he cautions that we should not totally disband “long-established standards for determining affiliation among Buddhists” (2002, 32), particularly affiliation with lineage. In other words, to be Buddhist one should ideally be affiliated with a particular lineage. Self-identification is also compromised by people who have marked “Buddhist” on the census from a desire to idealise Buddhism, rather than out of a sense of committed practice, belief, or affiliation. The census data seems overly optimistic in this regard. I suggest this because of the comparatively incongruent numbers in attendance that I have observed at Buddhist events. While Tweed (2002) notes that counting attendances can be problematic, nevertheless, a qualitative assessment of attendance suggests disparities with census figures.

Of the twenty-eight Buddhist events I attended between 2003 and 2007, fifteen were specifically in-house events (meditations, teachings, initiations, empowerments, and/or retreats) for those adherents within a particular tradition. The average attendance of these fifteen events was 15.8 people. In ten of these events, there was opportunity to demonstrate even greater commitment. These included, for example, doing prostrations before the Buddha, separating into advanced and beginners meditators’ sessions, acts of offerings, or reception of empowerment. Not all attending did these acts. This suggests that within any sangha there is a spectrum of commitment that is acceptable. This observation does not necessarily apply to sanghas of immigrant groups, but I would

hazard a guess that there would be more conformity to norms due to cultural expectations.

My numbers are backed up anecdotally. While attending these events, I enquired of people how big attendance “would normally be”, or “how many are in this sangha” or some such. There is some risk in this question, as people are likely to talk up the numbers. I experienced this with Soka Gakkai, where an attendee at the Wellington chapter told me that “this [Wellington group] is the biggest group in New Zealand”. Another member told me that the Wellington chapter had “about eighty in it, but around thirty regulars”. He also told me, contrary to the previous report, that “Auckland is the biggest [centre] with about 500 members”. On the night I attended in Wellington, only six of the membership were chanting in a separate room, and twenty five were attending the New Chanters’ Meeting (which I was attending). SGI-NZ literature states that there are 1,000 members in New Zealand and one of the Wellington members quoted this number to me (Wallace 2005). If Auckland has 500 members, then the national total of 1,000 may be true. However, discrepancies around the size of the Wellington group would suggest that the numbers would be well under 1,000 active chanters nationwide.

I would also suggest that various Buddhist groups may well approach a census with conspiratorial intent. For example, Soka Gakkai is regarded by some as sectarian and humanistic. It has also been criticized for compromising various Buddhist traits (Wallace 2002). Therefore, they may tend to identify themselves as “Buddhist” rather than more specifically as “Soka Gakkai” in an effort to legitimize themselves. Similarly Zen practitioners, whom I often observed to be shy of any identification of formal religious categories, may in fact be more precise and define themselves by lineage, or not declare anything at all. This may not necessarily be only a Buddhist phenomenon.

The plethora of Christian denominations listed on both census forms and summaries suggests that people wish to make certain statements about their affiliations and identity. I have no way of verifying this for the New Zealand census, but if there is anything in these types of observations, then further questions can be raised as to the usefulness of a census with respect to identifying Buddhists.

Nevertheless estimates can be made. Capacity crowds at the Dalai Lama's events (1996, 2002, 2007) can be explained by his much broader appeal due to the sympathy of many New Zealanders to the plight of the Tibetans, and that he is a Nobel Peace prize recipient (1989). Public meeting sizes of other Buddhist events suggest smaller numbers. Three I attended attracted 68 (Napier), 85 (Wellington) and 120 (Wellington). Photos on websites of attendance at retreats and the likes suggest numbers between ten and thirty as a rule. I have already suggested that there are between forty and sixty Buddhist traditions or chapters of traditions in New Zealand. Taking the greater of these (60) and generously affording them a membership of 80 each, then this would suggest a core participating population of Buddhists to be 4,800 (rather than 10,755). This number excludes counting immigrants who would declare themselves Buddhist on a census.

This discrepancy can be explained by the very fluid nature of a religion in transition and the ambiguities around census data, and imprecise methodologies for counting Buddhist entities. It can also be explained by acknowledging a drift away from institutionalised Christianity (Jamieson 2000), together with the perceived trendiness of Buddhism: people may not want to mark "Christian" on the census anymore, but being unsure what else to mark, declare themselves "Buddhist" because they think that

Buddhism is hip or that they like the Dalai Lama. Again, this tyranny of ideals can easily skew a census, and there is no method of measuring it.

While a census works with clear categories, it refrains from defining them. Thus “Buddhist” or “Anglican” or “Baha’i” may appear as prescriptive categories, but without reference or definition. The very word “Buddhism” can therefore be problematic for some. While being a generally accepted term, it is essentially a Western construct (Lopez 2001, 11-14). Both Asian Buddhists and Western converts may talk of themselves as followers of “the dharma/teachings”, or something similar (Lopez 2001, 12). However, while fully cognizant of the term “Buddhism”, today’s so-called Western Buddhists can be ambiguous about the label and often simply resist it. It is this ambiguity about “Buddhism” – and by implication the grey areas of conversion into it, and subsequent personal identities derived from it – that I wish to continue to explore. While the census may not define the term, I use the word “Buddhism” in as broad a sense as possible to include any belief or praxis system that claims to have been informed by the teachings of the historical Buddha, as mediated through the *Tripitaka*, subsequent scriptures, tradition, and/or legitimate lineage.

Talk of identity and meaning that New Zealanders may derive from “being Buddhist” presumes also some definition of what a “New Zealander” is. A census does not stipulate who a New Zealander is, but merely records the information about everyone who was in the country on a particular day. Those enumerated define themselves by the categories they notate. I also recognize that New Zealand identity is contested and often debated. James Liu et al. (2005b) offer a comprehensive volume of essays on its contestation. Michael King, one of New Zealand’s most eminent historians, believed that “historically, if not in fact, New Zealanders are all immigrants”

(1985, 177). Much like I suggest the category of close-enough-Buddhist, it may be wisest simply to talk of “close-enough-New Zealanders”.

I wish to work, however, with a more precise definition and have ring-fenced the formal interviews I analyse with greater precision. I use the word “New Zealander” not only to identify a citizen (holding a New Zealand passport), but also to identify someone who chooses to demonstrate a cultural-historical commitment to New Zealand, by having a significant length of residency. Since the word “New Zealander” is a geo-political term, I allow it to encompass various ethnicities: Maori, Caucasian (commonly those referred to as of European descent) Indian, Polynesian or Chinese, and any combination of these.⁴⁴ Two examples may help to clarify this. I include Mary Jaksch Roshi as a New Zealander, even though she is a German immigrant. She has been a long term resident in Nelson (since 1981) and leads a New Zealand chapter of the Diamond Sangha. I have excluded an American I met at a New Kadampa Tradition centre on the grounds that she was an American citizen and had not been in New Zealand for very long, and indicated she would return to the United States in due course.

I have chosen to leave Buddhist identity for now to be one of self-perception and self-description, rather than insisting on an essentialist definition. I would also suggest that this in itself is one of the characteristics of Western Buddhism. Because people can choose to embrace Buddhist belief and practice at will, census data will remain somewhat ambiguous, especially in New Zealand where there is no compulsion to answer the question on religion. Census data in and of itself is interesting and accurate,

⁴⁴ I acknowledge that even here, “ethnicity” is problematic. “Indian” is not an ethnicity, whereas “Aryan” or “Dravidian” or “Maratha” may well be. Likewise “Chinese” is not an ethnicity, but rather a political definition which could incorporate any number of ethnic groups smaller than the more numerous Han. However, this is not the issue here. I only wish to identify significant immigrant groups in the history of New Zealand to support my definition of “New Zealander”.

within the terms it itself defines: a census measures only self perception on the day of the census. That many enumerate themselves as “no religion” or some such is in itself interesting sociologically, but tells us little about Buddhism. Immigrants, I assume, would generally mark themselves as Buddhist, as they perceive themselves to be within a socio-cultural Buddhist milieu in their transplanted immigrant community. This identification would actually work in their favour as social glue, at least for the first generation.

However, for those converts comfortable in their Buddhist belief and practice, it is safe to assume they would also have no problem marking themselves as Buddhist – or a lineage of Buddhism – on the census form. This has been the consistent testimony of all the core Buddhists I interviewed. Other ambiguities are implicit vis-à-vis identifying oneself as New Zealander and also with the word “Buddhist”. In seeking to concretize definitions, more often than not, I simply asked in interview “what did you write for the religion question on the 2006 census?” Nearly all simply replied “Buddhist” (or a Buddhist tradition, like “Zen”). The ambiguities were amongst the “sympathizers” who tended to pick and choose belief and practice and who may or may not formally convert to Buddhism.

For those who were confident enough to consider themselves to be Buddhist and mark the census form as such, we are now left with the question as to how they came to convert to Buddhism. It is to addressing this question that we now turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: “Taking up the Practice”: Buddhist Conversion stories

“Taking refuge is when you become Buddhist.
Many New Zealanders have become Buddhists”.

Geshe Wangchen, Dorje Chang Institute (Auckland), 2006

Introduction

The English word “conversion” is derived from the Latin *conversio*, which contains the semantic content of the Greek word *metanoia*. The etymological history can be traced primarily through biblical translation, where *metanoia* meant “to turn away” or “to turn around”, used in the New Testament as meaning “change of mind on reflection; repentance” (Liddell et al. 1974). Today, the transitive verb “convert” means “to bring [someone/something] over to an opinion or religion” or “to substitute [something]” or simply “to change [something]” (Oxford Dictionary). Hence a person can be converted (passive voice), or can convert somebody or something (active voice), including his or her own self. Where conversion is active, the actor is choosing to convert him/herself to a new opinion, idea, religion, belief, and the likes.

Malony and Southard (1992) remind us that many understand Buddhism to teach respect for all faiths, and Buddhism therefore “seemingly [has] no need for the idea of conversion” (1992, 3,7). On the other hand, as I have noted already, other commentators are unequivocal that “Buddhism is said to be a missionary religion” (Eggletton 1999, 85). As I have demonstrated in the introduction, there is some notion of conversion already within Buddhism’s own literature and historical traditions, specifically with regard to “taking refuge”. Because Buddhism has moved out of its original Indian context across the world, it implies that one can convert to it in some sense: one must

choose whether to join or not, and moreover, in what ways to join it. Buddhism has undergone various renewal movements throughout history, implying again, that if one wants to embrace these, one has to choose to join them: that is, change or convert in some sense. Hence there is even the possibility of someone “converting” into a new sect of Buddhism, out of an old one. Granted “conversion” in Buddhism has rarely emphasized a demand to adopt a belief in absolute Truth and subsequently avoid syncretism. This expectation is chiefly expressed by the monotheistic religions (Hiebert 1992). Nevertheless, non-Buddhists today, especially in the West, still enquire as to conversion – or at least how to become a Buddhist – and Buddhists understand what they mean.

For example, in a Buddhist internet chat room in November 2007, the question was asked “how does Buddhism approach people in other religions to persuade them to convert to Buddhism”? An answer was offered by one Anthony Flanagan, who suggested that with “occasional exceptions, this is not something that Buddhists tend to do”. Rather, people “come to Buddhism” because there is something in it that “strikes a chord” with them such that they want to “look into what it offers more deeply”. This so-called “chord”, for Westerners, is often the “open invitation to explore, rather than a sudden insistence on embracing all its tenets based on faith alone”. In other words, “try it out and see” and even integrate aspects of Buddhism which will “help you in practising your own religion”. Flanagan naïvely concludes – for we have seen that Buddhism is indeed “exported” to New Zealand – that Buddhism tends not to proselytize, and seeks to live in harmony with other religious perspectives” (Flanagan 2006).

Because of the ambiguities of internet chat rooms, we have no idea if Flanagan is speaking authoritatively. Nevertheless, this invitation to explore comes from the Buddha himself who encouraged people to “seek with an honest and open mind” and “test the truth of his teachings through their own experience”. This was something that the Buddha encouraged General Siha to do, recorded in the anecdote in the introduction. Flanagan’s response implies an activist rather than a passivist mode of conversion, meaning that people must seek out Buddhism for themselves. Charles Markham, one of my interviewees, said that the Buddhist sangha must “look after the lake so that the swans will come and land on it”. He meant by this that Buddhists themselves must continue to be a sangha in a fashion so as to be attractive for those who are interested.

This active/passive distinction has been made by sociologists since investigations into cult recruitment during the 1960s, where sociologists “have conventionally approached religious conversion as something that happens to a person who is destabilized by external or internal forces, and then brought to commit the self to a conversionist group by social-interactive pressures” (Straus 1979, 158). Charles Markham’s care of “the lake” implies very little intentional recruitment of new converts, at least by the Zen tradition he was in. In contrast to this, Flanagan explicitly describes an activist mode: people seek out Buddhism, try it, and test it. Swans must still choose to land on this particular lake.

By and large, the interviewees were “swans landing on the lake”: they were activists, seeking out Buddhism. I assumed this throughout the interview process, and I offer activism as a definitive interpretive framework. The passivist theory of conversion depicted “the convert as driven into the arms of a group that manipulates him or her so as to exact cognitive and behavioural commitment to its belief system and institutional

structure” (Straus 1979, 159). The “passive” convert had been “driven” into this possibility due to antecedents such as deprivations, social class, mobility or marginality. Through participant observation I found no group intentionally strategizing to manipulate or cajole deprived, lonely or marginalized individuals into their sanghas. I have not conceptualised my Buddhist interviewees as “cultist” or even as members of any New Religious Movement. Nevertheless, even though I propose an activist paradigm, I am not ruling out that interviewees may indeed have been persuaded to adopt some practice or belief by an enthusiastic advocate.

Theodore Sarbin in his work on hypnosis believed the passivist mode of conversion was more a symptom of mechanism, which he says – writing in the late 1970s – is “the dominant worldview in modern Western civilization. The root metaphor is the machine: efficient causality. Cause and effect is the fundamental organizing principle of modern scientists” (Sarbin in Straus 1979, 159). Today, when a mechanistic world view is not taken for granted, I therefore do not assume causality between events or stages on an interviewee’s spiritual journey. In proposing a process model of conversion, Lewis Rambo (1993) cautions against a mechanistic causal progression: “the order of the stages [of conversion] is *not* universal and invariant” (his italics) (1993, 165). Therefore while the interviewees may well have articulated an active seeking, which took them on a spiritual journey, which led them to Buddhism, I do not presume any necessary links in the progression. Factors leading to conversion are many and varied, and often run concurrently as much as consecutively. I take notice of a causal sequence only if the interviewee explicitly makes the links. In addition, I do not concede that conversion to Buddhism is in some way deviant or that it is merely recruitment into a new social circle and nothing more (Lofland and Stark 1965, Lofland 1966).

By embracing an activist paradigm I am making a call on how the actor (the potential convert) approaches Buddhism, rather than Buddhism approaching the individual. I am not suggesting that Buddhist groups have not applied social pressure on individuals, as if they were passive individuals. *Kosen-rufu*,⁴⁵ the recruitment methodology of Soka Gakkai, as I observed and experienced it, was very intentional, well prepared, and persuasive. Other groups may well pressure individuals whom they perceive are passive, but I presume that the actor can choose to resist or embrace the perceived pressures. Thus I framed my initial interview question as “tell me something of your own spiritual journey”, assuming that the interviewee had some control over their acting within that journey, and indeed was “seeking” something. I assumed that if they then converted to Buddhism, that it would have been an accomplishment of some sort. I chose the opening question around the word “journey” because part of the accepted speech of Buddhists is to talk about a “path”. Some of the teachings within Buddhism are known as “paths”, and more importantly “path” is a metaphor for Buddhism itself, embodied in the Eight Fold Path, which is core to all traditions. Overall, talk of a “spiritual journey” or “spiritual path” was easily understood as something that the actors (the interviewees) progressed along themselves.

Conversion as change from not-Buddhist to Buddhist

I will argue later in this chapter that the word “conversion” is not the best word to use to conceptualise the change that occurs in becoming Buddhist. Before that discussion, I wish to explore “conversion” simply as change from “not-Buddhist” to

⁴⁵ *Kosen-rufu* literally means “to widely declare and spread (the Lotus Sutra); to secure lasting peace and happiness for all humankind through the propagation of Nichiren Buddhism. More broadly, *kosen-rufu* refers to the process of establishing the humanistic ideals of Nichiren Buddhism in society.” *Focus* 189. October, 2005. 43.

“Buddhist”. I wish to do this by exploring the classic notion of “taking refuge”, and then to explore the ambiguities of conversion that the interviewees revealed.

Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

Conversion is ritualized in Buddhism in the ceremony of “taking refuge in the three jewels”, that is, the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. I have already noted that in the Buddhist scripture *Vinaya-pitaka*, there are accounts of people who went “for refuge”. Western commentators on Buddhism are in accord on the significance of “taking refuge” as a rite of entry into Buddhism. According to Donald Lopez, “taking refuge” or “going for refuge” is a “fundamental practice of Buddhism” (2002, 263). Lopez declares unequivocally that “a Buddhist is someone who says three times ‘I go for refuge to the Buddha. I go for refuge to the dharma. I go for refuge to the sangha’” (2001, 173). This recitation may be private or public, once or regularly. Paul Williams agrees that this is the “minimum” for becoming a Buddhist: it is the “proper formulaic way prescribed by the Buddhist traditions” (2000, 1). In a similar fashion Peter Harvey calls it “the key expression of commitment” (1990, 17), and Rupert Gethin explains that “going to these three jewels for refuge is essentially what defines an individual as a Buddhist” (1998, 34). Graham Coleman describes refuge in the three jewels “as the mark of becoming a practising Buddhist” (1993, 367) as does Christopher Lamb who believes it to be the “primary initiation rite” (1999, 79). Charles Prebish endorses this: “[The three refuges] refers to a formula utilized in the ceremony by which one formally professes faith in the Buddhist religion” (2001, 256). “Going for refuge” may be as a single ceremony, or may be the first part of an extended ceremony which includes further taking of ethical vows.

Thus “going for refuge” could be considered in the same ritualistic category as Anglican confirmation, or the Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (Williams 2002, 206). I wish only to note here the ritualistic significance of “taking refuge” as a definitive moment when one “becomes a Buddhist”. In other words, having undertaken the ceremony, the actor is now willing to identify herself publicly as a Buddhist, because she perceives that an internal change of allegiance, affection, belief and/or motivation has occurred. In short, it is the moment when one moves from being “not-Buddhist” to being “Buddhist”.

Geshe Thupten Wangchen, resident Tibetan lama at the Dorje Chang Institute in Avondale, Auckland, told me that taking refuge is paradigmatic as a conversion event. “Taking refuge is when you become Buddhist. Many New Zealanders have become Buddhists. When they do the three refuges ceremony, then they are Buddhist”.⁴⁶ More than fifteen of the interviewees talked explicitly about “taking refuge”. For example, Clara Woodfield explained that for Tibetan Buddhists, “taking refuge” was “definitely the point of commitment”. Jane Crawley explained this in more detail with reference to her context in Karma Choeling Tibetan Buddhist Monastery in Kaukapakapa:

You do formalise [commitment]. You take refuge in the three. There is a ceremony you do. Say you go to an eight week retreat. At the end the lamas will tell people they’ll hold a ceremony for “taking refuge” and those who want to, can come and participate. This is the moment of conversion. If you want to take refuge outside of this type of event, then you tell your lama and he will do a ceremony with you. Some [ceremonies] are elaborate, some are very simple. It depends on the lama and the lineage and the person. Yes, [there is an identifiable core of converted Buddhists].

⁴⁶ When I pressed Geshe Wangchen for numbers, he said “five or six every month ... there are about a hundred at Dorje Chang”. At the time I interviewed Geshe Wangchen he claimed to be speaking in the context of an inter-Buddhist conversation that had commenced in the wider Auckland area in 2006, and so the claim that “five or six” New Zealanders a month were taking the refuge ceremony may have been a generic estimate. It was also unclear whether his “hundred” at Dorje Chang were regular sangha members, or the size of the mailing list. Further conversations and estimates which I undertook based on participant observation at a Tara *pūja* would suggest a much lower number of active participants at Dorje Chang.

In other words, there was a context and the ceremony was part of, or at the end of, a process. Lewis Rambo (1993) proposes a seven stage process model of conversion, and places “context” as stage one.⁴⁷ According to Rambo, the refuge ceremony would be in stage six, that of commitment. In other words, a person who goes for refuge is doing so as part of a process that has led to the ceremony, and that process is either in, or has been initiated due to a formal and disciplined context.

Chana Ullman (1989) conceptualises another aspect of this context, and proposes that “conversion is best understood in the context of the individual’s emotional life. It occurs on a background of emotional upheaval and promises relief by a new attachment”. This attachment, Ullman proposes, is to a person, rather than a religion (1989, xvi). I will explore Ullman’s thesis of attachment to a person later in the chapter: it is sufficient to note at this stage her psychological model of conversion. Psychological theories assume the centrality of “self”. In Buddhism, the existence of the self is problematic, but amongst the interviewees, the self was assumed to exist, and I found little evidence of any deep conceptualizing of “what” or “who” was converting, other than the general “I”. Jane Crawley, who took refuge at the end of the retreat (above), told me that her refuge taking and subsequent commitment to rigorous ritual (100,000 prostrations) was not so much about commitment to Buddhism. Rather, it was a psychologically pragmatic strategy simply to “deal with the negative and bad stuff in my head”.

⁴⁷ Rambo’s model includes the seven stages of context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment and consequences. See Lewis R. Rambo, 1993. *Understanding Religious Conversion*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. p 168.

The psychology of conversion

Dealing to “negative and bad stuff” in one’s head clearly locates Buddhist commitment – at least in Jane Crawley’s case – in the category of a psychology. I turn now to exploring the psychology of this acting. Generally, interviewees spoke easily of their movement towards Buddhism. They perceived themselves as actors in a narrative that they themselves controlled. This became evident when coding themes in the auto-narratives. I followed two basic principles in coding themes. Firstly, a theme must be on the “before” side of conversion, that is on the lead up to some sort of reference in the auto-narrative to being willing to be identified as Buddhist, or considering oneself to be Buddhist in a sense that the interviewee was comfortable with. This may or may not have been “taking refuge”. Secondly, frequency. If there seemed a general commonality of event or sequence of events across a number of auto-narratives, then I deemed it noteworthy as a theme. I have refrained from coding or grouping according to empirical criteria such as affiliation to groups, or the demonstration of religious ritual or event (Snow and Machalek 1984). Rather, my coding is informed by what Snow and Machalek (1984) termed “rhetorical indicators”, particularly “biographical reconstruction” (1984, 173). In other words, I was more interested in how the interviewees talked about themselves, rather than imposing external categories on them.

Two broad summative categories were evident, which I have chosen to name simply as “negative” and “positive”. I have named these categories as such to acknowledge that movement toward a new ideology can be initiated when a person experiences a negative place in life, suffering purposelessness or anxiety. Interviewees perceived that Buddhism could offer them something in the way of immediate purposefulness and/or to relieve either chronic or acute anxiety. On the other hand a seeker may be in a positive or congruent place in life, and they are attracted to

Buddhism for its perceived inherent value. These two motivations are not pre-requisites to embracing Buddhism alone, nor are they clear cut categories. These negative and positive motivations lead people into other religions as well. People embrace new ideologies and religion due to a mixture of these. Nevertheless, these two broad motivations summarize the interviewees' narratives well.

Negative reasons for embracing Buddhism: restlessness, stress and rebellion

Interviewees commenced a spiritual journey due in part to some sort of incongruence or negativity in their lives. This may have been chronic or acute, expressed as a general spiritual listlessness, or an existential crisis triggered by trauma. Lama Yeshe of the FPMT has said that “low self-esteem and lack of confidence” were the main traits he observed among the hundreds of Western students who flocked to him at Kopan monastery near Kathmandu (Paine 2005, 307). Three major negativities were expressed by interviewees: restlessness, stress, and rebellion.

For Bruce Farley, for example, restlessness led him to think “[there had to be] more to life than getting drunk on Friday nights, and hooning around in cars, and checking out women” (Broadhurst and Moore 2003). Similarly, Peter Combe experienced “lack of meaning” in his corporate job, due to boredom and lack of satisfaction. Others experienced existential anxiety. Graeme Rice perceived a dissonance between what he saw around him and what he felt inside. He called his spirituality a “search” to find the answers to life’s deepest questions. For Anne Cowie, attraction into Buddhism was due to an overall psychological need to find peace amidst long term personal and social dysfunction. For others, this existential anxiety sounded more sinister. Philip Jolliffe expressed a sense of “foreboding and disquiet” due to the

dominant “Christian based culture”, and Ron Burrows “was much more interested in some notion of an experiential spiritual life” rather than the “aridity” of the Catholic church in which he had been raised.

Others expressed this restlessness in vague terms of “unhappiness”. Hugh Tennent is a case in point: “I think [my interest in Buddhism] probably developed because I thought I could be happier than I was. It was like an existential journey, of wanting to be happier” (Broadhurst and Moore 2003). In a similar fashion, James Langley realised that he had been living an “incredibly self centred” life. The “lack of happiness [and] joy” in his life was a major contributing factor to embracing Buddhism: “that’s why I converted to Zen”.

A word of caution is needed here. Buddhism itself claims to offer happiness to its adherents. The Dalai Lama often frames his talks on this premise, and one of his best selling books is titled *The Art of Happiness* (Gyatso and Cutler 1998). The above examples may well be people who are reflecting on their move into Buddhism within terminology and process with which they are now familiar, and even expected to use (Beckford 1978). This does not mean that their perceived prior unhappiness, or their subsequent happiness are less real. The way they tell their narrative may be a symptom of their newly embraced religious perspective. However, this sensing that life could or should be happier is common, whether framed because of a knowledge of Buddhist ideas and terminology learned after becoming a Buddhist, or simply from a genuine expression of listlessness, anxiety or both.

Interviewees also expressed that stress was a major contributing negative factor in their journey towards Buddhism, where stress was “a condition or adverse

circumstance that disturbs, or is likely to disturb, the normal functioning of an individual, that has a resulting state of disturbance or distress” (Oxford dictionary). Buddhism is perceived in some way as a potential antidote to stress. I frequently heard testimony that “Buddhism has made me a lot calmer” or something similar.

The interviewees cited both the pace of life and relationship breakdown as the main stressors. Living a fast paced life is common enough in New Zealand. Rachel Pike for example burned out in her government job, burdened by Occupational Overuse Syndrome. She interpreted her own role in this as having an “undisciplined mind” and recognised the need to bring it under control. Others also interpreted their stress due to “an increasingly overactive negative mind” (Sally 2005).

It became clearly evident in the interviews that relationship breakdown was a cause, if not the major cause of a person commencing a “spiritual journey” which lead them to a Buddhist tradition. It was so prevalent I simply came to expect it. At least eight interviewees explicitly talked of marriage breakdown prior to their active involvement in Buddhism, and many others alluded to relationship traumas. However, only one interviewee, Patricia Rutland, articulated her chronic relational stress in the classic terminology of Buddhist suffering. “There is suffering” is the first premise of Buddhism, expressed as the First Noble Truth. The suffering from two broken marriages caused her “to turn to look more deeply” but she interpreted this as “needed suffering” so as to bring her to Buddhism and so to teach her spiritual lessons. This suggested a crisis of identity and resourcing, where she was looking for tools to be able “to live life more successfully”.

If relational stress launched people onto a spiritual journey, so also had stress from acute medical trauma or chronic disease. The “real spiritual journey” of one interviewee began because of a road accident, in which he nearly died. This made acute for him the “driving question” he had always had, that is, “what’s life all about?” In a similar way Terry Hearsey, while travelling throughout Asia, was traumatised by dysentery and hepatitis. This caused him to re-evaluate his life. In this re-evaluation he commenced an involvement in Buddhism.

Stress from chronic illness too has thrust people onto a spiritual journey towards Buddhism. For example, Anne Cowie struggled with infertility, which caused her to commence a long journey of “spiritual searching” while sensing powerlessness, pain and humility. Even subsequently, with the birth of twins, she experienced social trauma because expectations of planned parenting were shattered, along with a subsequent loss of freedom and spontaneity that she had experienced without children. Others mentioned alcoholism, tobacco abuse, cancer, and sexual abuse as chronic traumas that propelled them onto a spiritual journey which led them to Buddhism.

Restlessness and stress have both been expressed as negative reasons – reasons of felt incongruities – for commencing a spiritual journey which eventually led to Buddhism. Rebellion is another. Rebellious behaviour – that of leaving or resisting something with animosity – can be both symptom and cause of deeper relational stressors. Glenda Nairn had experienced childhood sexual abuse in the context of a family who were members of the Apostolic Church. Twenty-four interviewees volunteered stories of rebellion against an early Christian context.

This is interpreted by Phil Dyer, an Anglican clergyman who did a sabbatical retreat at Wangapeka [Buddhist] Study and Retreat Centre during 2003. He commented in his study leave report for the Christchurch Anglican diocese (2003) on why he thought people leave Christianity for Buddhism.

Thinking people see the church as no longer addressing issues. I was interested in the retreat [that was on while I had my sabbatical] in the number of people who had Christian backgrounds – often bad experiences – who were aware of that background and it still affected them. They were no longer drawing any sense of contemporary spiritual sustenance from that background and they were looking for something else.

While many were vitriolic, not all interviewees totally rejected their experiences of Christianity. Others had had bad experiences of other religions prior to their involvement with Buddhism, particularly Hinduism and various New Religious Movements. Several interviewees reflected on a journey through a variety of traditions, until arriving at Buddhism. Elizabeth Bremner, for example, experienced a number of Christian denominations, then explored Wicca, Yoga and the New Age, sometimes concurrently with Christian interests. In Buddhism she started with Vipassana meditation, then moved to Tibetan Buddhism.

I have sought to outline in this section the prevalence of three negative factors that influenced interviewees towards considering Buddhism. These factors were restlessness, stress and rebellion. If people perceived they had been suffering, then Buddhism's first premise that "there is suffering", immediately resonated. This was a major and new insight for Patricia Rutland: "I just thought 'wow, this is real! This is how life works'. So this is what attracted me to Buddhism". The Four Noble Truths explained why she had suffered, and also gave her explanatory power for her subsequent life journey.

However, none of these negative factors necessarily propelled people into Buddhism *per se*. Casual conversations I have had with adherents of other religions over the years reveal the same or similar reasons for their conversion into those religions. Psychological incongruities and social crisis may well push people into a general spiritual quest, and even a unique visitation to Buddhism, but interviewees also expressed an attraction to Buddhism for its inherent perceived worth. The timing of exposure to Buddhism was often synchronous with their negative context. For some, no crisis or ambiguity propelled them towards Buddhism, because they perceived themselves to be quite congruent and “together”. The notion of “spiritual journey” does not necessarily demand incongruence or negative factors. It does however imply “movement towards” something.

Positive factors: embracing Buddhism for its perceived inherent worth.

Where interviewees considered Buddhism as some sort of solution to negativities in their lives, so also many of them expressed an interest in Buddhism due to positive factors. Some described this as a natural consequence of a positive spiritual disposition. Sally Meads talked of a “call to the divine and the spiritual – to something deeper to life” right from childhood. Ron Burrows “grew up in a family [which was] interested in alternative thinking. I was just drawn to that sort of stuff.” Anne Cowie “grew up with a very open tolerant attitude to alternative [religions]”. Her context allowed her personal responsibility to explore several spiritual modalities on her way to Buddhism.

This sense of personal responsibility is a distinctive mark of interviewees' narratives. This was expressed as the pursuit of spiritual goals in line with one's values, of finding out spiritual answers for one's self, or of being an actor in one's own journey towards conversion. Jim Langabeer made this explicit:

For me the difference was very much that when Buddha was on his death-bed, he said, "Be a lamp unto yourself". Basically, Buddha said, "Find out for yourself. Ask questions". Personally I find that very attractive about Buddhism – that it says, "we don't have all the answers for everybody, but you [yourself] do". You know, you've got to find them for yourself. I find that an attractive thing in Buddhism (Broadhurst and Moore 2003).

Clara Woodfield would agree. She was attracted to Tibetan Buddhism because of its enquiring nature and "that everything was to be questioned". Glen Fletcher was attracted to it out of a "rationalist and lively curiosity".

Others talked of an inherent attractiveness they found in Buddhism due to the arts. Robert Pierson was drawn to the iconography of the Buddha: "the main attraction for me was the seated Buddha figures". Both Gavin Snell and Mary Kingsbury were first exposed to Buddhism in the 1970s TV series *Kung Fu* starring David Carradine as a Shaolin monk: "he was extremely calm, and very effective. And he used to fight baddies. This was my first image of Buddhism" (Mary Kingsbury). For James Langley, "Buddhism kept cropping up" in the context of the Beat culture during a sojourn in America while involved in the jazz scene. While conceding that these first exposures via the arts and media were sometimes "shallow" and "superficial", these interviewees all noted an attractiveness due to the calmness, peace, achievements and the community context of the artistic subject.

This ethical factor of the artistic subject – having a self-controlled life accompanied by calm and a cause to live for – attracted June Bush into the orbit of Zen Buddhism: “I was impressed with the quality of people I met and the way I was treated [when visiting a monastery]. I was just drawn to the authenticity of the people and the practice there”. What impressed her the most was the western monastics’ involvement with prisoners and the poor.

The attraction to an ethical impulse was not common to all. Some encountered Buddhism due to a religio-social tourism. By this I mean a tasting or experimentation across several media or traditions. June Bush had been impressed with the people she had met at a monastery, but has not followed through with any ongoing commitment to Buddhism. Karin Mahlfeld notes “for two or three years I was quite happy just to familiarise myself with Buddhist concepts and do some reading by myself.” She combined this with some experimentation in meditation. She then toured around the Wellington Buddhist groups “[to] find out what they were doing” (Mahlfeld 2006, 29). In a similar fashion, Stephen Webster’s interest in Buddhism started as a teenager out of philosophical interest. He started in a Zen group, then pursued a Buddhist group in Taiwan, then got involved with a Diamond Sangha retreat in Nelson: “from the early nineties I had a very casual interest in Buddhism. I was a tourist”.

This tourism was often supplemented by reading. Commonly, interviewees had read extraordinarily widely, indicative of their level of education and cognitive abilities. This tourism-by-reading was symptomatic of a search for a pragmatism that “works” and worked particularly “for me”. Philip Jolliffe called his wide reading prior to committing to Zen Buddhism as “seeking, without landing”. His journey into Buddhism commenced by opening a book on world religions, hoping it would resource him to

make a choice. He wanted a religion that worked “for [him]”. More than half of the sixty-six interviewees volunteered Buddhist books they had read *en route* to a commitment to a Buddhist tradition.

For example, one interviewee first came across Buddhism by reading a children’s book on the life of the Buddha, which “[rang] so true”. She then taught herself to meditate from other books she acquired. For Jennifer Yule, this “ringing true” was expressed as “making sense” when reading the Dalai Lama’s books which “struck a chord”. She also read *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* by Sogyal Rinpoche (1994), and became “quite convinced it’s true”. This “ringing true” is also expressed by Barry Farland as “making sense. [These books I’ve read by the Dalai Lama and Lama Zopa] really changed my mind”.

This tourism through reading – searching for something “that makes sense” – was a desire for a congruent worldview that helped the interviewees interpret their situation in particular and the world more generally. If what they read also offered to them some practical skills – usually meditation – then this was deemed helpful. Hence more often than not, an experimental thread was woven through their reading. They were asking, “does what I am reading help me to make sense of my life and the world, and does Buddhist meditation offer to me a tool to achieve this?”

To address this question, interviewees often supplemented their reading by attending a meditation retreat early in their contact with Buddhism. Here the negative and positive motivations converged. Many went on a retreat because their personal incongruities had got to the point where a solution was critical. They perceived that a meditation retreat would equip them with a resource to deal with their negativities. For

example, after “things fell apart”, Glenda Nairn attended a week-long Zen *sesshin* and this opened the door to her self-realisation and access to counselling and so into a commitment to Buddhism. Tim Monck-Mason “surprised [himself]” when he attended a Zen *sesshin* in the hope of managing his pain:

I did not want anyone telling me the answers, I wanted my own reality, my own discoveries. I was not managing my pain well at the time and I guess I was open to new things. I surprised myself a little by continuing to go [to Zen meditation], and now find myself a regular (Monck-Mason 2000).

What they learned at retreat they then brought home and attempted to continue. Patricia Rutland for example started her own personal “simple meditation practice”, using the “practices they’d taught me” after a month long retreat.

For most, meditation was their first experience of Buddhism and the first ritual they tried. Elizabeth Bremner’s first Buddhist event was a ten day Vipassana meditation retreat which was “really good”. Similarly Nigel Larson “had a life changing experience through meditation teaching, and my life has been much better since. I am more calm and peaceful.” The centrality of meditation for Philip Jolliffe was crucial. In practising *zazen* regularly, he believed it provided a tool of “authenticity” and “integrity”. Steve Voss got interested in meditation as part of a work related professional development requirement and he subsequently initiated contact with a local Insight Meditation group. Indeed, meditation is often the *raison d’etre* of Buddhist groups: Steve Voss’s group leader talked of his group’s “common interest” in meditation.

This ongoing trying or testing out Buddhist practices is common. Robert Pierson’s initial Buddhist meditation practice caused a psychic change and he experienced a profound mystical experience very early in his exposure to Buddhism. Because something “worked”, he wanted to keep trying it. Clare Hardy was accosted in

London by two members of the Soka Gakkai who gave her a card with the *daimoku* chant⁴⁸ on it. This was her first exposure to Buddhism. Desperate for a solution to chronic bulimia, she tried chanting for three weeks. Her bulimic tendencies subsequently disappeared. She attributes this to a direct causality. Don McKenzie acknowledged that chanting the *daimoku* “works”.

I began chanting as a means to quiet an increasingly overactive negative mind. I didn’t really consider myself as good Buddhist material. However, I rationalised my involvement as a valuable learning experience and I was up for anything that might help (Sally 2005, 22).

Some interviewees were quite resolute in their trial of Buddhist practices. For example, Jennifer Yule first tried to follow advice she had read in the Dalai Lama’s books. Even though she perceived that “it seemed to fit with my experience”, she wanted to keep “testing” what she was reading, and “applying it to my own life” to “see if it made sense”. In her case the content of the teaching was attractive – compassion and wisdom in particular – rather than simply being a set of skills in order to meditate. In other words her entrance into Buddhism was primarily through her experimenting with the application of belief, rather than the disciplines of meditation. However, ongoing meditation became her regular discipline.

While this religio-social tourism of Buddhism, even “testing” of Buddhism, is readily noted, a literal tourism has also been cause for people being exposed to and eventually embracing Buddhism. This has two aspects: as people travelled, so they were exposed to Buddhism. Additionally, after people have made some commitment to Buddhism, they may go to Asia to verify, justify or deepen what they have embraced. In essence, they go on a pilgrimage.

⁴⁸ This is the chant *nam-myoho-renge-kyo* which is repeated during Soka Gakkai (and Nichiren Buddhism more widely) worship events or privately. It translates very roughly as “Devotion to the Mystic Law of the Lotus Sutra”.

More than thirteen people identified visits to Asian countries as instrumental in their discovery of Buddhism, mentioning specifically India, Nepal, Cambodia and Thailand. Some had been exposed to Buddhism in Western countries as well (particularly Canada, Britain, and the United States). Many simply note the context as “travel”, or doing their “O.E.”. This I have noted already in chapter two as a significant mechanism for the arrival of Buddhism in New Zealand.

What was the attraction? Greg Gardiner was impressed that the “Tibetans have peace and harmony, and the world needs that”. Philip Jolliffe talked of “resonance” he felt with the Tibetans’ Buddhism when staying in Dharmasala, as did Cathi Graham (Herbison 1996). Kelsang Demo was impressed by the monks whom she met in Cambodia: “it was just about seeing how peaceful their minds were” (Marris 2005, 3). When visiting Nepal, Joel McKenzie was impressed with the Sherpas’ happiness, charm and good nature in the face of adversity: “Buddhism clearly fills peoples lives. Every aspect of life had religious associations”. For McKenzie, their compassion demanded a response: “why are they like this?”

Where Asia may have been the first place many New Zealanders experienced Buddhism, it is also the destination of many who, having made some sort of commitment to Buddhism, travelled there to make sense of, justify, or deepen their initial and tentative steps in Buddhism. In other words, it is an early pilgrimage destination. Once a person had undertaken the pilgrimage, they often reported of a deepened meditation practice.

Barry Farland has travelled four times to India and Nepal calling each a spiritual “pilgrimage”. Joel McKenzie who has opportunity to visit Asia regularly, talked of both

the emotional and spiritual benefits vis-à-vis Buddhism for him in this, especially when visiting Buddhist sites or gazing on Buddhist works of art. In the context of her search for authenticity, Patricia Rutland attempted to explain the need for pilgrimage: “because Buddhism is foreign [in New Zealand] people are searching for an authentic connection to ‘real Buddhism’” by going on pilgrimage to Asia. Some believe that this “real” Buddhism is associated with the Dalai Lama and hence prioritise a visit to Dharmasala or to an event in which he is involved, while others travel to other locations of authentication: some Zen practitioners may make a trip to Japan to authenticate their emerging practice. For members of the Mountain and Rivers order of Zen, a trip to the main monastery in Mt Tremper, New York state is often in order. As an example, June Bush believed that “if I’m going to consider becoming a Zen student, then I want to actually see what it’s really like at Mt Tremper”.

This essentialism was reasonably common. Interviewees perceived that “real” Buddhism, or the essence of Buddhism, could be identified and experienced elsewhere, preferably in its original Asian home, or at the tradition’s root monastery. Interviewees perceived it to be purer than New Zealand expressions. Donald Lopez (1995b) suggests this is a vestige of Orientalism. Orientalism is characterised by sentimentality, where the “classical age” is at risk of being lost forever, and hence the West needs to preserve it. Tibet particularly was “transformed into a focus of European desire and fantasy”, where “original Buddhism” was located in a remote and inaccessible Shangrila (Lopez 1995b, 252). The Chinese invasion of Tibet from 1950 has prompted an urgent impulse to preserve everything Tibetan without critique before it is either destroyed, lost, or diluted. This motivates what I identified in chapter two as the “fetching” mechanism for ongoing arrival of Buddhism in New Zealand. In this context, many note a relational synchronicity with a person and/or the teaching in this Asian context. This “wow”

factor was common when meeting a monk or teacher, especially if encountered in an Asian context. If someone connected with a teacher – preferably a “real” Tibetan lama, or Japanese Zen priest – who taught things that “made sense”, then a journey to self discovery commenced. This was more often than not expressed as discovering in meditation practice a new tool for the self to experience connectivity with itself: in other words for the self to become more congruent.

I have demonstrated to this point that people are attracted to Buddhism from personal motivations that are both negative and positive. I have wished to highlight that negativities – incongruence – are often the first step to considering a religious change. Others have commenced a spiritual journey into Buddhist ritual and/or belief from a perceived congruent personal psychological space. The two motivations – negative and positive – are not mutually exclusive, and for many interviewees it would have been impossible and unnecessary to try and disentangle them. All showed components of psychological trauma and congruence, often at the same time. Buddhist practice was perceived by many in a technicist way: to be a useful tool, meditation had to result in a greater experience of peace and self-congruence for the individual. Additionally, the teachings of Buddhism had to “make sense”. In other words the *Weltanschauung* – the worldview – taught or implied, had to interpret the experience of the interviewee. Because Buddhism’s first premise is that suffering exists, and because it was perceived to offer a tool to overcome suffering (meditation), these New Zealanders experienced Buddhism as potentially “useful” and were willing to convert to it.

The above discussion locates the interviewees’ conversion in a context and as part of a process. Lewis Rambo (1993) is at pains to argue that context and process are integral stages of conversion. The context leading up to conversion was considerably

varied, and involved a wide range of psychological factors. Conversion did not happen in a vacuum, even though the “taking refuge” ceremony may well be understood and experienced as a unique event in moving from not-Buddhist to Buddhist. In general, there was a sincere regard for the refuge ceremony as a classic category of “conversion” and all described key aspects of the process within psychological categories.

However, few saw little significance in the refuge ceremony in any ontological sense. They did not talk of becoming a new person, or that there had been a critical affective change. In psychological terms, “taking refuge” could be understood as the end of a “search for relief” from psychological anxiety (Ullman 1989:24). The word “refuge” certainly invites images of safety and stability. In the language of semiotics, Massimo Leone (2004) suggests that the self is destabilized because it comes into contact “with a spiritual message which speaks a different language” (2004, 1), that is, contains new and different symbols. “Vertigo” is the result. Re-stabilization of the self is the consequent need. This may well be occurring when people are exposed to Buddhism, although the interviewees’ psychological negativities in the first instance may have been due to many factors quite apart from being confronted with Buddhism.

While refuge taking certainly introduced a potentially new conceptual framework, or a “different language”, it primarily served a pragmatic function. If viewed as a rite of conversion, it was never spontaneous or sudden. Rather it was at the end of a process where both negative and positive factors conspired together so that the actor chose to undertake the rite. Taking refuge served as a gateway into participation in further Buddhist rituals, and relationship with teacher or lama. However, for many, taking refuge served only a minimal function, and there were major ambiguities.

Ambiguities of conversion

As I have noted already, taking refuge is generally regarded as the definitive and prescriptive rite of becoming a Buddhist. However, many of the interviewees considered they had become Buddhists, even though they had not undertaken the refuge ceremony. Ambiguities abound. Where “taking refuge” is traditionally understood to be in the Buddha, dharma and sangha, Clara Woodfield for example, nuanced her own refuge taking to being a student, to meditation and to lineage. People freely build broader constructs of what becoming a Buddhist might entail.

Melody Frew embodied this impulse. Having travelled through India and participated in Yoga, she went to Sri Lanka to do a Buddhist retreat. There she started calling herself Buddhist, even if tempered by self-doubt. “I wrote to a friend, and [said] ‘I don’t know what I am, but if anything, I’d be a Buddhist – that’s not to say I am a Buddhist’”. Frew had not participated in any entry rites. “No, no. [I didn’t go through any rites]. I thought that if anything makes sense to me, meditation does, and so therefore Buddhism makes sense”. Similarly, Anne Cowie undertook no entrance rituals: “I didn’t do anything formal. It was just this is a path that makes sense to me, that feels right, that is compatible and that works. It makes my life better”. Tim Monck-Mason simply allowed an aspect of Buddhist practice to take over his life: “then, without consciously knowing it or understanding it, I moved from having this particular purpose (pain management) to allowing *zazen* to bring new elements to my life. These are enjoyable and lovely elements that fit so well with my own senses” (Monck-Mason 2000).

Conversions of intensity

The above examples illustrate how some build broader concepts of what it entails to become a Buddhist. In his process model of conversion, Lewis Rambo (1993) also suggests an intensification of conversion: one learns, samples, experiments, grows in confidence and then commits. Once identifying with a tradition, one gets more committed either formally or informally (1993, 173), by taking of vows or precepts. Some of the interviewees held off identifying themselves publicly as Buddhist until they had taken vows. For example, Glenda Nairn said she “became a Buddhist” after doing *sesshin*, having counsel from her Zen teacher, and also “taking the [ethical] precepts” and a new Buddhist name.

In a similar fashion, Elizabeth Bremner’s conversion was by “taking *bodhisattva* vows and tantric vows” at the end of a Kalachakra initiation. At this point “I became a Buddhist immediately”. In interview, she prioritized this vow taking, rather than “taking refuge”. In hindsight, she realized the odd order of her initiation: “people usually take [the refuge ceremony] first”. Having access to the Kalachakra initiation is a new possibility, unknown to laity in ancient Tibet. The Tibetans explain their willingness to initiate untrained Westerners into the esoteric dimensions of Kalachakra by suggesting that one receives what one is ready to receive. A mere seed may be planted which could come to fruition in this life or the next (Lamb 1999, 86). Bremner conceded this and undertook the Kalachakra initiation a second time, once she had realised what it was all about. This repetition, and sometimes multiple empowerment is not uncommon. Graeme Rice for example, had undertaken “quite a few” empowerments.

Rachel Pike intensified her commitment by embracing a socially engaged Buddhism. “Engaged Buddhism” finds expression in an activist involvement in society

(Queen 2000). By deciding to train as a counsellor, Pike was intentionally working from her Buddhist ideals. She had taken formal refuge twice, once with the FWBO and once with Tarchin Hearn of the Wangapeka movement. She said that “evolution” is an appropriate term to describe her coming to Buddhism, but nevertheless, there had been “conversion” in as much as it was “intensification” of commitment. In other words, for her, “conversion” was in fact the process of more intentional application of Buddhist ethics worked out in her counselling practice.

Thus one could be “more” Buddhist because one consciously adopted a deeper expression of it or perceived oneself as more committed. Perhaps the most significant conversion of intensity is the vow to ordination, as it demands explicit lifestyle changes. Kelsang Vajra of the New Kadampa Tradition reflected on this:

I had a deep, deep feeling that I had to become a monk. Why? I’d been meditating on death quite a lot at that time, and thinking about my own mortality. And at that time I realised that I wanted to devote this life to spiritual practice and to revealing spiritual truths to other people. Because I’d felt that from what I’d learnt [already in Buddhism] I was able to find greater levels of happiness than I’d even thought possible. So I decided the best way to do that is to be an ordained person. And in doing so I was also able to put aside many of the things that had been distractions for me: relationships, intoxicants (Broadhurst and Moore 2003).

Similarly, a strong ethical impulse led Jennifer Yule to be a nun, birthed early from reading an original text of the Dalai Lama’s. This was linked with her passion for environmentalism. She “wanted to save the world” and perceived that being a nun would open to her the possibility of attaining enlightenment and hence of “being of greatest benefit to every other living being”. She followed a traditional route, undertaking a three refuges ceremony, then following this up with ordination and the reception of a unique name.

Taking the three refuges, taking vows, or being ordained are all perceived as instrumental in “becoming Buddhist” to various degrees, determined mainly by the actor, rather than in conformity with tradition or institutional dictate. In the Tibetan traditions, lineage significance and the personal commitment to a lama can also be determinative in becoming Buddhist (Williams 1989, 187). In his ethnographic study of Tibetan Buddhists in America, Daniel Capper (2002) concluded that Americans are attracted to Buddhism because of the “spiritual teacher or guru”. He concludes that “[there is] a correlation between positive relationships with lamas and deep Buddhist involvement” (2002, 9). In other words, to become a Buddhist, is to be committed to a lama or teacher. This conclusion is not unlike Chana Ullman’s hypothesis, that a powerful motivating factor in religious change is the quest for a perfect father (Ullman 1989). “Guru devotion” (to use Capper’s expression) was certainly mentioned by some interviewees as a significant factor which attracted them to Buddhism. A few examples serve to illustrate this.

FPMT members related a strong pull to founding lamas Zopa and Yeshe. Ecie Hursthouse first met them at Kopan (near Kathmandu): “we were really impressed because [Lama Zopa] was so unusual, so warm and friendly, and funny and compassionate” (Broadhurst and Moore 2003). Barry Farland was so attracted to Lama Zopa – who was so “way up there” – that on his second trip to India he asked Lama Zopa to be his teacher. Taking refuge was “making a commitment to [a lama] and the lay vows”. This was for him whatever he wanted it to be, rather than anything that Lama Zopa determined. “You make whatever level of commitment you want in terms of keeping lay vows. [This was] the turning point where I’d gone from being a fringe, dragged-along person, to saying ‘well this is a path I want to go down’”. Elizabeth Bremner related how both Lama Zopa and the Dalai Lama were the most significant

people in her initial interest in Buddhism. When being initiated into the Kalachakra, she simply had the aspiration to “be like him”.

I [found] a living example [of *bodhicitta*] in His Holiness. And thinking ‘well I don’t really know what this is all about, but if it’s got anything to do with being like [His Holiness], then that’s what I want to do’. It was very simple.

Jennifer Yule also relates how connecting with the Dalai Lama was significant in her journey towards Buddhism. Her first exposure was through the biographical film *Kundun* (1997), which made “a big impression”, but on hearing the Dalai Lama in person in Nelson she found herself very “happy” – mentioning her happiness four times in the interview – because “I had such trust in him” and “he seemed to practise what he was preaching. He seemed to be such a good monk. His demeanour was very wholesome”. She found herself wondering if he “needs a seamstress”, which was something practical she could offer him.

Where some talked of attraction to the Dalai Lama, others talked of their commitment as embodied in one “root lama”. In effect they added a fourth refuge to the standard three of Buddha, dharma and sangha. Additionally, some had taken refuge in more than one lama. Jacob Herron for example had three “root lamas”. If not an oxymoron, then this is certainly an innovation. Jane Crawley explained this phenomenon: people try and “take refuge with as many lamas as possible” so they are “connected, so that if they meet in the next life, then maybe they’ll become your teacher again”.

These are all examples of increased intensity of devotion or commitment, whether explained by Daniel Capper’s hypothesis that the “primary attraction is the charismatic person of the Tibetan lama” (2002, 9), or by Chana Ullman’s search for a

perfect father, born out of a desire for deep personal connection (Ullman 1989). I concur with Ullman not so much as to concede that interviewees were on a “quest for a father figure” (her research sample was very young in age), but that the interviewees sought embodiment of the ideals of Buddhism. Capper’s explanation is more realistic: he found that where people were attracted to meditation, or to compassion, it was because they believed meditation would make them more like their lama, or they wanted to be as compassionate as their lama.

However, intensification of commitment by lama devotion was not prescriptive for all. Ron Burrows, while very attracted to Sogyal Rinpoche and the Dalai Lama, ultimately regarded Tibetan Buddhism as “superstition” and changed to Zen. For others, the connection to a lama was too intimidating. For example, Jan Anderton was reluctant to “commit” to Buddhism, because of “the guru thing”. June Campbell (2002) articulates “the guru thing” by cautioning that even though Tibetan Buddhism has been “firmly established in the West, egalitarian ideals of gender equality can [still] fail to materialize when dominant groups in society selectively use philosophical ideals to promote self-interest” (2002, 187). This is why Anderton had chosen Insight Meditation, a discipline she did not perceive to be Buddhist and in which leaders were teaching-facilitators, not people to whom one unquestioningly gave one’s life: “I don’t hold too much with a guru, like a religious person sitting there telling you what to think”.

Where there is attraction to teachers because of charisma, this is not limited to Tibetan lamas. Some western teachers have gained similar influence. Barry Davey, a leader in the FWBO in New Zealand, had a personal relationship with Sangharakshita – the Englishman, Dennis Linwood – founder of the movement in England. During his

first meditation with Sangharakshita, Davey “knew instantly [that Buddhism was for me]”. What immediately inspired Davey was both the personal qualities of Sangharakshita as a teacher, and his vision for a new movement of which he wanted to be a part.

In a similar fashion, Philip Jolliffe relates that his first real feeling of “resonance” with Buddhism was because of an Australian monk he met. He experienced the Australian monk as someone with congruity, and he demonstrated the possibility of being Western and a Buddhist: the Australian monk was someone who had “gone before” in this regard. Similarly, practitioners at Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre talked of their first contact with Namgyal Rinpoche – the Canadian, George Dawson – as experiencing him as “just tremendously alive and real”. Terry Hearsey for example, related how this personal connection with Namgyal Rinpoche led to him intensifying his commitment to Buddhism.

Lama devotion is easily recognised in Tibetan traditions, so much so that early European constructs of Tibetan Buddhism named the religion “Lamaism” (Lopez 1998). Conversion, or intensification of commitment expressed as commitment to teacher, was also evident in Zen traditions. James Langley’s ritual of publicly becoming a Buddhist was associated with commitment to a teacher: “I said to him ‘I would like to become your student if that’s possible’. And he said ‘yes it is possible’”. Indeed, “becoming a student” was a phrase often used by Zen Buddhists to signify a process they undertook to seal their formal commitment. Stephen Webster unpacked this further: “I was looking for a kiwi expression of Buddhism – I decided to become [the Roshi’s] student and took precepts and robed – at that point I became a Buddhist”. Philip Jolliffe explained that “becoming a student” is definitely a rite of passage within MRO Zen. However, rather

than it being a unique initiation, or a “conversion” event, he described it as a process. Becoming a student is highly ritualistic, accompanied with day long meditation sits, *zazen*, and additional vows. Within Zen, each step is an intensification of commitment, and initiates, as actors in their own stories, will call themselves “Buddhist” at a variety of different points in the process.

I have sought to describe and conceptualise how conversion of intensity occurred amongst the interviewees. Taking vows, ordination and lama/teacher devotion were perceived in different ways with few institutional dictates. Some understood these steps to be an integral part of becoming Buddhist, while others saw them as subsequent deepening of commitment. Overall, each actor was comfortable in articulating a point they considered they had become Buddhist, whenever that may have been.

Conversion as change between lineages

Where conversion can be understood as an intensification of commitment, Lewis Rambo (1993) also suggests that conversion can be considered as being “from one orientation to another within a single faith system” (1993, 2). An example of this could be a Christian changing denominations. Indiscriminate “dharma hopping” (Emma Layman in Tweed 2002, 29) may well be occurring: Jane Crawley had changed traditions five times, not always exclusively, but sometimes keeping the practices of several traditions going at the same time.

However, most of the interviewees demonstrated a more considered movement between lineages, if at all. I would also caution against calling these “conversions”. Within Christianity, for example, one does not “convert” between Anglicanism and Methodism: both denominations are within “a single faith system”, to use Rambo’s

words (1993). Likewise amongst the interviewees, there was no conceptualisation of “conversion” when they changed traditions or lineages within Buddhism.

Some of the between-tradition changes were simply due to convenience. A person may have changed location due to new employment, and consequently joined whatever new sangha was accessible in their new place. Nevertheless some changed traditions due to matters of principle, and conviction. For example, Daniel Owen ceased involvement with NKT as a response to the revelation of sexual improprieties in the national leadership and changed to a local Zen chapter. Rachel Pike “escaped” from FWBO due to a perceived lack of support during a medical trauma. She is now an active member of the Namgyal Rinpoche (Wangapeka) tradition. Jan Anderton experienced “judgment” in Vipassana and moved to Insight Meditation.

For others “accessibility” was named as a reason for changing traditions. For example Mary Mold left Tibetan Buddhism because of “lots of [cultural] barriers”, subsequently finding the teachings of Daido Roshi “in much more accessible language” (Broadhurst and Moore 2003), and joined MRO Zen. Philip Jolliffe struggled with “all the bings and bongs” of Tibetan Buddhism which he claimed buried “authenticity and integrity”. The superstitious and the magical were too much and he moved to Zen. Ron Burrows also had a similar experience with Tibetan Buddhism: “there is a huge quality of believing in magic about it”. In a similar fashion Joel McKenzie joined a Zen group having rejected Tibetan Buddhism because it was too “cluttered”.

These examples serve to illustrate that the interviewees, while freely admitting considerable movement between lineages, still regarded themselves as Buddhist from before the change. If “conversion” simply means “change”, then they converted. But

this is simplistic. They changed traditions because of ethical principle, or personal comfort, or as Philip Jolliffe expressed, due to a need to experience personal “authenticity and integrity”. There was no change from not-Buddhist to Buddhist: they all still declared themselves as “Buddhist” on the 2006 census.

Passive conversion as karmic inevitability

I have offered a broad selection of examples as evidence for the interviewees’ role as actors in their own conversion stories. In the main, the interviewees were demonstrating that they were making the choice to move from not-Buddhist to Buddhist. When precisely they identify as Buddhist remains variable. However, a passive conversion paradigm should not be ruled out. Andrew Kennedy (2004) in his study of Buddhists in Leeds came to the conclusion that Western Buddhist identity is not such a simple matter as choice. He demonstrates that his participants perceived they discovered, as much as chose their Buddhist identity (2004, 143). Hints of this self understanding are found amongst my interviewees.

Four interviewees clearly articulated that they never “became Buddhist” or “converted to Buddhism”: they had in effect “always been Buddhist”. Due to *karma*, Barry Farland “had no choice” but to become Buddhist. Similarly a karmic imperative was expressed by Patricia Rutland who understood her entry to Buddhism as “inevitable”. Kaye, whom we met in the introduction, interpreted her whole life situation with respect to *karma*: “I’m here [at this Buddhist centre] because of *karma*”. While it can be argued that they have reinterpreted their life journey in hindsight due to their adoption of a Buddhist worldview, nevertheless there is a commonly expressed inevitability of “being Buddhist” that bypasses their engaged will in this present life. Elizabeth Bremner also hinted at the inevitability of becoming Buddhist due to *karma*.

On commenting on why she took Kalachakra initiation: “from the Tibetan Buddhist perspective, you need a lot of merit just to get there [to the ceremony].” Another talked of the inevitability of meeting his Buddhist teacher, by quoting the ancient proverb: “When the student is ready the teacher appears.”

The karmic inevitability of being Buddhist is expressed in the language of rebirth for Barry Davey. At age 63, he had already been a Buddhist “for thirty years” and he interpreted his whole life vis-à-vis rebirth, based on past-life memories he claimed he had had as a new born. Another interviewee had come to Buddhism “only recently in the last four years”: he interprets this as due to *karma* and he wanted to continue to earn karmic merit by doing *puja*, spinning prayer wheels, and the likes. This was appealing for him: “I’m hooked, a real believer”. Likewise, Jennifer Yule had an “instant belief” about reincarnation and became “quite convinced” about *karma* when she encountered Sogyal Rinpoche’s *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (1994). The book “made a huge impact”, and it became prescriptive as to how she came to understand the world. She also found in Buddhism an explanatory framework for her environmentalism and passion for animal rights through the Buddhist idea of “interconnectivity”.

These examples demonstrate that not all of the interviewees perceived themselves as actors in their own stories of conversion. While arguably reinterpreting their life stories through a Buddhist worldview, they nevertheless perceived themselves more as passive participants: due to *karma*, they could do nothing else but be Buddhist. This however was not widely articulated. The reason for this I suggest is that many simply did not describe their Buddhism in Buddhist dogmatic categories and were more interested in the practicalities of meditation. This, I will argue in chapter five, is more to

do with New Zealand cultural norms. Additionally, I suggest, the interviewees on the whole were not very interested in talking about “conversion” *per se*.

Rejecting “conversion”

Having used the word “conversion” throughout the thesis, I now wish to return to its etymology, not so much as defined technically, but as perceived by the interviewees themselves. Here I give notice of a tension, for amongst the academic literature on Western Buddhism, the word “conversion” and “convert Buddhist” is used widely. It is used so widely and uncritically that it begs closer scrutiny (for example Wallace 2002, 34). My interviewees on the other hand were decidedly uncomfortable with the word.

Two of the interviewees animatedly argued that “conversion” was not an appropriate word for “becoming Buddhist”. Philip Jolliffe, who associates with Zen Buddhism, believed “conversion” was “inappropriate to use”. He explained that “in a sense there’s nothing to convert to. It’s a practice in a religion, something with which you ‘engage’”. Clara Woodfield believed the word “conversion” was not the right word for what Tibetan Buddhists do: “[the word is] too Christian”. In this she was alluding to the sudden conversion of Saul of Tarsus as described in various places in *Acts*.⁴⁹

While several articulate “taking refuge” as their defining moment of “becoming Buddhist”, many of the interviewees refrained from emphasising a sudden event or moment of conversion. Even those who clearly stated a point of identification – perhaps a “turning point” (Lofland and Stark in Hunt 2003, 102) – did so as a point on a

⁴⁹ Periodically others imply that the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (later known as Paul the apostle) has been the defining prescriptive event that gives cause to the very existence of the idea of religious conversion, particularly abrupt conversion by the intervention of a deity. Saul of Tarsus’ conversion story can be found in Acts 9:1-19, 22:6-12, 26:12-18.

continuum of increasing interest in Buddhism. This is especially so of Zen practitioners, where structurally there is an intensification of commitment in the way of formal ceremonies. Stephen Webster for example articulated the “point that I became a Buddhist”, but conceded that this was in the context of accumulating factors which culminated in becoming a student and taking precepts. Philip Jolliffe cautioned seeing “becoming a student” as an initiation rite, but preferred to view it as part of a process. Indeed, Tarchin Hearn, teacher at the Wangapeka Centre, explained that taking refuge “is a life time process, rather than a mere ceremony”. There is a refuge ceremony in the Wangapeka tradition (to which Tarchin Hearn has added his own liturgical flurries), but, according to Hearn, refuge must continue to be taken as an ongoing practice and commitment.

Taking refuge is not exclusive or sudden “conversion”. It is not uncommon for practitioners to have taken refuge in several traditions, either consecutively or concurrently, indicating again, that it is not tied to time and place. There is a utilitarian note to taking refuge: it may be often and with which ever teacher one wants, as long as it “strengthens your practice”. In addition, taking refuge may not be so much an initiation as confirmation. This was the case for Jennifer Yule. In hindsight she believed that by the time she actually formally took refuge that “in my heart I had already taken refuge”. There had been an implicit desire or commitment to the Buddhist path already: she had not formalised it. Therefore her “becoming a Buddhist” was gradual, and the formal ceremonies merely represented that which had already taken place. She herself did not regard taking refuge as only an entrance rite. Her daily personal meditation practice includes taking refuge every day. Yule believed this to be common practice amongst Buddhists throughout Asia: consequently she had the power to locate her identity in something much bigger than herself.

Overall, the interviewees have not talked about conversion in any common way, nor have alluded to anything normative. New Zealand convert-Buddhists talk of their “conversion” in as many ways as there are individuals, it seems. Indeed the word “conversion” has been problematic in this thesis thus far. For those interviewees who talked explicitly about “conversion”, only two were comfortable using it, but eight actively resisted it. Five interviewees allowed themselves the process of “becoming a Buddhist” while eight resisted the phrase. Six were comfortable using “believe”, but nine explicitly resisted its use. Ten “chose” Buddhism, and five “resonated” with Buddhism. Six talked of “embracing”; five “took up”; fourteen used “connect” in some form. These verbs were not necessarily clearly linked to Buddhism *per se*: they were often used as euphemisms for conversion such as “taking up meditation” or “engaging with the practice” or “embracing the dharma”.

What is clear is that the majority of interviewees, those both formally and informally interviewed, could identify a time when they were “not Buddhist” and a time in which they now “are Buddhist”. When pressed as to what they declared on the 2006 census, they wrote “Buddhist”, thus conceding they were gracious enough to identify themselves with some sort of imposed category. Amy Wright talked of this:

Wright: I put “Buddhist” for [the 2006 census]. But I [did] it from a relative perspective: “yeah, I can say I’m a Buddhist”. But you know “Buddhist” is a Western term invented by Westerners to label Buddhism and make it fit in with other religions. The whole aim of practising the dharma is to not be “..ist” anything. Buddhists would say “I’m a follower of the dharma”.

Kemp: Is that what you [yourself] would say?

Wright: It depends on the situation. If I’m filling out a census form I put “Buddhist”. But “follower of the dharma” gets closer to it, because the “dharma” means “the law”, and that’s what I hope to do, is to be a vessel of the dharma, to live the dharma. Not to be a thing, a fixed thing, but to

respond to causes and conditions in life, so I'm not wanting to define myself as an "-ist".

This section of transcript illustrates the ambiguity that many feel about the restraints of the census. It also illustrates how interviewees may prefer not being described within prescribed categories.

“Taking up the practice”

The most common way of talking about becoming Buddhist, or converting to Buddhism was in fact “taking up the practice”. Twenty seven interviewees, both formally and informally interviewed, explicitly spoke of their entry into the orbit of Buddhism as “taking up the practice” or something very similar. These interviewees either volunteered this terminology, or used it freely in their language. For example Charles Markham “began by doing practice”, and Stephen Webster “got serious about practice”. Robert Pierson “developed [his] own practice”. Clare Hardy “came to the practice” and decided to “make a lifetime commitment to practising Buddhism”.

This “taking up the practice”, or rather the interviewees’ telling of “taking up the practice” signifies a conversion experience. This experience was not something that happened to them: they remained actors as they made the choice to “take up the practice”. However, as David Yamane (2000) notes, “conversion experiences are often recognized as crucial to religious conversion” (2000, 185). In other words, the action of interviewees in “taking up the practice” signifies an experience they had during their spiritual journey which was significant enough for them to note it as some sort of turning point, and hence motivated them in a process of self transformation and commitment to some aspects of Buddhism. Following Peter Stromberg (1993), I suggest that “it is through the use of language in the conversion narrative that the processes of increased commitment and self-transformation take place” (1993, xi). As people told me

their stories, and revealed the significance of the phrase “taking up the practice”, it reinforced, even created the very meaning of that transformation. Following Yamane (2000, 185), I suggest that the telling of experiences are made meaningful after the fact, that is in the telling and retelling of their story. In some sense, their “conversion” continues in the telling and retelling of their experience of “taking up the practice”.

Thus the interviewees freely talked of themselves and other Buddhists as “practitioners”, that is, those who practise Buddhism, or go on practising Buddhism, or, more commonly “practise the dharma”. Three sangha leaders referred to their members or adherents as “practitioners” whom they urged on to the “practice” of things Buddhist. To test whether this was in fact a phrase characteristic of converts, I interviewed two recent Chinese immigrants at Fo Guang Shan in Auckland. They too talked of having “taken up the practice of Buddhism” when they had personally appropriated their family’s religio-cultural heritage: one of these had “felt empty until I started to practise chanting and meditation”. In other words, in appropriating and internalising the Buddhism of their culture, they were “taking up the practice”. Could they also be regarded as “converts”, and hence challenge the notion of ethnic/convert categories?

Indeed, when initially contacting Buddhist groups, I usually received an invitation to attend a meditation or chanting event. When visiting Fo Guang Shan, my hostess invited me to the meditation session for English speakers on Sunday. She wanted me to “experience the practice” of Buddhism, before giving me a tour of the site. To experience practice was more important than viewing the buildings. When contacting MRO Zen, I was invited to a *zazen*, where my host first taught me “the practice of Zen”, that is, what I needed to do when and where in the *zendo* during *zazen*. Like my own experience, when one of the interviewees had initially expressed interest

in Buddhism, he had been invited “to come and have a go” at it. In other words, Buddhism was something one did.

Doing Buddhist practice confirms New Zealand Buddhists as actors in their own life stories. Buddhism is something they begin to do. Thus the time when they were “not-Buddhist”, means they did not “practise” or did not “do the practice” of Buddhism. If they wrote “Buddhist” on the 2006 census, they prefer now to call themselves “practitioners”. Therefore “not-Buddhist” could be reframed as “not-a-practitioner” and “Buddhist” as “practitioner”. While it is easy to resort to the word “convert” to locate this transition, it is clearly a word with which they are uncomfortable, and at times actively resist.

What then do they “practise”? For the vast majority, it is simply meditation, and in particular, techniques of meditation informed by traditions that come from what is understood historically to be Buddhism. So, when visiting the Chandrakirti Centre, I was warned not to disturb the monk in the hall who was “doing his practice”, that is, meditating. Likewise, in Zen, those who had “taken up the practice” had “begun to sit” regularly in meditation, either on their own, in weekly *zazen* with the sangha or periodically in week long *sesshin*. Insight Aotearoa, the monthly e-newsletter published by Wellington Insight Meditation for “New Zealand’s insight meditation practitioners and communities” consistently publishes articles on “practice” and tips on “how to practise”.

However, “taking up the practice” is not limited solely to meditation: it can be nuanced differently as well. It refers to “practising the precepts” or “commitment to [a particular] tradition”. It may also imply a willingness to “take up chanting”, or to attend

sangha events regularly. Intentionally conforming to ethical precepts was also regarded as a component of “taking up the practice”. I will take this up again later, in relation to forming an identity unique to being a New Zealander vis-à-vis imaginings of New Zealand being a Buddhist Pure Land (chapters five and six).

Because “taking up the practice” is clearly the preferred way of conceptualising the movement from not-Buddhist to Buddhist, I propose that Lewis Rambo’s process model has limited use (1993). The word “conversion” for Rambo means several things. Firstly, it may mean the change from the absence of belief or faith to a faith commitment. For example, from a secular understanding of the world, to an appreciation of the mystical. This is problematic for my interviewees, as only nine were willing to talk using the term “faith in ...” or “trust in...” a belief or philosophy, and three of these resisted the term altogether. In fact, most Buddhists claim that Buddhism is not a Faith (that is, a religious ideological system of thought or belief), and therefore when one “practises”, one does not necessarily have to change one’s Faith, that is, religion. Amy Wright for example declared that “you don’t have to abandon your Faith in order to practise Buddhism”.

Secondly, Lewis Rambo says conversion may mean change from affiliation from one religion, or “faith system”, to another (for example, from Hinduism to Christianity). All but four of the formal interviewees had had some sort of Christian upbringing, and so, according to Rambo’s scheme, they had converted to Buddhism. Rambo also defines conversion as change in orientation within a faith system (for example, from Methodism to Catholicism, or from Kagyu to Zen Buddhism). I have already challenged this. There is no evidence to suggest that my interviewees considered change between Buddhist traditions as religious conversion.

Thirdly, Rambo says that “conversion” can mean an intensification of an experience or commitment within a group: for example the taking of ethical vows or ordination into the priesthood. This “intensification” is clearly evident in the themes described above, but I would be slow to name this as a “conversion”. Within their acknowledged terminology of “practice”, this would be better termed an “intensification of practice” or “a greater commitment to the outworking of the dharma” or a “desire to be of more use for the dharma”. These were all phrases used by the interviewees.

While some of the ideas in Rambo’s scheme are helpful, as an overall framework it does not account for the ambiguities within my auto-narratives. This is not so much about Rambo’s scheme being unusable in a generic sense, but that the language that Buddhists speak is considerably different to Rambo’s. He constructed his model chiefly in a Christian context. If the interviewees say that “you don’t have to change your religion to practise Buddhism” then the word “conversion” must surely be rejected outright. The interviewees acknowledge a change from not-Buddhist to Buddhist, but they allowed this only begrudgingly due to the necessity of declaring oneself as something on the census form. However, a move from “not-practitioner” to “practitioner” is widely accepted. Only after having been willing to identify oneself as a practitioner is it then possible to intensify the practice of one’s Buddhism.

Yet we are caught on the horns of a dilemma. The fact that Buddhism has come to the West and “set up home” (Baumann 1997, 204) and in so doing has bedded down in profoundly non-Buddhist cultures and polities, there must be by definition, some sort of entry process or rite, if for no other reason than the host Western context, steeped in the exclusivities of either monotheism or secularism, expects it. This dilemma is

embodied in the comment of interviewee Jan Anderton who simply did not know how to become a Buddhist:

Kemp: So why don't you become a Buddhist? You just said you wanted to be one.

Anderton: Why don't I commit? [Long pause]. Don't know. Because I'm not sure if there's anyone... anyway of doing it down here [in Invercargill].

I suggest, informed by Rambo, to view conversion to Buddhism in New Zealand – if the word must be used – as essentially a sociological and psychological process, in which practitioners themselves define how and when they regard they have become Buddhist. They concede moving from not-Buddhist to Buddhist, and they are willing to talk of this as a story (which I will elaborate in the next chapter). They prefer, however, to articulate language around the word “practice”. Rarely, if ever is the change from not-practitioner to practitioner a single event that the word “conversion” may conjure up (although it may well be ritualised in an event). Rather, it is a process. Granted, it is a loosely chronological process, but not necessarily a causative chain of events. This progression has a context, and therefore is influenced by an interactive web of relationships. Multiple factors are at play, and these factors are interactive and cumulative. Rambo concludes that conversion is “what a group or person says it is” (1993, xiv), yet offers a definition of conversion that is so broad it says little:

Conversion is paradoxical. It is elusive. It is inclusive. It destroys and it saves. Conversion is sudden and it is gradual. It is created totally by the action of God, and it is created totally by the actions of humans. Conversion is personal and communal, private and public. It is both passive and active. It is a retreat from the world. It is a resolution of conflict and an empowerment to go into the world and to confront, if not create, conflict. Conversion is an event and a process. It is an ending and a beginning. It is final and open-ended. Conversion leaves us devastated – and transformed (1993, 176).

John Lofland (1994) rightly critiques this “everything-is-sometimes-true” as “open-ended indeterminacy” (1994, 100). Ironically Rambo himself calls for conversion studies that address “the nature of conversion in the formation and transmission of religious traditions” (1993, 175), implying that he must concede some sort of formal categories into which one can convert. In the case of my interviewees, no single group says conversion is anything in particular, and individuals decline the use of the word. Hence if “conversion” is declined both as a word and a concept, then we must reject all further talk of it vis-à-vis Buddhism in New Zealand. Thus the category of “convert Buddhist”, which is often found juxtaposed with “ethnic Buddhist” – and which I introduced in the previous chapter – is put at risk in the New Zealand situation. I conclude that “taking up the practice” and “becoming a practitioner” are more in line with the interviewees’ own understanding of both themselves and the process by which they journeyed from not-Buddhist to Buddhist. Hence I propose to reword the typology of Alan Wallace (2002), that the interviewees are “those who have a self-conscious sense of [moving towards, embracing and taking up the practice of] Buddhism and who thereafter refer to themselves not simply as having an interest in Buddhism or as studying Buddhism, but as being Buddhist” (2002, 34).

Conclusions

In this chapter I have drawn on insights from Chana Ullman’s psychological framework of conversion (Ullman 1989) and Lewis Rambo’s process model (Rambo 1993). Moving from not-Buddhist entails a process where the self as actor undertakes a search to fulfil some psychological need. To become Buddhist – that is to be able to declare “Buddhist” on a census form – one “takes up the practice”: this “practice” has various meanings, but more often than not simply means meditation. These actors are more than mere “sympathizers” (Tweed 1999, 2002) who graze on whatever Buddhist

idea or ritual takes their fancy. The self as actor perceives that the practice of meditation will fulfil in some way their expressed psychological need. In this, they are willing to be identified as Buddhist.

I wish to conclude this chapter by introducing one further concept, and offer this as a springboard to explore what being a Buddhist practitioner might mean in the New Zealand context. Because “taking up the practice” can be regarded as a euphemism for becoming Buddhist and because the self-as-actor moves from not-Buddhist to Buddhist on a spiritual journey that can be readily accounted for by psychological motifs, then I propose that these practitioners are in fact “taking refuge” in “taking up the practice”, that is they perceive that action is in itself a refuge.

Massimo Leone (2004) conceptualizes this as a re-stabilization of the self after experiencing “vertigo” when the self had been destabilized. He concludes that “religious conversion is primarily a conversion of meanings, wherein the paradoxical constitution of a stable identity ... is possible only when the elements which compose a soul are rearranged in order to express a different language” (2004, 173). This is a semiotic understanding of religious conversion, and I propose, following Leone that “taking refuge” in “taking up the practice” can be understood as a conversion of meaning. The Buddhist practitioner has not so much converted his or her self, but has re-conceptualised and re-ordered the elements of the self so as to be able to interpret the self within and using a new and different worldview. This allows for the ambiguities expressed, even to the point of allowing oneself to identify concurrently with other religions. I will propose in the following chapters, that “taking refuge” in “taking up the practice” finds metaphorical meaning in the symbol of “home”. I will demonstrate how “home” is articulated by the interviewees by the domestic language they use. This place

of “home” is in a unique location, that of New Zealand, and refuge is found in meditational practice in this “home”.

In this chapter, I explored what it means to become a practitioner. I have answered the first of the questions of this thesis: why do New Zealanders convert to Buddhism (and, by implication, how do they convert)? I have argued that the word “conversion” is inappropriate. Nevertheless, both negative and positive factors conspire together so that the actor (that is, the interviewee) perceives that in doing Buddhist practice – mainly meditation – that in some way personal or social negativities will be addressed and positive aspirations will be fulfilled. New Zealand practitioners are attracted to a sequence of commitment: practice precedes belief.

What then of the second question? Having encountered Buddhism on a spiritual journey, moved towards it, and demonstrated some sort of commitment to it by “taking up the practice”, how might a practitioner now live in New Zealand? What identity might they create for themselves both as Buddhist practitioner and New Zealander? It is to answering this question that we now turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Being a Practitioner: Narrative and the Re-stabilization of the Self.

“Precisely because they are essential meaning-making structures, narratives must be preserved, not fractured by investigators who must respect respondents’ ways of constructing meaning and analyse how it is accomplished”

Catherine Reissman (1993, 4)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced the idea that “taking up the practice” could be conceptualised within a semiotic framework. Massimo Leone (2004) suggests that “religious conversion is primarily a conversion of meanings ... [where] the elements which compose a soul are rearranged in order to express a different language” (2004, 173). In the telling of their stories of movement towards Buddhism, the interviewees described their experience of negative factors which, using Leone’s term, led to the “destabilization of the self”. However, even the perceived positive factors of Buddhism which the interviewees identified – the simple newness and otherness of a different religion – are themselves reason enough to destabilize the self.

Leone brings these negative and positive factors together under the one word “vertigo”. Exposure to vertigo causes a subsequent “crisis of the self”. The resolution of a crisis of the self is expressed as a turning point where the self is reconceptualized within a new worldview or language. This is the place in the auto-narrative where the interviewee decided to “take up the practice”. In doing this, according to Leone’s model, the self is potentially “re-stabilized” by the actor. It is this “re-stabilization of the self” that I wish to explore in this chapter.

I suggest that the re-stabilization of the self is expressed in the “new language” of finding refuge. This refuge is not so much in the three jewels (Buddha, dharma and sangha), as in the pragmatic and action-orientated practices of Buddhism. Buddhism is something one does. The refuge is in the action: one “takes up the practice” and then continues in the practice. I propose in this chapter that this “doing” of Buddhism is not located solely in sangha, or for or with material objects, or for existential or ontological benefit. This “new language” of refuge in “taking up the practice” offers to practitioners new ways of understanding themselves and their place in New Zealand as New Zealanders.

This new way of understanding themselves – their identity – is found in and created by the interviewees’ own auto-narratives, that is, their stories of re-stabilization. I wish to unpack this notion by drawing from the insights of narrative analysis. By the end of the chapter, I will offer that these stories both create and mirror a dimension of home here in New Zealand, and I will then explore this more explicitly in the following chapter. This re-stabilization of the self in a home that is unique to New Zealand is the cornerstone on which they build identity.

Narrative Analysis

In its simplest sense, narrative analysis is the examination and critique of a story. Life can be conceived of as a journey which begins and will finish. The journey has plot: it has rites, tensions, and character development (Eggleton 1999, 275). If a story can be conceived of as a time referenced account of a journey, then narrative analysis examines how the elements of the journey’s story are sequenced. Narrative analysis also explores the relationship of these sequences and how the perceptions of the present have shaped the telling of the past.

I draw on narrative analysis because I have primarily elicited stories, which, according to David Garson (2008), “give respondents the venue to articulate their own viewpoints and evaluative standards”.⁵⁰ Since my desire was to let the interviewees speak for themselves, then it seems logical to analyse their spoken stories with a methodology designed to interpret this self-telling. In effect I entertain the possibility that the self-telling of interviewees’ stories, their auto-narrative *per se* may be determinative in constructing what Buddhism in New Zealand is becoming. In the words of Jeffery Paine (2005) : “what theology is to other religions, biography may well be to Buddhism” (2005, 21). In other words, Buddhism’s very identity may be embedded in the stories people tell of themselves, rather than in (or complementary to) dogma or tradition.

However, I have not adopted narrative analysis uncritically from its literary analysis home, but have taken its general strengths and applied them to the auto-narratives. I resisted using what Catherine Reissman (1993) calls the “life story method” where an analysis of the interviewee’s story involves the re-telling of it by the researcher. In my mind this allows for unjustified interpretive potential to creep into the final text of the interviewee’s auto-narrative. Rather, I have embraced a whole sequence methodology (Abbott 1995, 105). It is the whole telling of the overall plot of the spiritual journey in which the interviewee finds meaning, and in which the interviewee interprets his or her own “taking up the practice” of Buddhism in particular. In essence the methodology I have used is informed by narrative analysis, but not rigidly constrained by it.

⁵⁰ G. David Garson, 2008. *Narrative Analysis*. <http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/pa765/narrativ.htm> (Accessed March 10th, 2008.)

My questioning strategy yielded up what I am calling an “auto-narrative” for each interviewee, in that I imposed on the interview a time sequence by the very nature of my first question: “tell me something of your spiritual journey”. While each transcript of the twenty-one core interviews is precisely that, an interview, they are, nonetheless also stories: I wanted each interviewee to tell the story of his or her own spiritual journey. In the context of this study, the narratives demonstrated a journey towards, and commitment to Buddhism (outlined in chapter three), and then the consequent identity the interviewees perceived they derived from Buddhism (which I take up in this chapter and the next).

I have refrained from doing an in-depth structural analysis of the auto-narratives, preferring the content to take centre stage, rather than the structure. I have therefore resisted rearranging the auto-narrative into an exact chronological sequence, believing that the rearrangement of the temporal nature of the text would radically affect the meaning of the narrative (Garson 2008). Hence, while alert to plot, I do not rigorously compare plots between auto-narratives looking for a definitive or universal plot. Hence I do not use plot line analysis vis-à-vis examining diversion to plot as an analytical tool (Burck 2005). I do however assume that the way the interviewee told his or her story is important: in other words *that* they told something and in *this* place in the interview I deemed as significant. I concede that a strict structural analysis would yield up some very interesting insights into the use of language in general and religious etymology, syntax and grammar *per se*, but a literary analysis was not my primary concern. I wanted to examine content in the first instance, and only frame that loosely within a very broad understanding of the literary structure of the whole narrative.

I have accessed only the telling of the events, not the actual events themselves. In other words, I have only the interviewees' interpretation of their spiritual journeys. Nevertheless, the events are not completely inaccessible if one assumes there is a truthful correlation between the reported narrative and the events reported. Indeed, William Labov (1972) defines narrative as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred" (1972, 359). While noting that qualitative methodologies by definition have a large degree of subjectivity in them, I acknowledge, following Labov (1997) again, that

narrative [analysis] is essentially a hermeneutic study, where continual engagement with the discourse as it was delivered gains entrance to the perspective of the speaker and the audience, tracing the transfer of information and experience in a way that deepens our own understandings of what language and social life are all about.⁵¹

If indeed we can gain "entrance to the perspective of the speaker and the audience", Labov (1997) argues that the "most reportable event" is the "semantic and structural pivot", or the "turning point" to use Lofland and Stark's term (in Hunt 2003, 102). My interviewees knew that I was researching Buddhist "conversion and identity" and hence there was a disposition to make the "semantic and structural pivot" known, central and of high priority. This took form in a "micro-narrative" (a short piece of transcript with one topic) about an event, initiation rite or process that gave them passage into Buddhism. The micro-narrative was usually located somewhere near the middle of the interview. In this I concede that I was an "exponent of cultural norms", in that I presumed that firstly "conversion" was the right word and secondly that it was an event of some sort. On both counts, the interviewees resisted this, as I outlined in the previous chapter. The "conversion" micro-narrative was about "taking up the practice".

⁵¹ <http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~wlabov/sfs.html> (Accessed March 11th, 2008.)

Thus narrative has proven to be a productive strategy in giving voice to the interviewees' resistance to preconceived definitions. Indeed, it is in the telling of their stories that their experiences have been made meaningful. David Yamane (2000) argues that we cannot study or measure "experiencing", that is "religious experience in real time and its physical, mental and emotional constituents" (2000, 173), and so we must therefore study retrospective accounts, in effect, reported auto-narratives. These auto-narratives by definition are interpretive: "actively experiencing and reflecting on experience are clear and distinct activities" (2000, 174).

Therefore, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, where many interviewees' journeys into Buddhism have been in the context of negative factors, a retrospective telling of the experience of the journey can be seen, to use Peter Berger's words, "an imposition of order upon experience", and I would argue, more often than not, cathartic. Thus an item of experience, that is, a conversion event or ritual, "is *ipso facto*, taken out of this flux and given stability as the entity so named" (Berger 1969, 20). Thus in their use of "new language" (Leone 2004, 173) they reconceptualise the self and give it stability. By resisting the notion of "conversion" and conceptualising their religious change as "taking up the practice", they are redefining who they are in the very telling of their story. Interviewees are essentially saying something like "I am a practitioner. I can articulate my spiritual journey as taking up the practice of meditation (and other Buddhist practices). Therefore I am a Buddhist".

Thus we are left with a universal, the universal story-telling of religious experience. If to understand religious experience is to know how people make it meaningful then narrative is central to this endeavour. The story of *Exodus* is perhaps a

good example, where it can be argued that scribes in the mosaic tradition wrote an interpretation of the events of escape from slavery in Egypt, and in their telling and re-telling of the story, the emerging community of Israel came to understand their own reason for existence and identity as a community. In Buddhism itself, there is a strong and broad tradition of story telling. The canonical *Jataka* tales, for example, is a collection of moral stories representing various aspects of the Buddha's alleged past lives: these are well loved as told and enacted (Cowell 1973). The *Jataka* tales are narratives that help people to make their religious experiences meaningful. As Norman Denzin (1990) has pointed out "some experiences elude representation, but significant moments of experience are given in representations which are always narratives, stories, and fictions made up out of the events at hand" (1990, 5-6). The Dorje Change Institute in Auckland has a large illustration of one of the tales painted on a wall in its courtyard.

Narrative analysis then is more about description and classification than empirical determinism. David Yamane (2000) celebrates this qualitative analysis of religious experience, where the analysis commences with a structured question as a filter which is followed by a "more or less open-ended interview of those responding positively to the filter" (2000, 179). The filter in this project was the first open ended question: "tell me about your spiritual journey". Coding and content analysis of the resulting transcript followed.

Although I have used this standard process – and the discussion on conversion in the previous chapter is based on it – it is not without its shortcomings. Mere coding into themes or categories deemed significant by the researcher is inadequate if there is not an appreciation for the complex relationship between the proffered word of the interviewee and the event being related. If there is an assumption of a rigid correspondence between

word and event, then it locks the narrative into a snapshot genre that is doomed to a metaphorical photo album. Stories by their nature change over time, and are always interpretive. No two renderings of culturally iconic fairy tales – or *Jataka* tales – are the same. Similarly, if I had consistently used closed questions as the interviews had processed, then I would have been pre-selecting many answers and implicitly driving the narrative to prescriptive conclusions that I perceived would be true or significant.

Because of this risk Ewick and Silbey (1995, 200) argue that there are three basic elements which constitute the heart of a spoken narrative. Firstly, there must be events or experiences which are selected for consideration. In this study I selected “conversion”: event, process or ritual, or combinations of these. Secondly, the events and experiences are ordered temporally with beginning, middle, and end. In this study, I allow for this three-fold division, but refrain from atomizing the auto-narratives smaller than thematic micro-narratives. Thirdly, the events or experiences are subjected to moral ordering by the interviewee. This is where meaning and narrative are entwined: the narrative conforms to some overarching culturally accepted norm. This norm is distilled from *Weltanschauung* – worldview – where worldview is understood to be a view of reality. Moral ordering is teleological: the beginning and the middle are driving to an end. An interviewee’s spiritual journey, and his or her telling of it, both have meaning. This is, to use Paul Ricoeur’s (1991) word, “emplotment”: religious events and experiences are in a sequence, originally set in motion toward some end goal perceived as being worthwhile by the actor of that plot (the interviewee).

Thus each elicited auto-narrative is an interpretive moral ordering of a sequence of events and experiences done by that actor: the interviewee, in the telling of the narrative, is bringing meaning to this in the telling. Not only did the sequential events of

the auto-narrative have meaning, but the telling of the auto-narrative also had meaning. What my interviewees consistently did was not stop at the micro-narrative of “taking up the practice”, despite my desire to tease out what this species of conversion may have meant for them. They often pressed on to subsequent meaning, implying that moments or processes of change were less relevant than how they now lived in light of that change. In effect they pressed on “to the end” of the plot, that is, to extrapolating what meaning and significance they now experienced, or hoped to experience beyond merely identifying as a Buddhist practitioner.

Using narrative analysis: the twenty-one transcripts

I now turn to analyse the transcripts of the twenty one people whom I formally interviewed. The opening filter question was “tell me about your spiritual journey” or a close variant. Two examples were:

Tell me something of your spiritual journey. You’re here [at this Buddhist Retreat Centre] as an administrator. How did you come to be here, in your own spiritual journey? (Natalie Prenter)

I’m keen to hear what your own spiritual journey has been. You were [at the week long *sesshin* where I met you] practising Zen Buddhism: what’s been your life’s spiritual journey up until this point? (Gavin Snell)

Subsequent questions followed trajectories that the interviewees then set themselves. Overall, there was a cluster of five similar questions in all interviews. These included:

1. The “filter”: an invitation to tell their spiritual journey
2. an invitation to deepen and expand on the specifics around their “taking up the practice”, once the interviewee had identified when (in the interview) they had moved from not-Buddhist to Buddhist

3. an invitation to revisit events, emotions and beliefs prior to becoming Buddhist (or “taking up the practice”)
4. what now? questions: what meaning, significance and/or identity had they since found, having identified as Buddhist?
5. demographic data: age, employment, political affiliation, social contexts.

This relatively unstructured questioning technique is not without precedent as a research strategy designed to elicit narrative in a New Zealand context. Kathryn Rountree (2004) in her study of feminist witchcraft in New Zealand employed a near identical strategy. Rountree had forwarded a list of thirteen “themes and questions for discussion” to an interviewee, and used these only as “starting points”: the interviewee could deal with them in any order, and take the interview anywhere she wished. This is equivalent to informing my interviewees of the general gist of where an interview might go as outlined on the information sheet in Appendix 5. Not surprisingly, Rountree’s interviews “became discussions [of] shared ideas and experiences” (2004, 81), much like my interviews sometimes became.

A relatively unstructured questioning technique has been deployed elsewhere in Buddhist studies. Caroline Kingsbury, for example, in her study of Buddhism in Bellingham (WA, U.S.A.) (2004), offered merely an “outline of the areas in which [she was] interested”, which she informed her potential interviewees would “hopefully give [them] a framework within which to express their experience [of conversion to Buddhism]” (2004, 117). These included “a kind of personal history of your perception of how Buddhism came into your life” and “how Buddhism might work for you” (2004, 118). Similarly, in his study of Buddhists in Leeds, Andrew Kennedy (2004) had only an “underlying schedule of questions designed to encourage open responses” (2004,

143). Both these studies yielded up integrated discussions regarding people's commitment to Buddhism. Kennedy concluded that the testimonies he elicited "suggest that gradual alterations to ordinary consciousness, along the way, provide some practitioners of Buddhist ritual, including meditation, with therapeutic and immanent experiences, which provide sufficient motivation for continued practice and for renewed engagement with the world" (2004, 154). Employing a similar strategy, I too will end up with a similar conclusion, but shaped particularly for a New Zealand context.

Having elicited an auto-narrative, I then analyzed each by isolating pericope: I called these "micro-narratives". A micro-narrative was not necessarily the narrative between each question. It was a consecutive telling of short narrative around a single topic. In giving titles to micro-narratives, it helped me to understand the structure and flow of the interview, and gave me a tool by which to make inter-narrative comparisons. Even though each formal interview was approximately an hour long, the number of micro-narratives in each interview varied between fifteen and thirty-six. I do not claim that this was the only way to analyse the auto-narratives. The process did however allow for plot structure to be identified, without being too intrusive. Table 2 gives an example of an interview which has been broken down into micro-narratives.

Table 2: An example of the breakdown of auto-narrative into micro-narratives (Philip Jolliffe)

- MN1: Childhood background and experience
- MN2: The "overseas experience": exposure to Buddhism in Asia
- MN3: Return to New Zealand: invitation to hear Zen master and joins a Zen group
- MN4: Learning Zen through tapes and reading
- MN5: Unpacking the word "resonance"
- MN6: Being Buddhist: aligning practice with belief
- MN7: Being a Zen scientist

- MN8: Zen ethics and scientific practice
- MN9: Buddhism and other areas of the interviewee's life
- MN10: Being Buddhist with a Christian partner
- MN11: On the "catastrophe of religion"
- MN12: Skilful means in Zen practice
- MN13: On the Zen altar: form and meaning
- MN14: Form and meaning are for end of awareness
- MN15: On Buddhism in New Zealand generally: authentic Buddhism
- MN16: Biodata

Locating micro-narratives helped identify a rough chronology. I also included any further annotations I had made about the interviewee from supplementary meetings and sources, or participant observation. This gave me a richer appreciation for each interviewee's social context, and provided more informal text. Understanding of the auto-narratives would have been less robust if I had not undertaken participant observation, for as Roberto Franzosi observes "understanding of even the simplest text requires a great deal of background knowledge" (1998, 547).

The example of Philip Jolliffe in Table 2 above, is a case in point. I found his name on his tradition's website, which led to an initial telephone conversation, then an informal introductory meeting at a café, then a formal interview. This was followed by participant observation at *zazen* with him, then again at a weekend *sesshin*, and then a Zen group social barbecue. Informal conversations and emails around all these interactions were taken into account when analysing the formal narrative text.

Having identified micro-narratives, I was then able to identify seven broad themes. Not all auto-narratives necessarily had all seven themes within them. These themes are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: Seven Themes

1. Life and religio-social context
2. Psychological and social factors in the journey into Buddhism
3. Specific details of embrace and commitment to Buddhism: “taking up the practice”.
4. Benefits of Buddhism: meaning and identity
5. Buddhism in New Zealand
6. Biodata and social descriptors
7. Additional notes and summary

I have already interacted with the first three themes in the previous chapter. These dealt to the first question of the thesis, namely, why and how do New Zealanders become Buddhists? I do not single out themes six and seven for explicit discussion, but rather weave these into the general thesis. Similarly, theme five informs discussion throughout the thesis. In the rest of this chapter I wish to focus on theme four. In essence, having examined an interviewee’s narrative of movement towards Buddhism (their “conversion story”) in chapter three, I now move to addressing the second of the questions of the thesis, that is, what meaning and identity do they now create for themselves, as Buddhist practitioners?

Narrative and identity: four worldview indicators

To address meaning and identity, I devised a scheme by which I examined the relationship of four key factors across all auto-narratives. These four factors were, 1) selfhood, 2) practice/ritual, 3) involvement, and 4) belief.

I have drawn these four factors from the broader concept of *Weltanschauung* (worldview) where worldview is a way of seeing the world, or perceiving reality. I have chosen these worldview factors because I am making generalizations based on

theoretical possibility, rather than on statistical induction (Bertaux and Kohli 1984, 218). I use these four factors because they are plausible and summative. In a sense they fell naturally out of the auto-narratives. They are tools for locating interactive nuances, or to use Bertaux and Kohli's words, they represent an "internal structure centring around specific themes, their complication, and their solution" (1984, 224). These four factors also offer a shift out of a strictly sequential chronology of "spiritual journey" and place chronology "interdependent in a complex network" (Abbott 1995, 103). In essence, in chapter three (on conversion) I attempted to code and discuss process, and in this chapter, I attempt a content analysis of the auto-narratives to reflect on social interactions and the formation of stable identity. In other words, I have identified these four factors as means by which the interviewees re-stabilize the self (Leone 2004).

In his conceptualization of the re-stabilization of the self, Leone (2004) offers three illustrations: conversion of ideas, conversion of passion/emotion, and conversion of action. He uses metaphors all drawn from Christian examples, but I contend that this semiotic representation of meaning can well throw light on how Buddhist-practitioners re-stabilize themselves in New Zealand particularly. I propose an etymological fusion of "refuge" and "practice" in the metaphor of "home". "Refuge" speaks of security, while "practice" speaks of action. "Taking refuge" is as much a sociological phenomenon as a Buddhist soteriology. One "takes refuge" in a "practice". In this there is both security ("refuge"), and risk ("practice"): one enjoys the security of home (accompanied by domestic emotions), and in that very security, one is able to expand into the risks of action. Thus in the metaphor of "home", ideas, emotion and action – to use Leone's three illustrations – are brought together. I will go on to argue that this metaphor of home can be located in New Zealand as a place in the next chapter, but suffice it to explore at this point the four worldview factors I identified.

In isolating four worldview factors, I nevertheless recognize that the concept of worldview is contested. However, David Naugle (2002), who has attempted a substantial and definitive history of the concept, offers a summative definition: worldview is the “overt human beliefs and behaviours, as well as socio-cultural phenomena – [conscious] or not – most often rooted in and expressions of some deeper, underlying principle and concept of life” (2002, xv). In simpler language, worldview carries the idea of a lens, in that it is to do with the presuppositions one holds about reality through which one views the world.

Buddhism has a worldview informed by The Four Noble Truths, which is recognised in all Buddhist traditions. Various expressed, it can be summarised as follows: the first truth is that suffering (*dukha*) exists; the second is that the cause of suffering is desire (*tanha*); the third is that the cessation of desire (and hence suffering) is possible (*nirvana*); the fourth is the path (*marga*) by which one can live so as to be free from suffering and achieve enlightenment. This path is the Noble Eight-fold Path.

Starting with the premise of suffering is both an epistemological and worldview assumption. However, the interviewees did not necessarily accept this premise as a given. This may well have been because most interviewees did not experience the same kind or degree of suffering as one might have had in the original socio-historical context in which the Buddha originally formulated the Four Truths. Alternatively, as I have suggested already, the so-called “converts” were more practitioners: doers of Buddhist things, rather than believers in explicit formulations. Nevertheless, if part of the inherent notion of worldview is that it is rarely explicitly articulated, then the four factors

following are the “beliefs and behaviours” that come out of a “deeper, underlying principle and concept of life” (Naugle 2002, xv).

Firstly, I propose that the factor of self-hood (SH) gathers within itself questions of “who am I?”, “what have I become?”, and “what am I becoming”. Thus the transcripts included comments around self-awareness, role and status within a sangha (or other community), labels and titles that a person may appropriate and/or accept, and how interviewees expressed their understanding of how others perceived them. An example of this is the comment: “I put myself down as ‘Buddhist’ on the census form” (Rachel Pike). Although “self” is problematic in Buddhism, everyone assumed the existence of their own self.

Secondly, the factor of “practice/ritual” (PR) incorporates answers to the questions “how do I nourish myself spiritually?” and “what rituals do I undertake that give me meaning?” I placed reflections on rituals of ongoing commitment and sustenance, and the interviewee’s interpretation of these within this factor. Implicitly, interviewees were asking the question “what uniquely Buddhist practices should I do that give me Buddhist identity”? This factor includes daily, weekly or monthly rituals and spiritual habits, as well as unique rites-of-passage rituals. An example: “I learned to meditate with the FWBO [and] I did quite a few retreats” (Rachel Pike).

Thirdly, “involvement” (IN) focused on what interviewees did because they had identified as being a Buddhist. How might they speak, behave, and relate to other Buddhists and non-Buddhists? For example interviewees may reflect on “what political causes should I get involved with because I am a Buddhist?” or “how should I now act toward others?” In addition, this factor addresses questions such as “what role should I

have in my sangha and what roles can I aspire to?” or “how as a woman am I to be Buddhist?” and the likes. An example:

Training to be a Counsellor is a direct result of my Buddhist belief and motivation. I can see the profound suffering in the world and I just want to be a part of fixing it (Rachel Pike).

“Belief” (BL) was the fourth factor. Interviewees revealed answers to questions in this category similar to “how do I relate to the dharma; what parts are important to me and what do I find the most relevant?” and “what new belief system have I appropriated: what are its strengths and weaknesses, and what values do I put on it?” or “what credence do I give to institutional formulations?” An example:

I think I learn through the teachings of the Buddha an incredible amount about the nature of mind, insight into reality, and how mind works, and clarity, and a kind of discriminatory existence (Rachel Pike).

Having isolated these four worldview factors, I then explored how interviewees talked about each, but more particularly how each factor related to the others. In a transcript, sometimes a sentence or idea could be easily identified as a single factor, but more often than not a factor occurred joined to, within, or interactive with another. For example, an interactive example of PR-BL (practice/ritual with belief):

[This corner of my room is special for me and meaningful]. All these objects [on the small table by my bed] are meaningful, but in a way I don’t keep it fresh, because I don’t meditate everyday, sometimes I neglect it. But this [small] Buddha is very important to me. My own little Buddha. I take that everywhere. He’s not a flash Buddha. He’s a bit of a Calvinist Buddha (laughter). He’s just very kind and doesn’t wear flash robes (Rachel Pike).

This example demonstrates Rachel Pike’s practice (PR) of having an altar table in the corner of her room with various objects of devotion on it along with comment about her regular meditation practice. Her beliefs (BL) about her Buddha image are identified in her comments regarding how she regards it as the most important item on the table, that

she “takes it everywhere” (she demonstrated that it fitted in her purse), and that he is “not flash” but “Calvinist” (presumably meaning “austere” in some sense). I listed this as an interaction of two factors, PR (practice/ritual) and BL (belief) because her Buddha image is part of her normal configuration of items on the altar table and she uses it in regular ritual.

Some interactions involved three factors. Again, drawing on the auto-narrative of Rachel Pike to illustrate the relationship of involvement, belief and selfhood (IN-BL-SH):

I have these thoughts about whether I want to be a Buddhist teacher. I think that’s why I want to have more grounding in some of the purist traditional aspects of Buddhism. As a way of living, the dharma has so much to offer people. What’s so wonderful about it is that in the dharma is the idea that you must check it out for yourself. So the theory of [Buddhism] doesn’t have this self-righteous thing, although some people can get self-righteous about Buddhism. But in theory, it’s supposed to be an embracing of all ways of living. The Dalai Lama says all the time, “[stay in your own religion]. There are many paths up the mountain”. If I don’t become a teacher, I’d want to be really working with people who need the dharma – not in a dogmatic way – people who are needing ... [who] want to transform their lives (Rachel Pike).

Here, for Rachel Pike, an interplay of involvement and selfhood is embodied in her desire to become a Buddhist teacher, but she perceives she needs “more grounding” in “traditional aspects”. This I note as belief (BL), endorsed by further comment about “dharma” and “Buddhist theory” and Buddhism’s “embracing of all ways of living”. Reference then to teaching of the Dalai Lama underlines this belief aspect, and the micro-narrative concludes with the possibility that if she does not become a teacher (IN-SH), then Pike still wants to “work with people” because she believes (or implies she believes) that the dharma will “transform their lives”. I have left this as a three way interaction as I think the context and meaning of the micro-narrative would be compromised and fragmented otherwise. Other parts of the auto-narrative texts were

often so complex that leaving them as a full four-way interaction seemed the wisest course of action.

Once I had identified these four factors, as well as their interactions, I then ascertained the frequency of the individual factors and the multiple interactions. Thus I was able to build a matrix for each interviewee. For the example I am currently using – Rachel Pike – a full matrix is in Table 4.

Table 4: Auto-narrative matrix of Rachel Pike

	Factor	Frequency of mention
Single factors	PR	7
	SH	6
	BL	8
	IN	7
Two-way relationships	PR-IN	0
	PR-SH	2
	BL-IN	9
	SH-IN	1
	SH-BL	7
	PR-BL	11
Three-way relationships	PR-SH-BL	2
	PR-IN-BL	0
	PR-SH-IN	0
	SH-BL-IN	2
Four-way relationships	PR-BL-IN-SH	1
Summative frequencies	PR	25
	SH	19
	BL	40
	IN	20

Having undertaken this procedure for all the “formal (Buddhist)” interviews, I then simply added up the frequency of each category over all the matrices, a summary of which appears in Table 5 in Appendix 7. Across all formal interviews there were 440 single or combined reflections on practice/ritual, 299 on selfhood, 456 on belief, and

665 on involvement. Although arising from actual examples, this analysis cannot be statistically verified, nor should it be. It reveals only indicative and plausible relationships and the weighting each interviewee, either consciously or subconsciously gave during the interview.

I was then able to formulate a descriptive summary narrative for each interviewee based on this analysis, combined with any notes I had made from participant observation or supplementary interactions. Thus for Rachel Pike:

Rachel Pike articulated well a story mainly focussed on belief. She often talked about belief in the third person, leaving applications to herself to implications –i.e. she described a lot of what she understood was happening around her (for example at her retreat centre, or New Zealand). The interplay of belief, practice and involvement were the most common relationships, although usually only two of these played together at any one time. She understood herself to be “engaged” – a helping profession (counselling) was the main expression of her dealing with suffering (a belief) but there was also a homely aspect to her self narrative. Overall, she had conviction around belief, and belief interpreted her practice. This belief and practice relationship gave rise to her perceptions of identity.

This was an important part of the process of analysis because, at first glance, Rachel Pike’s matrix seems to contradict the argument of the thesis thus far. I am arguing that New Zealand “converts” understand themselves to be practitioners, and yet Pike’s most frequent factor is belief (mentioned forty times). The interactions of the factors listed in the matrix (Table 4) however, indicate that belief interacts primarily with practice/ritual and involvement. In other words, even though belief is frequently mentioned by Pike, it is usually in the context of talking about or explaining practice/ritual and involvement.

I have included the other summary narratives in Appendix 4. While my methodology yields up deep and useful information, and interprets real accounts of

spiritual belief, ritual/practice, involvement and selfhood, I readily concede that the auto-narratives could be looked at differently, and indeed, even within my methodology, there must be some caution. For example, Gavin Snell reflected a lot on issues pertaining to his own sense of selfhood (SH). This selfhood he formulated in terms of identity rooted in his sangha, such that it could be argued that his self-identity was found not so much as a Buddhist *per se*, but as a member of a group (which coincidentally happens to be Buddhist). By remaining alert to nuance by ensuring the context of the interviewee is maintained, I have had a tool at my disposal (that is, the final summary in Appendix 4) to capture feelings, images and time, as well as to address ambiguities (Mitchell and Egudo 2003).

A straight count of the frequency of factors reveals involvement (IN) as the most frequent and belief (BL) as the next most frequent. As I have noted already, this at first reading may seem to contradict my argument so far. This in fact is not the case. “Taking up the practice” was certainly the way interviewees spoke of their embrace of Buddhist meditation especially, but here we are talking about their ongoing involvement and interactions within Buddhism. If we look at how many people emphasised which factor, then the commonest factor was involvement (with all twenty one interviewees), followed by practice (with eighteen interviewees). Not surprisingly then, the most common bi-polar relationship was involvement-practice, followed by belief-practice/ritual, and belief-involvement. There were only thirteen who talked articulately about belief as a priority, and only eight with respect to selfhood. I conclude from these interviews that in a general sense, my interviewees were pragmatists, even technicians, concerned primarily about “practising” Buddhism and being involved with activities they expressed as natural outworkings of their “practice”.

By pragmatist, I mean someone who primarily did things, rather than believed dogma. By technician, I mean someone who used methods (and even beliefs) as tools to achieve desired outcomes, often in an opportunistic way. In other words, they adopted tools – rituals and spiritual practices – to nourish their spiritual lives knowing in the main that the practices were informed by Buddhism, but being largely indifferent overall to an explicit Buddhist identity. Indeed several appeared to be Buddhist but in interview resisted taking the label. This was not an active denial of identity, for nearly all declared themselves Buddhist on the 2006 census. It was more of an indifference towards the need to have an explicit Buddhist identity. “Being” and “becoming” Buddhist were less important than “doing” practices and rituals sourced from Buddhist traditions. Being Buddhist was defined by what one did – they were involved and did practice – not by what one believed, in the main. In other words, having been attracted to Buddhist practice, they continued to shape their identity in that very practice, rather than, say, finding identity in subsequent belief, community or elsewhere. Simply put, to become Buddhist was to begin to meditate. To continue in Buddhism was to continue to meditate.

This may seem at first glance to be nothing remarkable. However, it stands in contrast to Christianity, from which all but four of the interviewees had shifted. Conversion into Christianity may well be by assimilation or by an abrupt conversion experience. Whatever the entry, it is usually defined in categories of belief: “whoever believes [in Christ] will be saved” (Mark 16:16). Consequently, one nourishes one self as a Christian by a broad range of disciplines. This shift by the interviewees to a pragmatic priority may well be symptomatic of a deeper and more expansive socio-cultural dynamic in New Zealand. Interviewees may well be reflecting the pragmatism of New Zealand society which, it can be argued, is cynical of belief and celebrates

practical outcomes. Hence there may well be the perception that because meditation “works” in fulfilling personal needs – it perhaps is perceived of as a tool with which one can re-stabilize oneself – then it takes preference over a closer examination of belief.

This is not to say that belief was ignored. Rachel Pike, whom I introduced above, had some clear and forthright things to say about the role of belief in her life. For those interviewees who volunteered substantial micro-narratives on belief, they located themselves primarily within the doctrines of *karma* and rebirth. To be Buddhist was to be a sentient being who existed as a consequence of *karma* in a past life. But even so, doing practice remained crucial. What they do in this life (either well or poorly) was perceived as determinative for their identity in the next life. Hence any accompanying comments about practice and ritual were informed by this view. Indeed those who were most articulate about belief were in the main from the Tibetan traditions (FPMT, Sakya and Kagyu). These traditions clearly prioritised the meritorious rituals associated with generating karmic merit.

On the other hand, those who had a higher practice and involvement priority were far less articulate about Buddhist doctrine or belief. Often involvement was framed within Buddhistic ethical principles (“taking precepts”), or generic qualities like “being compassionate”. These interviewees tended to come from groups who were more meditative, namely Insight Meditation, Zen and Soka Gakkai (where chanting, I would argue, is a form of meditation). The possibility of this differentiation is intriguing, but I would be cautious about offering definitive relationships. To do this, one would need to approach the differentiation with more focussed research strategies and with a bigger sample size. Nevertheless, I posit further preliminary reflections by drawing from my wider research circle of informal interviews and participant observation.

Narratives of re-stabilization

Having been the subject of an interview, the interviewee would often ask me if I “had a practice”. Because of the context, I understood them to mean “do you have a Buddhist practice?”. This in effect was a euphemism for “are you a Buddhist?”. In other words, they sought to know who I was – my identity – by asking a question about what I might do. They were implying that their own identity as Buddhist was defined by what they did, namely, Buddhist practice.

I have suggested thus far, that this practice was generally meditation in the first instance. Practitioners had found in the practice of meditation that they were able to re-stabilize their self. I have also suggested that the telling of this – their auto-narrative – has in itself acted as a re-stabilizing mechanism. However, this practice of Buddhism – that which gave ongoing meaning to practitioners’ lives – is not defined only by meditating, where meditation might be perceived solely as the individual sitting in the lotus position undertaking breathing or mental exercises. For some, “taking up the practice” was broader.

I have suggested that in Tibetan traditions – and this was plainly obvious when doing participant observation at FPMT centres particularly – the practice of Buddhism was more to do with earning merit. One is part of a sangha so as to play a role in doing meritorious acts so as to effect a better individual rebirth. Thus at Chandrakirti the purchasing and filling of twenty-one Tara statues was the project at hand, and at Dorje Chang, the filling of a large prayer wheel with 111 billion mantras on microfilm was the dominant form of merit-making during my contact times. Sangha members were encouraged to take a part in filling statues, or spinning prayer wheels. Even so,

meditating, or chanting the sutras, or taking empowerments or whatever practice a practitioner had taken up, were all actions which participants understood as expedient, so as to earn merit, transforming bad *karma* into good. In this, I posit that they understood their own identity as being merit-makers: they are Buddhist because they do rituals to increase karmic merit.

In effect this could be reduced to a simple formula: if it works, or rather, if I perceive that it works, then it is helpful, representing perhaps, as I have already suggested, New Zealand cultural values of individualism and pragmatism. For a meditator, if the meditation works – that is, if I find release from my pain or confusion – then it is good, and I will continue it. For a merit-maker, if my bad *karma* is transformed by doing meritorious actions, then I will continue it.⁵² Thus meditation and merit-making are tools, with no expectation of practitioners to believe dogma in the first instance, other than the belief that the tool may in fact “work”.

Several practitioners I interviewed view this action-based identity as a freedom from the “tyranny of belief” (Beatty 2000). Philip Jolliffe for example:

Take the Dalai Lama: there was a plaque at the end of his meditation hall that said something like: ‘If anyone ever tells you to believe, run for your life’. There are numerous encounters between people in the commentaries in Zen literature that whenever the student wants to attach to something in a belief sense, the masters will pull it away. Even down to the point of burning iconography or whatever the students are investing themselves in. One of the tenets of Zen is that the realization of practice is beyond words. It’s not dependent on anything external [i.e. a belief in an external deity].

⁵² It should be noted here that the affective results of merit-making and meditation are in two different categories. A practitioner can certainly feel that meditation has produced an outcome (“I feel more peaceful”), but a merit-maker has no way of objectifying whether merit has actually been earned in any ontological sense. A Buddhist practitioner may take issue with this, appealing to the law of *karma*, in that if good things happen, then good *karma* must have occurred. This may well be, but there is no verifiable link. Hence a large dose of faith in the dogma of the tradition or in the teaching of the lama is implied. In the words of interviewee Barry Farland: “you do what your guru says”.

Charles Markham makes this more explicit: “people who have a strong religious belief, particularly Christian, find Zen Buddhism – or something as alien from Christian religion/practice – they find it threatening”. Barry Davey strikes belief a final blow: “a belief is not necessarily conducive to raising our level of consciousness”. Thus where belief may well interpret practice within the notion of worldview, the way is open for a number of reconfigurations of belief and practice as people construct new identity which is not constrained by dogma or authority. Formal belief – as in dogma or codified doctrine – may well be simply discarded or deemed inconsequential in the formation of identity. I wish to call on three examples to illustrate this.

Self-construction of a new identity: three examples

Anne Cowie, affiliated now with the Insight Meditation movement, originally found herself in a dysfunctional spiritual group that was informed by Buddhism. She described this dysfunctionality as being primarily with the teacher. Cowie managed to stick with the teachings nonetheless, articulating that the spiritual community (rather than the teacher alone) had always been her priority. Her attraction to the group had been because of a deep psychological need and desire to find peace amongst considerable personal anxiety. This was her way of expressing the need to re-stabilize herself after vertigo (Leone 2004). When the leader expelled her from this first Buddhist community, it was a “huge grief”, and she experienced vertigo for a second time. After this disenfranchisement she spent a year without Buddhism, and found solace in Taoist practices. Subsequently, when Cowie discovered Insight Meditation she embraced it as a technique, rather than a belief paradigm: “I found it [the technique of meditative breathing] enormously liberating, freeing, and a relief. I didn’t do anything formal [as a rite of entry]. It was just a ‘this is a path that makes sense to me, that feels right, that is compatible and that works. It makes my life better’”.

While now settled in Insight Meditation, Cowie does not feel constrained at all by anything that is particularly Buddhist about it, and continues personal daily routines which include Tai Chi, and Pilates⁵³ exercises. These she sees as complementing her Buddhist meditation, which she defines as the work that she must do on her own mind. She called this a “practical down to earth approach”.

Cowie now interprets her dysfunctional existence in the first group in the Buddhist language of skilful means: “it strengthened me”. She believes it also equipped her to be a “community builder” in the Insight Meditation group she now leads. “Now I’m really choosing for myself on my own terms: I’ve had a break [from Buddhism for a year], missed it, and realised it’s still the thing that appeals the most, makes the most sense, is the most useful”. In essence, even though she identifies openly with a new Buddhist group, she has constructed for herself an essentialist and pragmatic meditation-centred practice informed from three sources: she has three tools in her spiritual tool box. Her ongoing meditation practice is self-constructed and conforms little to any institutional paradigms.

This self constructed spiritual practice is also evident in the story of Anthony Banner, who manages a retreat centre on the Coromandel peninsula which is informed by the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh.⁵⁴ Banner resisted taking the label of “Buddhist”, but nonetheless is open about the fact that he interprets his life story within Buddhist categories. He “drinks at the well” of Buddhism, and “draws inspiration” from

⁵³ The Pilates exercise programme is named after its founder Joseph Pilates. It is a muscular programme to enhance posture.

⁵⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Zen monk resident in France who has a large and international following. He is credited with coining the phrase “engaged Buddhism”, that is, a socially conscious and politically activist movement.

Buddhism, but marked “no specific religion” on the 2006 census form. He explicitly declared that the source of his inspiration came from Thich Nhat Hanh’s tradition, explaining that Buddhist “mindfulness practice” is what is most attractive, rather than its “buddhist-ness”. In other words, he has appropriated a Buddhist tool, but not embraced a public Buddhist identity, even though loosely identifying with a Buddhist tradition. Banner makes no apology for this, saying that it is more important to become a Buddha than a Buddhist. To this end he believes people explore mindfulness because it has the potential to make them happy. Banner’s language is functional and therapeutic. Mindfulness practice “supported” him “enormously in [his] difficulties”. It was a method that countered his “bad-habit energy”. His language is full of verbs, leaving underlying beliefs to remain implicit: “I feel my commitment is to personal practice and the unfolding of what this [retreat centre] is”.

However, even in conceding that mindfulness practice is informed by Buddhism, and specifically Thich Nhat Hanh’s tradition, Banner believes mindfulness is not solely a Buddhist practice, but is one of the commonalities of all religions. Hence he is slow to affiliate with any institutionalised religion, believing that particularities would compromise his integrity. Thus he does Buddhist things (practises mindfulness meditation), and is custodian of a Buddhist centre, but refrains from fully embracing the entirety of Thich Nhat Hanh’s tradition or the Vietnamese Zen sources behind it. In essence he constructs his own individual identity, tucked away at a secluded retreat centre on the Coromandel peninsula, being mindful and continuing a daily Yoga practice, conceptualising much of his spirituality in terms of balancing energy, rather than in explicit Buddhist categories.

This pattern of individualized identity construction is also evident with Melody Frew. I interviewed her during a period of sojourn in New Zealand immediately after she had returned from extensive training and retreats in Thailand. There was a note of frustration relayed in her interview because her Thai centre had not delivered to her in categories outside of Thai cultural constraints. She was at a cross-roads as to what in the tradition she could or should adopt at all. She summarized her spiritual path: “for me my path is learning to depend on myself and in different contexts”. Buddhist categories of belief were unimportant. She explicitly rejected, for example, any belief in rebirth. However she felt intuitively that the Buddhism she had learned was coherent, but deemed the belief framework less important than “I’m here now, and for me, now, this practice makes sense, and works”.

Frew went on to describe in detail the limitations she had experienced in her Thai training. She had received a dharma name, but felt ambivalent about it. She had been assured of the equality of monk and nun, but had not experienced equality after taking ordination vows. Within the sangha, she had struggled in her nun’s role, believing that her robes were not the end in itself, but rather a means to an end: “the robes are just a tool because the tradition isn’t coherent enough for a nun; it doesn’t have enough spaces. It doesn’t make sense”. She kept encountering Thai “cultural baggage” and interpreted the Buddhism she experienced as “not serious enough”. However, having concluded this, she had not rejected Buddhism *per se*, and had considered re-ordaining in a Tibetan tradition. Again, however, she perceived Tibetan Buddhism as having “enormous problems”, such as sexism, lack of support for the sangha and the likes. She also believed that the Tibetan teachers did not take the Western nuns seriously. Consequently Frew continues as a practitioner while resisting the adoption of the full scope of Buddhist belief and ritual while maintaining a self-

constructed identity. When I met her in New Zealand, she was trying to decide which local sangha to join.

Melody Frew resisted the constraints of a tradition known for its orthodoxy. Consequently, she expressed cynicism about it. In contrast, Anthony Banner and Anne Cowie were both located in traditions not known for their constraining orthodoxy. All three held their locations with ambivalence. Being known as a such-and-such Buddhist was less important than constructing an individual practice that was meaningful for themselves, which may not have complied with the inherited wisdom of the tradition. In other words, it was natural that those who wished to construct their own identity found their way to the traditions with less constraining orthodoxy, or, as Melody Frew had done, they simply reject that which they had formally learned, and plunder the tradition for whatever is “useful” in their self constructed practice.

Belief and practice: further possibilities of self-constructed identities

The three examples above have demonstrated that formal belief may simply be discarded or deemed inconsequential in the formation of identity. This self-construction of identity apart from formal constraints is nothing new. Robert Bellah et al. (1996) call on a 1978 Gallup poll which found 80% of Americans agreed that “an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any churches or synagogues” (1996, 228). I would suggest that this ambivalence towards religious authority has become a cultural trait of the West, and it is this context which allowed Buddhism to gain access in the West originally.

However, even though identity may well be self-constructed, it is still Buddhist identity in some sense, even if mixed with other modalities. This self-construction of a

spirituality informed by Buddhist practice (but not exclusively Buddhist) is not uncommon and may well be regarded as one of the defining characteristics of Western Buddhism. Stephen Batchelor (1997) for example has deconstructed Buddhism to an essentialism which he calls “Buddhism without beliefs”. He does this in part by changing the language.⁵⁵ He appeals to the Buddha’s offering of a “central path” (instead of “the middle way”) as a sort of benchmark of non-religion. Batchelor has had wide experience in a number of Buddhist traditions in Asia. These experiences led him to the conclusion that largely, Asians had compromised Buddhism beyond recognition, and all that was really needed was to strip Buddhism of its doctrinal clutter.

Batchelor believes that even though the Buddha gave a “succinct account” of his awakening, “even Buddhists” have come to see it as something quite different. “Awakening has become a mystical experience, a moment of transcendent revelation of the Truth. Religious interpretations invariably reduce complexity to uniformity while elevating matter-of-factness to holiness”. In reaction to this, Batchelor promotes an agnosticism based on the observation that “each truth⁵⁶ requires being acted upon in its own particular way”, and he argues this has been “relegated to the margins of specialist doctrinal knowledge” (1997, 4). Because of this, he declares disparagingly that “a Buddhist is someone who *believes*” (his emphasis) (1997, 5). In other words, Buddhism has become a religion – a systematic and institutionalised locale of belief – and this was never the intention of the Buddha. Batchelor does not so much add any Western notions to his brand of Buddhism, as remove legend and lore, claiming that the Buddha simply

⁵⁵ Batchelor’s change of standard language from “middle way” to “central path” and, in the overall argument of his book *Buddhism without Beliefs* (1997) use of “anguish” for the more widely accepted “suffering” in the narratives of Buddhism, is symptomatic of his desire to “write on Buddhism in ordinary English” which “avoids ... jargon” (1997, xi).

⁵⁶ In this quotation, Batchelor is referring to each of the Four Noble Truths.

taught awakening, and that he was, in essence, no more than a practical man who had devised a set of ethical principles (Kohn 2003, 84).

Because of this, Batchelor argues that we should prioritise “dharma practice”. This is in fact what many of the interviewees were doing. In other words, “dharma practice” is something to be acted out, rather than propositions to believe. Thus the Four Noble Truths are best understood as “four enobling truths”. They lead to awakening, which is attainable now, rather than in the distant future: awakening is not a thing or a state of being, but a process (1997, 10).

Thus in reducing Buddhism to “dharma practice” Batchelor claims to have found its essence, that awakening is based on action, and that action is of the “four enobling truths”. Batchelor has no place for formal Buddhist associations, extravagant ritual, politicized Buddhism or dogma. He bemoans the fact – at least his interpretation of it – that “only as Buddhism became more and more of a religion were grandiose claims imputed to [the Buddha’s] awakening” (1997, 5). Batchelor believes this has been the problem of Buddhism in its Asian context. Now in the West, Buddhism can be stripped of its dogma: it can become “Buddhism without beliefs”. Batchelor has some influence amongst Buddhists in New Zealand: I attended a presentation of his in Wellington with around 120 people in 2006, sponsored by Wellington’s Insight Meditation group.

At first reading Batchelor appears to have found a succinct way of conceptualising what may be occurring within Western Buddhism. However, his interpretation is simplistic. One critic, Richard Hayes (2000), notes that Batchelor’s “Buddhism without beliefs” unjustifiably limits the Buddha’s awakening to “a

liberation from the limitations of dogmatic thinking and uncritically received cultural prejudices” (2000, 39). By constructing the Four Noble Truths as a worldview, the Buddha still maintained a belief framework. Even in renaming these as “four ennobling truths” Batchelor still implies a belief framework. Additionally, contrary to what Batchelor proposes, some of the interviewees offered micro-narratives of belief. For example, Anthony Banner, even though resisting the label “Buddhist”, volunteered a number of Buddhist dogmas he had embraced, including mindfulness, the role of suffering, inter-connectedness, the waywardness of the mind, the universality of *bodhicitta*, skilful means, and the law of *karma*. In a similar fashion, Patricia Rutland demonstrated that she interprets her world in Tibetan Buddhist belief categories:

Kemp: Will you be reincarnated?

Rutland: Oh yes. It makes so much sense. But it will take aeons to reach full enlightenment. The teachings of the lamas say that the human life span decreases from 50,000 years eventually down to ten years. We are currently about 100 years, and decreasing due to bad *karma* – the world is full of hate and wars and cruelty and killing animals, and our collective bad *karma* is decreasing our life spans over the generations. When it reaches ten years, then a new Buddha will appear, and then he will show us the way to enlightenment again, and people will start to be better and more loving and the lifespan will increase again back to 50,000. This is a full aeon. And there are three.

Kemp: What is it that will change humans from bad to good?

Rutland: Oh humans really are already good. We have goodness inside all of us. This is what will be used to increase *karma* again.

Likewise, Barry Farland had internalised belief as told to him by his lama, and relayed to me:

Enlightenment is only the point of developing the mind until it has only 100% good qualities. So there is no negativity in the mind. The mind is only experiencing happiness, compassion, bliss and all in a totally unconditional manner. And there is no residue even of negativity in the mind. That’s enlightenment.

Within these quotes, even though belief is plainly evident, action is still implied. There is a belief in the efficacy of action, that is, the inevitability of outcomes due to invested action, this most notable when digging deep into the philosophy of *karma*, which is all about the efficacy of action. Thus the dominant belief in interviews was the belief in action: the acts of meditation would produce calm, and the acts of virtuosity (or non-virtuosity) would produce good (or bad) karmic outcomes. Thus formal beliefs such as *karma* and rebirth act as interpretive lenses to understand experiences which arose due to actions. This then is the point: belief, when articulated, often followed practice, and in doing so was then appropriated as a frame of reference to interpret the experiences gained in practice particularly, or actions observed in life in general. Batchelor does not concede this, and disappointingly seems constrained by promoting a singularity.

This inter-relationship between belief and practice is played out in a micro-narrative of Jane Crawley. Betraying an arguably distorted Christian worldview, she volunteered that she could not understand that an “all powerful God would allow bad things to happen”. In contrast, “*karma* makes so much sense. It’s so easy to understand.” When I asked her what she meant by “*karma*”, she reflected on the alleged causes of an airline crash of a chartered aircraft flying into Christchurch airport on June 6th 2003.

Cause and effect. The effects we live with are caused by what you did in a past life. This makes so much sense. It’s all about me only. For example the plane crash in Christchurch [where eight died and two lived], the two who survived did so because it wasn’t to be caused by their *karma*. Why those two? Because the others were merely affected by the *karma* from previous lives.

In effect she interpreted the specificity of an event in Buddhist language derived from a Buddhist worldview. The logic was implied: that the accident had happened was evidence that *karma* worked. Hence, if one continued to act by doing Buddhist things to

gain karmic merit, then accidents like this crash would not happen. Belief interpreted an event: the belief then motivated action to prevent other bad outcomes, the possibility of which was itself a belief. Philip Jolliffe says something similar.

Firstly I'd declare that I'm a bad Buddhist. I could be a lot more diligent. And in a sense, that's a missed opportunity. In another sense the experiential nature of *karma* the way it is – the cause and effect – we do things and persist in certain behaviour until the consequence is overwhelming and we suddenly 'get it'.

In a similar fashion, Jeffrey Paine (2005) argues that Buddhism is different from “other religions” which put faith first, enabling the believer to “do and achieve inordinately” (2005, 22). Rather, he claims, with Buddhism it is the other way around. One achieves in practice, and belief follows. “Faith paves the way to nowhere” for Buddhists, Paine argues. The creed “I believe” is no longer part of their “vocabulary of experience”. Consequently, Paine suggests, “we need to see the results of Buddhism in human lives first, before we can really know what Buddhism is” (2005, 22). To acknowledge that belief and practice had a similar frequency in the interviews reveals nothing about the priority or relationship of these (see Appendix 7), unless one looks closely at how the factors interacted. Though comparable in frequency, practice was clearly prioritised over belief. Comments about belief often interpreted the practice.

That belief is still articulated amongst the interviewees leads me to conclude that Batchelor's “Buddhism without beliefs” is not a realistic model for the West. To strip Western Buddhism of belief is to take away the interpretive framework of the experiences practitioners have, especially because they also claim to have moved from “not-Buddhist” to becoming “Buddhist”. Their “conversion” to Buddhism, that is, their “taking up the practice”, did not demand believing a set of dogma: one could then continue to “practise Buddhism” without feeling one had to adopt any doctrinal code.

Nevertheless, any embrace of belief was as an interpretive framework to make sense of that which they were experiencing because of their ongoing practice.

Venerable Bodhi (1998) also critiques Batchelor. The Four Noble Truths are not just “challenges to act” – which Batchelor was arguing for – but injunctions to act upon truth. To act on a truth, one has to believe the truth (1998, 17). Moreover, Bodhi reminds Batchelor that any tasks that the Four Truths may impose only acquire their meaning from a specific context which is the “quest for liberation from the vicious cycle of rebirths”. If one ignores the hermeneutic principle that the original context influences the meaning of a text, then one can certainly depart from the more traditional understanding of *dukha* as the suffering of repeated becoming due to *samsara*, the round of rebirths. Batchelor does indeed do this. His hermeneutic separates text from its context allowing him to place text within the social context of the 21st century, thus interpreting the First Truth (for example) as “existential anguish” rather than “suffering”.

Batchelor’s hermeneutical innovation cannot be applied to the stories of the interviewees. While many interviewees felt at ease about constructing their own identities, nobody articulated a self-description of purely individualistic understanding divorce from sangha, ritual, ethics or history. Nobody viewed these merely as “consolatory elements” (Batchelor 1997, 18). Quite the contrary. Most, if not all, expressed their affiliations with Buddhist practice and belief as “enfolded in a distinctive matrix”, to use Bodhi’s words (1998, 17). Bodhi insists on retaining the Going for Refuge in the Three Jewels as the “traditional foundation for Buddhist practice”, because it is the significant ritual which sets aside “confirmed Buddhists”

(1998, 18). Batchelor makes no mention at all of any entrance rituals, nor of the necessity of embracing the Five Precepts as a normalised ethical framework.

Batchelor argues that Buddhism has been successful precisely because it has adapted due to the new cultural conditions in which it has found itself. He wrote *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* outlining the history of that success (1994). This new “Buddhism without beliefs” is Buddhism’s newest metamorphosis due to new “imagination” being exercised, he believes. This imagination is located in the “autonomous individual’s freedom to realize his or her capacity for personal and social fulfilment” (1997, 110), thus claiming that his hermeneutic clearly deposits the text (the Four Truths) into its new context (the 21st century West), disengaged from its original Asian roots.

Bodhi cautions however, that Batchelor has too simplistic a view of history, and, even though Asia may well have overlayed various religiosities onto some notion of an essentialist teaching of the Buddha, “Buddhist orthodoxy and contemplative realization are not necessarily incompatible” (1998, 19). Bodhi concludes that Batchelor’s agnostic dharma practice is a “very weak antidote indeed” for the “vast cloud of moral and spiritual confusion” of humankind. Bodhi holds to a Theravadan orthodoxy, insisting that even in the Western expressions of Buddhism “any practices undertaken outside the context of Going for Refuge are still on the hither side of the Dhamma, not yet within its fold” (1998, 20).

Bodhi in effect ensures that Buddhist practice is not merely meditation. I will explore this further in chapter six, by examining “practice” as the “practice of ethics” vis-à-vis notions of an ideal society, which in effect will endorse Bodhi’s contention

that there need be something more than mere meditation to deal to the moral and spiritual confusion of today.

Before discussing that, however, it is noteworthy to summarize that one can clearly understand oneself as “Buddhist”, without having undertaken any rites of admission or affiliation. The ambiguities around census data also suggested this. Living as a practitioner-Buddhist, it seems, does not demand exclusive belief in a set dogma: to live as a re-stabilized self, one does not necessarily have to adopt Buddhist belief.

Multiple belonging

The way then is opened for multiplicities. Practitioners celebrate this by feeling free to move between traditions consecutively or concurrently or even to make for themselves multiple identities, or what Catherine Cornille (2002) calls “multiple belongings”. Multiple believers are people who appropriate referents of identity from more than one religious framework. “JuBus” – dual Jewish and Buddhist – for example have already attracted sociological reflection (Kamenetz 1994, Loundon 2001, 133, Obadia 2002, Kohn 2003, 84, 100ff). I know of one student at Victoria University of Wellington who willingly took this label of “JuBu”. Two interviewees identified themselves as explicitly belonging in two traditions at the same time and were comfortable in doing so: Jan Anderton clearly placed herself in both Reiki – a New Religious Movement in the West (Partridge 2004a, 231-233) – and Insight Meditation (informed by Theravadan Buddhism).⁵⁷ In a similar vein Mary Kingsbury found no

⁵⁷ I am aware that Reiki practitioners may well not see Reiki as a religion, but more of a healing practice. Jan Anderton viewed it this way as well, understanding it as a “modality” of healing, implying that anyone of any faith could learn to practise it (see Partridge 2004, 233), without compromising their religious beliefs. Nevertheless, she drew a clear distinction between Reiki and Insight Meditation, leading me to believe she understood them as two distinct entities. Even so, she could practise both comfortably – she could “mix” them - because she perceived them both as healing modalities the commonality of which was energy flow, and she was quite put out by an initial Buddhist group with whom she had had contact which had insisted Reiki and Buddhism were irreconcilable.

contradictions in being an active member of both the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) of Buddhism and the Theosophical society while also retaining vestiges of her childhood Anglicanism, all in the context of an extensive and explicit Maori family context.

This multiplicity of belonging should not be surprising. Cornille (2002) points out that even though “multiple religious belonging is generally predicated on the belief in the unity of all religious experiences”, that “the more encompassing a religion’s claim to efficacy and truth, the more problematic the possibility of multiple religious belonging” (2002, 5,2). In the New Zealand context, where both Christian monotheism and secular materialism dominate – both claimants to exclusive truth – I was not surprised to find only a small number of “dual believers” in this study. This does not rule out however, the possibility that they occur elsewhere in the population or that New Zealand is not open to them. If New Zealand is indeed becoming more pluralistic, and religious expression is being pried away from institutional dogmatism to greater subjectivity, then I would expect to see more expressions of “multiple belonging” in the future, especially if the perceived commonality is an action like meditation.

Until then, we are left with the phenomenon of a spirituality which allows for the plundering of traditions in the construction of self identity. This building of identity outside of orthodoxy – perhaps a DIY⁵⁸ spirituality – is possible when considering that ritual/practice and involvement were dominant as indicators of New Zealanders’ self understanding vis-à-vis Buddhism. If practice precedes belief, and involvement is undertaken without the necessary guidance of dogma, as my interviews indicate, then

⁵⁸ DIY is shorthand for “Do-it-yourself”. In its original context, it has to do with home handymen who might fix up the house, or tinker with the car in the weekends, rather than hiring a tradesman. DIY has taken on the role of a metaphor in New Zealand English, that of self-ability and confidence, even independence, especially amongst males.

Buddhist practice can be readily conceptualised as a tool and little else. The practitioner then is a DIY spiritual handyman.

With this in mind, Philip Johnson (2004) explicitly suggests the possibilities of a “DIY Buddhism”. Johnson defines a more generalised DIY spirituality as “alternate or innovative spiritual approaches in the West that operate outside the boundaries of organized, conventional religion [where] spiritual seekers acquire spiritual knowledge from a range of sources that draw from the major religions and esoteric traditions” (2004, 234). Those constructing a DIY spirituality do so as seekers of spiritual knowledge for the purposes of personal growth. They do not see the need for a creed or institutional framework or authority. With respect to “DIY Buddhism”, Johnson suggests that practitioners “commodify for themselves elements from the disparate Buddhist traditions and sects” (2004, 235). In other words, in a similar fashion to a broader DIY spirituality, DIY Buddhists are constructing for and by themselves an eclectic personal spiritual practice informed by any number of Buddhist traditions and lineages, as well as, perhaps, by extra-Buddhist sources.

I have suggested that the solo spirituality of the three examples earlier in this chapter demonstrate a Buddhist practice outside of orthodoxy. A casual wander around any New Age festival, as I did in 2002 at the Melbourne Mind Body Spirit festival, suggests a strong DIY impulse is being expressed more generally, where people plunder Buddhism along with other traditions to build their own unique DIY spiritualities. Johnson draws on Peter Oldmeadow (2001) and Terry Muck (2000), appropriating their insights to suggest DIY Buddhism is feasible: Oldmeadow explores the globalisation of Tibetan Buddhism and notes how Western Buddhism and Asian Buddhism are now quite different. Muck argues for three Buddhisms, that of Global Buddhism,

Enlightenment Buddhism and People's Buddhism. The People's Buddhism is characteristic of the Buddhism in the United States which "has taken on a highly privatized form that centres on various forms of Buddhist meditation" (Muck 2000, 41). It is this latter Buddhism that perhaps has sparked the imagination of Johnson.

I did not observe a DIY Buddhism as Johnson describes it as a normative trend in my interviews, although we would be wise to remain open to the possibilities. What mitigates against this, I would suggest, is that even though several were obviously constructing their own identities, they were nevertheless, on the whole, still associated with definable sanghas and/or dharma centres. This gave them structure, purpose and a sense of orthodoxy: to identify as a Buddhist was to be associated with a dharma centre and/or a lineage, if only in a sporadic fashion.

Neither did I observe a commodification of Buddhism in any significant way. Was Buddhism or Buddhist practice being bought and sold? Was the dominant metaphor the marketplace? Jeremy Carrette and Richard King (2005) suggest this is now a real possibility in the West across many religions. In several interviews, I probed to see what amounts of money practitioners might spend on their Buddhist practice, and whether there was a consumerist mentality, but I did not encounter any extraordinary commodification in a financial sense. In a technicist sense, commodification may well be an apt term, where people are appropriating tools to achieve certain outcomes, and discarding them if they perceive they have served their purpose. Certainly there was some mixing of modalities of self-empowerment as I have already described, but there is not a surge of self-identification in the category of dual-belonging that would suggest it to be a significant phenomenon. That is not to say that it is not a possibility, for one interviewee was candid enough to admit that she had formally taken refuge in five

different Buddhist lineages. However, often quite the opposite was also occurring: several in MRO Zen explicitly ruled out the possibilities they would ever mix in Tibetan practices; others in Tibetan traditions found the perceived austerities of Zen ruled out the possibilities they would ever concurrently embrace Zen practices.

Can we conclude that practitioner-Buddhism in New Zealand is merely reduced or deconstructed to a radical individualism, devoid of community? Is “refuge in the sangha” such a foreign notion that Buddhism in New Zealand risks sliding into fragmented individualism? Robert Bellah et al. (1996) talk of two modes of individualism: “utilitarian individualism” and “expressive individualism” (1996, 7). The former is about single minded devotion to personal success, where everything is sacrificed in the process of attaining some goal. The latter is a personal valuing of an aesthetic: music, books, relationships and the immediate enjoyment of life. In practitioner-Buddhism, I suggest these are both happening together. There is a clear utilitarian individualism, where practitioners have focused personal spiritual goals, particularly in meditation. There is also an expressive individualism where many of the artistic aspects of Buddhism are deeply appreciated across all traditions and lineages.

In the context of their analysis of American society, Bellah et al. (1996) suggest that perhaps ironically, these two forms of individualism are the glue that holds (American) society together. I would posit that the wider Buddhist movement in New Zealand could also be understood in a similar light. “Utilitarian individualism” allows one the dream of personal success. In Buddhism this is spiritual success, rather than material. Practitioners want to see that their spiritual practice works and gives them meaning against the perceived aridity of modernity or perceived inconsistencies of Christianity. Not only do they want to practise meditation, but they want to practise it

well, and they perceive they do this best with others, that is, in sangha/community. On the other hand, “expressive individualism” is the portrayal of personal feeling. If we portray and experience feelings that we have in common it draws us together. We feel like we really know people, if they have emotions similar to us. These emotions can be cultivated through spiritual practice, but also through the aesthetic aspects of wider Buddhist art and culture. Hence Buddhist spiritual practice, and the feelings about practice are more important than belief. According to Bellah et al. people do not necessarily wish to be associated with other people who can think, because that potentially forces us apart (1996, 21). On the contrary, people prefer to associate with people who feel similar things to them. Hence in the New Zealand context, the individualistic impulse in Buddhist practice not only fits well with New Zealand individualism, but the feeling of success in individual meditational experiences paradoxically brings a sangha together. Additionally, the aesthetics and cultural otherness of Buddhist iconography, ritual and art, may well create communities of affective cohesiveness where people simply celebrate all the good they have discovered in Buddhism as a whole. Individual practitioners’ narratives are thereby woven together to form sangha/community narratives.

A Challenge to belief and practice: Soka Gakkai in New Zealand

Soka Gakkai offers both endorsement and exception to the notion that Buddhist identity may well be located in the practitioner’s narrative. Unlike many of the so-called “convert” Buddhist traditions, Soka Gakkai International (SGI-NZ) defines a clear membership. To be a practitioner in Soka Gakkai is to be a “member”. In my contact with Soka Gakkai, I informally interviewed one Chinese-Malaysian member who was a third year university student, as well as formally interviewing a New Zealander of Italian descent (Clare Hardy), who had immigrated from Britain over twenty years ago.

Between these interviews I was a participant-observer at a “New Chanters’ Meeting” on the evening of July 11th 2006 in downtown Wellington. During the visit, I witnessed the telling of several peoples’ “Experiences”. An “Experience” was a short – around ten minutes – telling of some conflict, how chanting the *daimoku* (“*nam myoho renge kyo*”) aided the member in resolving that conflict, and how well the member consequently lived in light of that resolution.

During the meeting I became aware that the telling of Experiences was following a standard structure: one I suspected was verbatim from SGI-NZ’s magazine *Focus*. In effect there was a genre of testimony-telling at work. This is confirmed in Daniel Métraux’s study (1997) of SGI-Canada members in Quebec. Métraux notes that the Experiences are “inspirational in nature – they are meant to show how people of true faith in the Buddhism of Nichiren can change adversity into victory and can overcome any obstacle”. He notes that in his close reading of other Soka Gakkai Experiences “over three decades” in Japan, the United States and elsewhere, that they “closely resemble” each other (1997, 64).

This observation challenges several notions that I have put forward so far. By conforming to a pre-determined genre, the SGI-NZ members were likely masking the actual events of their conversion – “becoming a member” – with the telling of it. Hence my accessibility to the content of their personal auto-narratives was compromised. James Beckford (1978) discusses this phenomenon in his study of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ conversion accounts which he concludes are “constructed according to a set of guidelines which reflect the Watchtower movement’s changing organizational rationale” (1978, 249). In a similar fashion, the Experiences that I witnessed were “skilful accomplishments of actors” who could “make decisions about what to include

and what to omit” (1978, 260) because the framework of the genre was pre-set. This may have been done intentionally (set by SGI-NZ) or unintentionally (part of the cultural air that SGI-NZ members breathed). Because of the existence of a pre-determined structured genre, new members could be delivering their Experiences to other members (and potential recruits) within a very short time of becoming a member themselves. Hence there would have been an affective welcome and acceptance which new members immediately experienced.

Meaning for the member may therefore be imposed upon them, rather than formulated by themselves. The logic of congruence in their Experiences, whether spoken or published in *Focus*, implicitly links the features of the Experience (often, but not necessarily a conversion narrative) to the group’s ideological rationale (Beckford 1978, 260). Thus meaning for a member may well have been derived from an ethic of conformity. Perhaps they might say something like “I am now a Buddhist practitioner because I can tell my Experience publicly”. However, for Clare Hardy, who was not constrained by the expectations of the meeting (I interviewed her in her home), her meaning was largely derived from her chanting. In effect she was saying “I am Buddhist because I chant the *daimoku*, and I believe this chanting is efficacious because I experience my Determinations⁵⁹ to come true”.

Soka Gakkai is doing something that is both similar and different to other traditions. It is capitalizing on members’ telling of their Experiences, and so, as I am arguing, people construct their identity in the telling of these narratives. On the other

⁵⁹ In a similar way to “Experiences”, SGI-NZ are encouraged to make “Determinations”. These are desired outcomes that they need or want, and they believe that they can “chant towards them happening”, that is, while chanting the *daimoku* in front of the *Gohonzon*, they think intently about the Determination they have made, and then it will come true. These Determinations can range from anything like getting a new job to success in a relationship, to overcoming some perceived psychological deficiency. The Experiences were more often than not about how Determinations came true.

hand, it has institutionalised this telling, unlike the traditions from which other interviewees came. I suggest – and more research needs to be done on this – that there is considerable risk for Soka Gakkai in the institutionalization of the genre of Experience, if it wants to influence a broad spectrum of New Zealand society. I suggest this because so far, I have demonstrated that practitioners are their own actors: they wish to remain in control of their own stories, and in control of the context in which those stories are told. SGI-NZ may well remain locked into an institutionally defined paradigm, whereas other Buddhists in New Zealand may become more indigenized because as their own actor, practitioners are allowed to tell their own stories according to their own constructs.

No other Buddhist tradition in which I did participant observation had a set genre for personal narrative telling. Nevertheless, SGI-NZ is consistent with other Buddhist traditions in that action precedes belief, where personal testimony of the efficacy of chanting – often delivered to a receptive audience via the genre of Experience telling – gives rise to the belief that chanting will continue to be efficacious for the fulfilment of Determinations, and that this is the way the universe works. It is in these narratives themselves, whether formalized as SGI-NZ does, or related to me as a researcher, that practitioners identify who they are, and moreover, who they continue to become as Buddhists.

Summary and Conclusions

For many, the interview was the first time they had attempted to tell their life story to anyone, and they found themselves interpreting it as they told it. Thus their self-reflection became part of their auto-narrative. Three short quotes illustrate this (my italics):

Well before I took refuge, I had already thought about wanting to become a nun. I'd already seen other nuns ... *I think [in hindsight] that [they] probably had a large impact on me* (Jennifer Yule).

... So it was really a lot of searching for years, and *I guess [looking back] I switched to academic stuff to try and answer my questions* (Melody Frew).

I'm a little bit involved with [two Buddhist groups]. *But I think that's [because] I'm looking for that connection* (Mary Kingsbury).

This self-reflection not only added to the depth of the story told and hence to a richer data set, but, I posit, was also the locale where Buddhism itself was conceptualised by the interviewees. In their telling of their own stories, several realised they were Buddhist. Thus for some, the self-telling created their identity, and for others it confirmed their identity. The story-telling was a vehicle of self discovery. By talking about selfhood, practice/ritual, involvement and belief, they were reconceptualising their self within a new worldview.

I am not suggesting that story-telling is the only vehicle of discovery of self identity. Piety, ethics, ritual, study and other modes of religious expression no doubt also contribute to one's Buddhist identity. Sally McAra's study of Sudarshanaloka emphasised the role of material culture in this regard (McAra 2007). What I am proposing, informed by Leone's semiotic model of conversion and identity, is not only that "taking up of the practice" deals with vertigo, but the telling of the story of the ongoing effects of that practice – the movement towards the end of the story – may well be a vehicle for the re-stabilization of the self.

Using worldview as an interpretive lens, I propose that their “conversion” to Buddhism is primarily, to use Leone’s words, a “conversion of meanings” where the interviewees now reinterpret their experience of the world around them as actors who have appropriated the practice of Buddhism. They have then “re-arranged their soul” according to new elements expressed as worldview, where subsequent Buddhist belief has interpreted the very experiences of their practice. They are now free to express this as a “new language” (Leone 2004, 173). This new place of a “stable identity” is indeed paradoxical, for I will shortly argue that these practitioners conceive their identity in the metaphor of “home”. This “home” signifies a new place of security for the “stable identity” of the self, and it is from this place of security that further risk becomes possible. This risk is exemplified by interpreting experiences achieved by the practice of Buddhism in terms of beliefs quite new and foreign to the dominant Judeo-Christian worldview in New Zealand.

We are now in a position to develop this metaphor of home further, as a place of both refuge and risk. I intend on doing this by exploring practitioner-Buddhist identity with respect to New Zealand socio-cultural context particularly. In the next chapter I will spend considerable energy arguing for a position on Arcadia. Arcadia is one of the culturally iconic myths that have shaped New Zealand identity, particularly the idea of “home” as somewhere rural, safe, domesticated and pure. By the end of the thesis, I will have argued that Arcadia as “home” is the socio-cultural page on which the narrative of practitioner-Buddhism in New Zealand can be written. I do this by discussing the concept of Arcadia as a utopian impulse in New Zealand, and comparing and juxtaposing this with the Buddhist notion of a Pure Land. It is in these further metaphors that the identity of the self of the New Zealand Buddhist practitioner is conceptualised.

Chapter 5: New Zealand as Arcadia: a “Good Place to Practise Buddhism”

“We are hungry for the words that shall show us these islands and ourselves;
that shall give us a home in thought”

A contributor to *Phoenix*

Introduction

I have demonstrated that my interviewees were attracted to Buddhism because of the perceived rewards it could provide through practice, and that practice was in the main meditation. Having converted to – or rather “taken up the practice” of – Buddhism (chapter three), interviewees were then willing to be identified as practitioner-Buddhists (chapter four). It was in this notion that they continued to find meaning and identity.

In this chapter I wish to build on this. Interviewees often spoke of New Zealand being a “good place to practise Buddhism”. I explore in this chapter what this might mean by appropriating notions of an ideal society, particularly Arcadia. I will introduce an argument to establish that the notion of Arcadia is a significant cultural myth in New Zealand. I do this in four sub-sections. Firstly, I offer a brief general history of the Arcadian myth from its Greek sources. Secondly I will demonstrate how Arcadia was appropriated in the New Zealand colonial agenda, and thus embedded into the New Zealand worldview. Thirdly I argue that Arcadia is still articulated today, as demonstrated in the arts (particularly New Zealand poetry and recent film). Fourthly, I will argue that the current environmental impulse also demonstrates that Arcadian ideals are still part of a New Zealand worldview.

The idea of Arcadia is contested, and because it is so, I spend considerable energy in arguing that it offers to Buddhism a socio-cultural narrative of plausible fit in

New Zealand. I use Arcadia as a heuristic device to demonstrate that the myth itself is socio-cultural soil into which Buddhism can be planted. In the latter part of the chapter, I will explicitly bring Arcadia and Buddhism together, and will do this in the metaphor of “home”. I will do this because interviewees used a variety of domestic language – particularly notions of “home” – demonstrating a degree of sentimentality about the possibilities of New Zealand as a “good place”, and their identity in it. Practitioners, I will argue, are using a new language, and they are adopting a new worldview. In doing this they are re-stabilizing themselves in a place – both geographical and sociological – which they perceive is safe and pure. This is encapsulated particularly in the imaginings of one practitioner, that New Zealand as an Arcadian ideal place can also be conceptualised as a Buddhist Pure Land. This particular imagining will be taken up in the subsequent and final chapter as practitioners find a *turangawaewae*, that is, a place to stand.

New Zealand as a “good place to practise Buddhism”

During the interviews, I became aware of an implicit notion, that “New Zealand is a good place to practise Buddhism”. This arose due to a few interviewees commenting that visiting Tibetan lamas had said something like “New Zealand is a particularly good place to practise Buddhism”. Graeme Rice remembers seeing this notion written in a book where “the author asks a Tibetan Rinpoche where he thought the best place in the world to practise dharma [might be] and without hesitation Rinpoche said ‘in New Zealand, especially around the Nelson area’”. This comment is indeed noted in Gabriel Lafitte and Alison Ribush’s *Happiness in a Material World: The Dalai Lama in Australia and New Zealand* (2002, 220), where the lama is identified as Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche who visited New Zealand in 2001. Interviewees Jennifer Yule and Elizabeth Bremner had also noted this quote in their reading. One of

the directors of the Chandrakirti Centre added to this, saying that Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche said that “this is the best place in the world to build a *gompa*”, referring perhaps to the actual site at the Chandrakirti Centre where a *gompa* – the meeting hall – now stands. Hyperbole aside, Graeme Rice nevertheless believes that Nelson particularly may well be a “good place to practise Buddhism”:

If you walk into any café here and you look at the pin boards, you see so many flyers for meditation, yoga – we were looking at one today and there’s a guy who does Zen *shiatsu*, and who was a Buddhist monk for eighteen years and offering meditation. There’s Wangapeka, Chandrakirti, the Nelson Buddhist Centre: it just seems a fertile area for Buddhism, and also spirituality. Yoga centres, hippies everywhere. There’s people really questioning these things. Lots of creativity. The Dalai Lama comes here [to Nelson]. Other Rinpoches come here. It just seems to attract this sort of thing.

It is not clear why Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche perceived New Zealand to be a good place to practise Buddhism. He may have been enamoured by the climate of Nelson province, or may have perceived some spiritual essence, or been opportunistic in endorsing the long term plans for the Chandrakirti Centre. Whatever he meant, Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche and Graeme Rice are not alone in their opinions. Chan Ng, an ethnic Chinese who immigrated to New Zealand in 1999, also volunteered that “New Zealand is a good place to practise Buddhism”. Similarly, Elizabeth Bremner believes “absolutely” that New Zealand is a good place to practise Buddhism. Likewise Rachel Pike believes that “New Zealand offers [much] to people who want to become Buddhists”. Patricia Rutland reported that the Dalai Lama had said something similar to her as well when he visited Nelson in 2002.

To determine whether these comments were not mere wishful thinking, but grounded in some broader perceptions and what these might be, I sent out an email on September 26th, 2007, to all interviewees with whom I had had contact. This was not

intended to be a statistically robust questionnaire, but rather a means to inform a growing hunch. The question was simply:

“New Zealand is a good place to practise Buddhism”

1. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
2. Why? Why not?

Eighteen people responded. Sixteen of these were people I had previously interviewed, and two responded due to the email having been forwarded to them by an interviewee. Two who responded were academics and “sympathizers” in Tweed’s definition (1999). In addition, one of the interviewees took it upon herself to circulate the question to members of her weekly meditation group. They replied by post, adding another nine responses, bringing the total to twenty nine. Of the twenty nine, nineteen responded with an unequivocal “yes”, and ten responded with a qualified “yes”. None replied with a straight “no”. The responses revealed that the question had been understood in two ways: chiefly a geographical question on the one hand, and a sociological question on the other.

Eleven people responded particularly about New Zealand’s landscapes as places for good Buddhist practice. By “practise Buddhism” they implied “practise meditation”; in other words New Zealand was a good place to meditate as a Buddhist. In a general sense, New Zealand is “beautiful” and had a “clean environment, and a good climate”, and “we still have the wilderness”. Most people had a “positive attitude toward the environment”. In addition, “the relative ease of access to quiet forest, beach and mountain reserves along with the expansiveness of the night sky with its frequent clarity to see moon and stars, add to the ability to experience the Buddhist notions of spaciousness, emptiness and luminosity”. Another noted that “New Zealand

geologically is young and vibrant; its nature is spiritual and ancient”. One response noted that “the great [Buddhist] meditators of the past gave detailed descriptions for ideal meditation locations, and New Zealand fits the bill. The place should be very quiet, clean, with sufficient resources to stay alive i.e. food/warmth, safe from wild animals and bandits. Plus New Zealand is beautiful! This is important as one should meditate in a pleasing environment”. Another emphasised that “one is meant to dwell in isolated places and meditate, [and so move] pointedly on the path; this is a major instruction from those who have attained the path, so New Zealand seems ideal for this”.

Eighteen people responded with annotations about why New Zealand was a good place to practise Buddhism for sociological reasons. One respondent said “New Zealand is one of the most geographically isolated countries in the world, far away from war, pollution and so on but with the benefits of being a first world country. A kind of middle way, it is not too nice and distracting, like Bali, but not too horrible and distracting like Iraq!” In a general sense, New Zealand had “freedom of religious expression”, and “we are more accepting as a nation of other people’s beliefs”. One person thought “that New Zealanders are not especially prejudiced, so there does not appear to be any stigma attached to being a Buddhist”. Politically, there were “no great obstacles to freedom of Buddhist religious practice”, nor was there “state persecution or inter-religious tension”. In sum, “we live at a time, and in a country of religious tolerance. New Zealand is much more open and religiously freer than even twenty years ago. We have the freedom to practise the dharma”. This is partly due to the fact that we have mechanisms for the expression of minorities, particularly MMP⁶⁰ as it “opens up the possibility for other perspectives to be taken seriously”. Because New Zealand had a

⁶⁰ MMP is the Mixed-Member Proportional form of parliament in New Zealand. Prior to 1993 the New Zealand parliament had an FPP structure: First Past the Post, referring to the number of votes a candidate received in his/her electorate.

“relatively high degree of secularism” and there was a “growing number of people who don’t have an institutional religion or who are not practising believers”, there was a social and political context for toleration. We were essentially a “liberal society, because of a strong secular attitude”.

Respondents also believed New Zealand is a good place to practise Buddhism because we have good social structures, like care for the elderly and free education and health care. Thus people can live well and “get ready to die” well. This means there “is a chance to realise the true nature of the mind and attain *nirvana*, or at least a new human body”. We are also a country “at peace and without significant corruption, so our day to day lives are not fearful because of warfare or inappropriate government behaviour”. Neither are we overcrowded: there are “not too many people, and [few] diseases”. New Zealand is “safe” and has a “high standard of living so we are able to discover the dharma through media or personal contacts. And, for most folks interested in Buddhism, there is the financial ability to explore that interest”. Because “we are a rich country” and “basic needs are met, we have the free time to practise the dharma”. Overall, we are a “peaceful non-sectarian society” where there is a “high degree of religious freedom”.

The respondents were not so naïve as to suggest that New Zealand did not present challenges to the practice of Buddhism as well. These challenges were articulated variously: opposition to building consents by neighbours of Buddhist centres, the killing of animals (related to the livestock agricultural sector and fisheries), and periodic misunderstandings and ridicule, are three examples. These challenges were opportunities to practise Buddhist ethics, and consequently were “beneficial”. Nevertheless, even those with qualified responses still agreed that New Zealand is a

good place to practise Buddhism for both geographical and sociological reasons.

Granted, these are perceptions of ourselves, not objective or quantified standards of measurement. If one took objective economic, cultural or social data and compared it to UN statistics or the GDP of other western nations or some such, then our perception of ourselves may be more subdued. Nevertheless, this is the whole point. It is the perceptions of ourselves that I wish to continue to explore and I will do this by drawing on the five fold typology of the ideal society proposed by James Davis (1981).

James Davis (1981) and the ideal society

I propose that New Zealand as a “good place to practise Buddhism” can be conceptualized in the notion of an ideal society. I wish to argue that there is a noticeable ideal society impulse in New Zealand, particularly in the myth of Arcadia. I employ James Davis’ five fold typology of the ideal society because his summary observation sounds remarkably Buddhist: “all visualisers of ideal societies are concerned to maximise harmony and contentment and to minimise conflict and misery” (1981, 19). The desire to be happy is prevalent throughout Buddhist discourse today, and to “minimise conflict and misery” hints at notions in the Four Noble Truths. Where the formation of Buddhist societies is readily identifiable in the history of the spread of Buddhism, it is too early to determine whether that will occur in New Zealand. However, Davis continues that the minimising of conflict and misery is “to produce a perfected society where social cohesion and the common good are not imperilled by individual appetite” (1981, 19). Davis derives his five fold typology from an examination of English utopian writing in the 16th and 17th centuries. While this may seem a distant age from which to choose a framework for what follows, it has nevertheless been used to conceptualise Buddhist notions of *nirvana* and other Buddhist felicities already (Collins 1998).

Firstly, the Land of Cockayne was an image of late medieval England where there was sexual liberty, fountains of youth, and the absence of conflict due to the “fullest private satisfactions of men’s appetites” (rather than social or institutional constraint). Secondly, the Arcadian tradition envisioned nature as benevolent. There was an assumed harmony between man and nature which paralleled a social harmony between men and moderation: in essence it was a vision of “moderate man set in a world of natural bounty”. The New World particularly was often put forward in English literature as a natural paradise which only required “to be adorned by men of simplicity and good will” (Davis 1981, 21-24). The title “New World” itself captured Europeans’ desire for an idealised society. There was a world out there that was new, or waiting to be made new. In sum, “the Land of Cockayne idealised nature in a gross way. In Arcadia, too, nature is idealised but at the same time man is naturalised” (Davis 1981, 38). Cockayne was a land of indulgence, while Arcadia one of escapism.

Davis also offers two further utopian visions he demonstrates were identifiable in English literature. Both were premised on a Christian notion of divine providence in history. The third vision was the perfect moral commonwealth which accepted the social and political status quo, but believed harmony could be achieved through the moral reformation of individuals in society. Thus, in contrast to the Land of Cockayne and Arcadia, the collective problem would be solved not by decreasing, but increasing the limits of personal appetites. Hence duty, loyalty, charity, and virtue exercised by the individual were preconditions for society’s regeneration (Davis 1981, 31). Taken further, Davis’ fourth class of utopian vision was the millenarian vision, where the process of solution to society’s ills was emphasised, where history was moving to the second coming of Christ (or some other millenarian vision), and hence attention to

today's details could be neglected. The perfect society was future, and would be executed by the divine will.

Lastly, in the Utopian vision, Davis demonstrates the basic problem is more realistic: "limited satisfactions exposed to unlimited wants" (1981, 37). The answers were in imposing control on society by the state, and where possible, the intentional elimination of adversity by imposing order. Order was the means and the goal. The Leninist communist project or the Hitlerian Third Reich are examples of this. This Utopian vision (capital "U") is the fifth vision of Davis. It is not to be confused with the more generic use of the word "utopian" (small "u") which is a synonym for some notion of idealised or perfected society.

Using Davis' typology as a starting point, I wish to extract the notion of Arcadia (without ignoring the other four themes) and argue that New Zealanders perceive themselves in Arcadia, a pastoral paradise where the land is beautiful, government is generous, people are kind and the cultural milieu is laid back, relaxed and even escapist. In other words, as the respondents to my interview suggest, the conditions are right for spiritual "practice". I wish to argue that it is in this socio-geographical Arcadian context that Buddhists understand themselves to be located as well: in short, New Zealand is an ideal place to practise Buddhism.

New Zealand as Arcadia

The notion of an ideal society is usually contested, and New Zealand is no exception. Where there is religion, there will be notions of perfectibility. Where there is a community of people, identity will be contested. Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney's *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand's Pasts* (2006) is a recent

collection of essays addressing this very issue. In addition, James H. Liu et al. have also contributed to the discussion in their compilation of essays *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations* (2005b). Perhaps New Zealand can be conceived of as some sort of religious or political utopia? Arguments raged during the run up to the parliamentary elections of 2005 as to whether New Zealand was a Christian nation or a secular one. These arguments were in the context of smaller sectarian parties jostling for position. In New Zealand's journal of literature *Landfall*, several articles appear in the May 2008 edition which continue to explore the possibilities of idealism in society: indeed the November 2008 edition of *Landfall* will be on the theme of utopias.⁶¹

Because notions of an ideal society are contested, I will take some effort first to argue that Arcadia in particular is a recognisable impulse in New Zealand self understanding. In doing this, I take a position vis-à-vis the ongoing debate regarding identity in New Zealand. I will demonstrate how and why I locate New Zealanders' appropriation of Buddhist practice within the ideal of Arcadia. I will argue that "Arcadia" is a heuristic for conceptualising "home" and it is in this notion that I will bring the various strands of the thesis together.

I am not suggesting that Arcadia is the only way of conceptualising how Buddhism might find a place in New Zealand, nor even the only utopian interpretation. One may be able to imagine alternative mythology to this end. For example, Duncan Mackay (1992) argues that the search for El Dorado is a legitimate mythology for interpreting early New Zealand life. This is particularly located in the search for gold, but it could be extended also to the general acknowledgement that colonists saw huge

⁶¹ Notice of this is given on page 195 of *Landfall* 215 (May, 2008).

potential wealth, especially due to wool and lamb/mutton, or more recently the “white gold” of milk.

Nevertheless, I argue that an Arcadian conceptual framework is a good fit for understanding how Buddhism can find a place in New Zealand society, and moreover, how Buddhists themselves can find a *turangawaewae*, a place to stand in New Zealand. I wish to rally evidence to this end, ultimately to demonstrate that Buddhists can find unique identity in New Zealand because they can find a home in a socio-cultural paradigm that is already well embedded in the New Zealand worldview.

A history of Arcadia

Appropriating Arcadia to argue for a socio-cultural “fit” for Buddhism is a novel idea. Therefore, I wish to demonstrate and argue for several connections, particularly Arcadia, New Zealand, Buddhism, and home. To do this, I wish to commence my argument at the very beginning of the history of the idea of Arcadia. I seek in what follows to place methodically the building blocks on which I can legitimately conclude firstly that Arcadian notions are still well embedded in New Zealand worldview, and then ultimately that Arcadia and the Buddhist Pure Land have overlap.

The meaning of James Davis’ Arcadia is sourced from the idealisation of the province of Arcadia, which is in Peloponnesian Greece. The Greek historian Polybius (203-129 BCE) writes in his *Histories* that the inhabitants of Peloponnesian Arcadia were “famed for their virtue, piety, kindness and hospitality” (in Wilkins 1957, 4). However, it was Virgil (70-19 BCE) who created the enduring poetic impulse of Arcadia. The Western imagination has grown based on Virgil’s *Eclogue*. The poetry of Virgil’s era had “learned to turn its aesthetic energies into the glorification and

embellishment of the objects of commonplace reality” (Snell 1953, 284). In this sense, Virgil wrote about shepherds on hills who sang and fell in love: this being the idealization of normality and commonality, located in an actual place, Peloponnesian Arcadia.

This glorification of the common, or as Bruno Snell (1953) summarizes, this “imaginative creation”, was readily conceptualized as “spiritual landscape” in Arcadia (in Jenkyns 1989, 26). This “spiritual landscape” became the home, not of mere shepherds, but of noble shepherds, who “lack the crudeness of the peasant life as well as the over-sophistication of the city”. In this ideal way “the peaceful calm of the leisurely evening hours stands out more clearly than the labour for their daily bread, the cool shade is more real than the harshness of the elements, and the soft turf by the brook plays a larger role than the wild mountain crags”. Snell believes that Virgil had ceased to see anything but “tenderness, warmth and delicacy of feeling” in this “spiritual landscape” he had poetically constructed (1953, 288). Virgil thus creates an Arcadian landscape, a middle way, that is between myth and reality, “a land of the soul yearning for its distant home in the past” (Snell 1953, 301). Hence Arcadia became a common metaphor or symbol elevated above and broader than political agendas and personal ethics.

The idea of Arcadia is likely to have been brought into European usage and popularised by Jacopo Sannazaro when he published his pastoral romance simply called *Arcadia* (1504). Richard Jenkyns (1989) notes that this book had success throughout Europe, influencing two plays of Shakespeare (presumably *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), although elements of the pastoral romance can be seen in

The Winter's Tale and *The Tempest* as well).⁶² Sannazaro's *Arcadia* (1504) more significantly influenced Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590) which was explicitly modelled on Virgil's *Eclogues* and became part of the core works of the pastoral romances of the Renaissance and thus embedded the ideal of Arcadia into the European consciousness.

This emerging collective imagination was due in part to many Europeans attempting to describe how Virgil perceived of Arcadia. The nuances have included an idealized land of country life where there is eternal youth, where love is sweet and music is on the lips of shepherds. It is a place where nature is lovely and refined, a dream landscape, the soul's homeland and an enchanted realm of higher existence. Because of this, Arcadia is a place of high moral ideals: simplicity, contentment, and delight in natural beauty, homely piety, friendship and hospitality, devotion to poetry and to peace. Richard Jenkyns questions whether Virgil linked the spiritual to the pastoral, and argues that "traditional belief in Virgil's Arcadia is an antiquarian mistake" (1989, 38) believing it to have been Sannazaro and Sidney who made the conceptual link and paved the way for its enthusiastic entry into the European psyche. How it came to be, and when certain embellishments emerged, is less important than that Arcadia as a myth became embedded in the European imagination.

With European culture rooted in Graeco-Roman history and ideology, it should not be surprising that the concept of Arcadia has become so well embedded in the Romantic stream within Western culture more generally. James Davis (1981) notes that all utopian writings have in common the notion that the universal human problems can

⁶² See the discussion in <http://www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk/creativedevelopmentprogramme/productions/asyoulikeit/comedy.shtml> (Accessed 4th April, 2008.)

only be resolved by harmonising human wants and needs with the provision of economic resources. Arcadia particularly is a place where nature provides those resources, enough to fulfil all human desires, and this so in part because the people of Arcadia are moderate, taking from nature only that which they need.

Because nature is so generous and people are moderate, social organisation is not needed. People will form themselves into “natural societies” (Fairburn 1989, 26). Natural resources are so bountiful that there need be no social organisation for their appropriation, distribution or consumption. This implies a society of justice, contentment, morality and harmony. Arcadia satisfies its inhabitants without burdening them with convention, including the convention of institutionalized religion. Unlike an Utopia, there is no machinery of state to impose rituals of association on its citizens. With this background, Zoja Pavlovskis (1971) eulogizes that even though “there is something artificial, although attractive, about the pastoral landscape as well as the loves of the shepherds who live in it, it is not difficult for the poet to colour such a landscape with his [own] dreams and aspirations” (1971, 151). In other words, because the Arcadian ideal is woven into the very fabric of European ideology, anyone with an imagination – particularly poets – can appropriate it for their own ends, or invest in it additional nuance.

I labour this discussion of the sources of the myth of Arcadia because I propose that the New Zealand landscape, both geographic and social, indeed the whole New Zealand colonial project, has been coloured with dreams and aspirations that are Arcadian. I wish to rally support for this proposition (and ultimately to argue that this is the conceptual soil in which Buddhism in New Zealand is planted) in three sources: colonial idealism, the arts, and more recently in the environmental movement. In doing

this, I am not saying that notions of Arcadia are necessarily explicitly articulated – worldview is rarely explicit – nor that they are the same as original or Romantic notions. I will demonstrate that they have been commodified and reduced to mere slogan. Nevertheless, as full a history of the idea as possible is warranted to establish the groundwork for conceptualising New Zealand as a Buddhist Pure Land. It is in the possibilities of New Zealand being a Buddhist Pure Land that this Arcadian argument will culminate.

Colonial idealism

Because notions of the ideal society, and particularly Arcadia, were embedded in the European imagination, we should not be surprised to find it within European colonial notions of ideal societies, and in particular the New Zealand colonial project. The colonial settlers and governors of New Zealand certainly held dear various notions of ideal society. Motivation for colonisation was in part due to the desire to create societies that would be free from the perceived and experienced religious bigotries of Europe. Buddhists too would eventually find a place in this new land, albeit slowly and tentatively. Indeed, these Buddhists themselves would conceptualise New Zealand as an ideal place, but in different ways.

Entering Port Nicholson, Wellington's harbour, in 1839, Charles Heaphy, draftsman and artist to the New Zealand Company was overwhelmed by the potential of the land

which in reality is of the richest and most fertile nature. The hills are covered luxuriantly with foliage to the water's edge, and the deep black vegetable mould, which for ages has been accumulating, produces the most splendid growth of forest, many of the trees in which are really of stupendous size (Heaphy 1842, 2).

These large trees, which would have to be felled to make way for cropping and sheep farming were not deemed to be a problem. This land was so fertile, that should the colonists have been able to start farming immediately on their arrival “the colony would ere now have produced far more grain than would have been sufficient for its consumption” and “even a cow in stall [would] yield much milk” (Heaphy 1842, 8). Felling the tall ancient trees, even if they were acknowledged as a “primeval forest” (Wakefield 1845/1955, 12), would be a mere inconvenience. Even the native chiefs (at least around Port Nicholson) “promised to welcome” immigrants, because the chiefs (at least the ones Heaphy knew) were “dignified” and had “gentlemanly deportment, were unobtrusive, mild [and had a] discriminating disposition” (Heaphy 1842, 22,33,54). Heaphy surely conceived an Arcadia of some sort.

Heaphy himself, as draftsman for the New Zealand Company, also contributed to the Arcadian myth through his drawings and paintings. In these he portrayed expansive skies above a land of rolling green, often already cleared (whereas in reality the land had often not been cleared) and ready for immigrants to settle and start farming. Alas, this was a ready-made Arcadia to appropriate with little cost, fed to an audience back in Britain which was more than willing to embrace the myth. Indeed, from the 1860s New Zealand experienced two decades of very rapid colonization where the great attraction was easy access to fertile land, especially readily farmed coastal flat lands.

Moreover, Arcadia became a religious myth: the colonists endowed the land with spiritual qualities, much like the original Arcadia. Paul Shepard (1969) demonstrates this spirituality of the land by examining numerous diaries of colonists. These diaries “reported the landscape in terms of iconography of scenery, with a language of natural theology”. Additionally, Shepard implicates the Arcadian myth, by

concluding that “these reports reveal feelings rooted in a tradition of landscape aesthetics, informed by neo-classical ideas of art, natural history and empirical science”, which were sourced in “the pastoral traditions in the interpenetration of European man and nature”, even if nuanced differently (Shepard 1969, 1).

In the diaries, the land was seen as “heathen” and “wild”, associated with biblical nuance of wilderness, which had to be “tamed”, and where the natives were savage and had to be converted to Christianity. The landscape, wild because of the curse on Adam, when modified by colonial civilizing elements, would not only speak of Creation, but of Redemption. Thus nature itself would reveal divine Truth. An agrarian spiritual interpretation was explicit. “Where”, asked Thomas Chapman, “are the flocks lying in the green pastures, and the temple of the Lord”? (Shepard 1969, 4). Once the place of New Zealand had been spiritualised, then the way was open for others of other religions eventually to do so as well. Hence, one hundred fifty or so years later Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche would be free to talk of New Zealand as a “good place to practise Buddhism”.

Until then, this redemption would be undertaken by changing the landscape to resemble the English home country: the land would be redeemed by oak. Thus nature could become virtuous by means of appropriating the pastoral ideals of the Romantics, indeed the European Arcadia. Shepard believes that the diaries said relatively little of paradise *per se* as the realities of the climate were experienced and the relationship with Maori became varied and ambiguous. Yet they were romantic about the landscape, in that they had an emotional and non-rational response to the new and the unique in New Zealand, popularising generalisations and ideals (broad descriptions of vistas from mountain summits and passes were common), rather than dwelling on detailed

descriptions of specific scenes. Thus that which was implicit in the artwork of the European Romantic pastoralists was transferred to idealised topography in New Zealand. Romantic sentiments of land, place and people had moral influence. This was eventually to find overlap with Buddhist notions of land and place as well.

Colonists came to New Zealand to make a living by clearing bush, farming and building towns. This was inspired by a vision of a world undefiled by civilization and its controlling institutions. The ideal rolling green hills, with the ideal sheep farm, run by a noble shepherd would be the fuel that would generate the wealth of the country. This was framed in spiritual and Christian terms. Shepard concludes

The association of such improved pastoral scenery with virtue and Godliness was the most persistent theme in the written record by the New Zealand pioneer. Nostalgia was inseparable from a sense of duty. The necessity of clearing and fencing was inextricably associated with Christianising the Maoris, and, indeed, with the creation of a beautiful domesticated environment (1969, 14).

This “beautiful domesticated environment” is critiqued by Miles Fairburn in his book *The Ideal Society and its Enemies* (1989). Fairburn argues that the “most prominent” image of New Zealand for European settlers in the 19th century was that of an ideal society in general. This, Fairburn argues, is so because New Zealand as a colonial project was part of the great European expansion into the New World, which was fuelled by images implicit in the European psyche between the 16th and the 18th centuries, including Arcadia (1989, 19). The colonial literature generated out of New Zealand was a symptom of this Arcadian image. This image was communicated through not only diaries (as mentioned above) but also letters, newspaper articles, memoirs, immigration handbooks, novels and the likes. Suffice it to mention one example of a communication which appeals to the Arcadian ideal, a letter home from one A.H. Atkinson of Taranaki to a Mrs Coster in 1854.

I am entirely incompetent (not being a poet) to do justice to the Arcadian beauties of our luxuriant province. I have found the “Island” and have lived in New Plymouth. Upon landing you see at once that you mistake the country if you thought it aught but a land flowing with milk and honey. It is this in a literal sense, honey is most plentiful, and so indeed is everything that is good (in Fairburn 1989, 22).

Fairburn also argues that once well established, it was in the colony’s interest to promulgate and widely promote New Zealand as Arcadia as it was in competition for immigrants destined for elsewhere, and that the long and dangerous sea voyage – the worst in all the options for immigrants to the New World – potentially detracted from many making the journey. The myth is still promulgated today in Arcadian sound-bites (which I will demonstrate shortly) to attract immigrants from Buddhist Asia who have to undertake a far less arduous journey. This Arcadia of the 19th century was seen in the language: New Zealand was “better”, “brighter” than Britain; it was to be an idealised “Britain of the south”. Fairburn also demonstrates the spiritualisation of the landscape: it was the “land of Goshen”, a “land of plenty”, an “earthly paradise”, and a “land of milk and honey”.⁶³ This “land of milk and honey” found expression in the slogan “God’s own country”, now abbreviated without much loss of meaning to “Godzone” (Fairburn 1989, 24).

If God had blessed New Zealand then He had created a land of natural abundance. Life was simple, yet orderly, and this guaranteed the middle-class to be free from status anxiety (Fairburn 1989, 25). Fairburn concludes that the colonial project perceived itself as Arcadian. However, even if this perception was dominant, Fairburn argues that ultimately it was not successful. While “God’s Own Country” may have become an ingrained paradigm, and now an iconic slogan, nevertheless, the State

⁶³ The “land of Goshen” is a biblical image referring to the bounty of the Egyptian province in which the Israelites were slaves, according to the book of *Exodus*. A “land of milk and honey” is also biblical imagery, referring to the promised land which God had covenanted to Moses’ descendents.

became overbearing, shifting more towards Davis' Utopia (1981, 36). However, the agrarian theme within Arcadia was so strong and had such deep rooted sources that the very natural abundance of the fertile land of New Zealand was precisely what sustained the State. Today, the State machinery remains relatively uncomplicated. The feedback from the email question discussed earlier – “is New Zealand a good place to practise Buddhism?” – alluded to the possibility that New Zealand had remained in a sense, Arcadian.

However, Fairburn's thesis is broader. He goes on to argue for a notion of the “atomization” of colonial society, a concept that not all historians of New Zealand have embraced (see for example Belich 1991). Fairburn's atomization theory is based on an extreme individualism that he believed was part of the Arcadian ideal – the noble shepherd had become the independent worker – and evident in the social structure of colonial New Zealand (or lack of it, or rather, the fear of its breakdown). The rugged bachelor stumping and draining the swamp was idealized in literature (Sinclair 1986, 57), and epitomized as *Man Alone* (Mulgan 1975).⁶⁴ In the late 19th century, 40% of men had not married (Sinclair 1986, 68). Certainly a strong independent spirit still pervades the New Zealand psyche, and as I have already suggested, may well be a cultural fit to the perceived individuality of the Buddhist practitioner. This cultural individualism is expressed in the iconic quarter acre section, DIY idealism, and the test of manhood in the ability to fix anything with a No.8 wire. Admittedly, much of this is contested today and losing its iconic place. Nevertheless, a lone Buddhist meditator, “seeking to go deeply within” himself, located in an isolated landscape in New Zealand,

⁶⁴ John Mulgan's novel *Man Alone*, first published in 1939, is an iconic piece of New Zealand writing and a “literary landmark” which has “haunted [New Zealand] writing for decades” (from the back cover), so much so that it has been reprinted and republished until as recently as 2002. Mulgan portrays a vision of New Zealand society as detached, and unsentimental with the propensity to reject and alienate. While this assessment of Mulgan's work is itself contested, C.K. Stead nevertheless believes that Mulgan “catches certain truths about our national identity” (from the back cover).

seems remarkably similar to the culturally iconic *Man Alone*, or the single noble shepherd in that very same landscape.

Arcadia in the arts

All cultures embody and materialise themselves in artistic expression of some sort, whether it be drawings of great hunts on cave walls, or digitised images thrown up on large screens. New Zealand's socio-cultural narrative is no different to this generality in that it offers material culture in the form of the arts. I have chosen a selection of arts to demonstrate that Arcadia is a consistent motif in New Zealand's self expression. To give a definitive survey would be beyond the scope of this thesis, and so I offer in this section only a selection in support of my argument. Religion too, as a locus of culture, embodies itself in artistic expression, and Buddhism is no exception. Indeed, that New Zealand can be conceived of as a Buddhist Pure Land – the conclusion that I am going to arrive at – is exemplified in an art form which can be understood to show signs of synthesis between New Zealand artistic subject (landscapes) and Buddhist style (Tibetan *thangka*). Arcadia in New Zealand artistic expression can be identified in film, poetry and literature.

Where Arcadia was well embedded in the colonial agenda, it can be also readily identified in New Zealand literature. Keith Sinclair (1986) believes that “the literary landscape [of New Zealand is] almost entirely rural” (1986, 57). An iconic example of this is *Erewhon* (1872). Although Samuel Butler (1835-1902) lived only five years in New Zealand, his *Erewhon* has been appropriated as a “New Zealand classic” (Buchmann 2006, 184). In his introduction, Malcolm Elwin reminds us that “the colonies [were] then regarded as convenient resorts for unsatisfactory sons”, and because Samuel was estranged from his father, he was sent to New Zealand to start

sheep-farming (Butler 1872/1969, v). Even in this banishment there was an Arcadian impulse: New Zealand was imagined to be a paradise for shepherds. This seems to have been proven true as Samuel doubled his capital in five years working on the high country station Mesopotamia in the Upper Rangitata Valley. *Erewhon*, an anagram of *nowhere*, is a satire on Victorian English society, written against the scenery of this valley, but more generally against the backdrop of the idealism of Arcadian New Zealand.

The plot commences in a woolshed – perhaps the archetypal locale for a pioneering shepherd – and the narrator journeys up rivers, over a mountain range and into an idealised, even spiritual land that was

such an expanse as was revealed to Moses when he stood upon the summit of Mount Sinai, and beheld that promised land. The beautiful sunset sky was crimson and gold, blue, silver, and purple; exquisite and tranquillizing; fading away therein were plains, on which I could see many a town and city, with building that had lofty steeples and rounded domes (Butler 1872/1969, 45).

This land was inhabited by “girls and men [who were] of the most magnificent presence, being no less strong and handsome than the women were beautiful; and not only this, but their expression was courteous and benign” (Butler 1872/1969, 47). The narrator soon discovers this to be an anti-society, or at least an anti-Victorian society, where crime is treated by doctors, sickness is punishable, machinery is banned, and scientific endeavour is punishable as a social evil. While *Erewhon* is not an Arcadia – it is arguably a dystopia – it is significant for the purposes of my argument that a satirical anti-Arcadian work has found its way into the New Zealand cultural milieu. So much so that Mesopotamia station continues to attract tourists in search of the experience of *Erewhon* (Buchmann 2006), and a mountain range, a peak and at least three further locations have been named *Erewhon* (Reed in Buchmann 2006, 184).

Even though Butler critiqued the Arcadian myth in New Zealand by using satire, Arcadia has continued to be appropriated nonetheless. This can be seen amongst New Zealand poets. I wish to take two of these, namely the poets Charles Brasch (1909-1973) and Allen Curnow (1911-2001), to demonstrate how the theme of “land”, “people” and even Arcadia is represented in their works as evidence for my argument of the embedded Arcadian impulse in New Zealand.

The title for Charles Brasch’s first book of poetry *The Land and the People* (1939) introduced the themes that were to be dear to him. Lawrence Jones (2003) believes Brasch to be bringing together two main themes, that of the Romantic desire for permanence and significance and that of a love for the landscapes of the South Island. James Bertram (1976) suggests another theme as well, that of an “assurance that in the shaping processes of nature, and the final natural product, might be found the true exemplar and model for human art” (1976, 12).

Ngaio and broadleaf people the grassy coast
Of green hills bent to the water ...

A grey stole of weather drawn from sky to sea,
White-furred with mist trailing on mountain ledges;
The clouded harbour breathes lightly as rain.
A horseman slowly passing lifts his hand
In silent greeting, but does not pause or turn.
Beneath the infinite whorls of Whiria Pa Hill
Pipi-gatherers stray about the wet shore (in Roddick 1984, 41,58) .

These themes of land and people are represented in the titles of his published works: *The Land and the People*, *Disputed Ground*, *The Estate*, *Not Far Off*, *Home Ground*, all signifying, in sum, that Brasch was concerned with the “idea of New Zealanders coming to awaken ‘to find where they lie’” (Jones 2003, 90), and that where

The archetypal form
Of branch, bud, leaf,
This seed of all

will be what makes us “all become native” (in Bertram 1976, 23).

In a similar way Allen Curnow offers the Arcadian theme “the plain novelty of sight” along with the “visible structure of the world perceived in a temporal framework”, where truth, especially aesthetic truth was discovered “out of bleak experience” (Roddick 1980, 5). For Curnow, experiencing these islands, especially seeing them, remained a dominant theme because of their immense isolation. It is in this isolation that an Arcadian ideal can be detected: it is a “verdant isolation” in which lies a “remote secret of national life”. Two further themes prevail in Curnow’s poetry. The first is restraint (Roddick 1980, 6). This restraint is demonstrated in the injunction not to explore overseas until learning of home, that is New Zealand. Why travel overseas when home has all that one needs? Another theme in Curnow’s poems is the propensity to imitate:

Island and ocean a theatre

Screening a weary self-flattery

Where colour and where courage is

Costumed second-hand, in character (in Roddick 1980, 11).

Curnow specifically notes in the introduction to his *Selected Poems: 1940-1989* (1990), a group of poems “touching the history and identity of my country” which he describes as “a scrap of green ground at the hub” (Curnow 1990, xi). Perhaps significantly he declared that “the best of our verse is marked or moulded everywhere by peculiar pressures – pressures arising from the isolation of the country, its physical character, and its history”.⁶⁵

The “country’s physical character” is easily recognised in more recent literature, where Arcadia is more nuanced. While retaining the mystique of a shepherd’s paradise, Arcadia is also wild and untamed, spiritually majestic. For example, James Brown,

⁶⁵ See <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/curnowa.html> for a discussion of this. (Accessed 4th April, 2008.)

together with Craig Potton, known for his iconic New Zealand photography, has compiled an anthology of “landscape poems” (2005). They do this for no other reason than that “our poets in particular seem to have a deep-seated fascination with the landscape” (2005, 10). Brown defines the genre as more than mere description. They are poems in which “the landscape is present and pervasive” – and Brown includes seascapes, weather, and the southern night-sky – “made up of multifarious sounds and voices” representing the “various tones and textures of the New Zealand landscape”: yet, these same poems are full of the “silence of awe, the silence of the ineffable, the silence of the unsayable”. Brown believes the landscape “poems’ noises are trying both to mask and express a speechlessness that is beyond feeling, beyond consciousness, beyond words” (2005, 11). Surely this is an Arcadia, an idealised land, a perfect place, even if now recognised as wild and untamed, yet a land in which one can experience the sublime, if not enlightenment? Would this not be the best place to practise Buddhism? It is a landscape of majesty which reduces the participant to insignificance and impermanence: “to be in the presence of a sublime vista is to feel humbled, vulnerable and even frightened, and yet at the same time inspired, fortified and uplifted” (2005, 11).

Alone we are born
 And die alone;
 Yet see the red-gold cirrus
 Over snow-mountain shine.

Upon the upland road
 Ride easy, stranger;
 Surrender to the sky
 Your heart of anger.⁶⁶

Other poets and literature could be drawn upon to illustrate the prevalence of the Arcadian myth in New Zealand, either as promoted or critiqued. Returning to the Upper

⁶⁶ James K. Baxter’s *High Country Weather* in James Brown, 2005. *The Nature of Things: Poems from the New Zealand Landscape*. Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing.

Rangitata Valley, the location for the *Erewhon* story, another Arcadian myth unfolds, that is, the myth of Edoras. Edoras is the court of Théoden, King of Rohan in J.R.R.Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954/1995, II/vi, 495). Peter Jackson, director of the film trilogy (2001-2003) constructed a set of Edoras on Mount Sunday at Mount Potts Station in the valley. Anne Buchmann (2006) has shown that "in both cases [of Erewhon and Edoras], tourists visit 'places' that are associated with a story where they want to merge into the landscape" (2006, 185). Erewhon and Edoras are now well embedded as Arcadian myths in not only the New Zealand psyche, but also in global perceptions of New Zealand, with myth-tourism being birthed, especially after the publication of Ian Brodie's *Lord of the Rings: Location Guide* (2003).

With this global perception of idealised spiritual landscape – "Godzone" – in New Zealand, Arcadia has been reduced to a marketing slogan. The film industry is attracted to New Zealand because of its "clean and green" scenery. The Chronicles of Narnia *Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005) and *Prince Caspian* (2008) both used a number of iconic New Zealand scenery locations. The Internet Movie Database⁶⁷ lists 588 movies shot in New Zealand, including Indian Bollywood films and Chinese films,⁶⁸ with twenty nine shot in Queenstown alone, presumably, because of its scenery. Because New Zealand is "clean and green" and therefore a good place to film, the New Zealand Film Commission has issued guidelines about how to "be green" when filming. In other words, film companies are welcome to capitalise on New Zealand's scenery, but must do so in a way that will not destroy that scenery. Production companies must "use their creativity to seek win-win solutions that deliver both screen success and

⁶⁷ www.imbd.com (Accessed 4th April, 2008.)

⁶⁸ <http://www.imdb.com/List?endings=on&&locations=New%20Zealand&&heading=18;with+locations+including;New%20Zealand> (Accessed 4th April, 2008.)

protection of New Zealand's natural, historical and cultural heritage".⁶⁹ It seems that more than Buddhists consider New Zealand a good place to practise their art.

Environmentalism

The brevity of the iconic "clean and green" slogan does not imply insignificance. Quite the contrary. This idealised, even mythical "clean and green" landscape finds further expression. If one travels to Queenstown, renowned for its beauty and adventure sports, and then travels farther along the Glenorchy road to the head of lake Wakatipu, one eventually comes to a place called Paradise. Paradise is located between the Rees and Dart river valleys, overlooking Diamond Lake with mountains of Aspiring National Park and Fiordland National Park overshadowing it. Paradise used to be a sheep station, and its homestead is called "Arcadia". Currently (2008) Paradise is for sale for a cool \$12m (+GST). The advertising is reminiscent of the Arcadian ideal:

Paradise is one of the most beautiful destinations on earth: unique, unspoilt and untouched by development. The sheer beauty of Paradise has a visual impact that is exhilarating and gives one a sense of wellbeing. [Paradise has] therapeutic value. Permanent snow lies within the site for excellent year-round heli-skiing. All mountain sports from rock or ice climbing to moderate walks can be enjoyed. Diamond Lake lends itself to a variety of water sports including swimming, canoeing, windsurfing and yachting [and there is] excellent trout fishing. [Paradise is in] close proximity to world-renowned walking and hiking tracks, [and it is in] excellent horse riding country.⁷⁰

That Paradise could lose its iconic status due to it being developed into smaller holdings raises issues of the limits of conservation law in New Zealand. The term "nature conservation" began to be used in the 1960s and came to mean that all natural

⁶⁹ <http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/Resources/GreeningtheScreen.aspx> (Accessed 4th April, 2008.)

⁷⁰ <http://www.brownssothebysrealty.com/Details/details.asp?PropertyID=213> (Accessed 4th April, 2008.)

features in New Zealand should be preserved and proactively conserved for their inherent worth. It was in the Conservation Act (1987) that this became law:

Conservation means the preservation and protection of natural and historic resources for the purpose of maintaining their intrinsic values, providing for their appreciation and recreational enjoyment by the public, and safeguarding the options of future generations.⁷¹

While not explicitly citing any Arcadian ideal, that such a strong conservation statement is now part of the legal framework of New Zealand is surely representative of an underlying implicit idealisation of place. Could the New Zealand environment be conceived of as “pure” in some sense? A casual browse through the prolific number of landscape photography calendars in any bookshop each Christmas would suggest that many conceive of New Zealand as a pure place of some sort. During the last thirty years, green issues have become more and more prevalent and proponents of conservation have become more united and politically active, culminating in the formation of the Green Party in 1990 and its subsequent acquisition of seats in Parliament.

This politicization of the environment demonstrates a resistance to non-Arcadian images. This is epitomised in New Zealand’s anti-nuclear legislation (1987), prompted by New Zealand’s long protest to French nuclear testing in the South Pacific (134 underground tests between 1975 and 1990)⁷² and denial of entry of allegedly nuclear powered or armed ships into New Zealand waters, a policy still upheld across all political parties. The emotions aroused at the periodic suggestion (since as early as 1968) that New Zealand builds a nuclear power station,⁷³ are provoked by the possibilities of nuclear accidents that could ruin the “clean green” image of New

⁷¹ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/TheBush/Conservation/ConservationAHistory/1/en> (Accessed 4th April, 2008.)

⁷² <http://www.executive.govt.nz/93-96/minister/pm/nuclear/history.htm> (Accessed 5th April, 2008.)

⁷³ See for example the debate in the *Otago Daily Times* in 2004 between John De Bueger and Jeanette Fitzsimons: <http://www.greens.org.nz/searchdocs/other7827.html> (Accessed 4th April, 2008.)

Zealand. That New Zealand could be turned into a nuclear wasteland – an anti-Arcadia – is the worst possible fate conceivable. This maintaining and promoting of New Zealand’s “clean green” image has become so important to the nation’s psyche and place in the world that the Ministry for the Environment has attempted to quantify its value in a study published in 2001 entitled *Valuing New Zealand’s Clean Green Image*.⁷⁴ The report notes that

New Zealand’s clean green image does have a value. Environmental image is a substantial driver of the value New Zealand can derive for goods and services in the international market place. This image is worth at least hundreds of millions, possibly billions, of dollars. New Zealand is relatively clean and green. This is mainly attributable to our low population density resulting in relatively benign environmental pressures. However, there are environmental problems that are sufficient to raise questions about the sustainability of the value of New Zealand’s exports attributable to its environmental image. There is a risk that New Zealand will lose value that is created by the current environmental image if we are not vigilant in dealing with the problems that could threaten the image.⁷⁵

This “clean green” image of New Zealand is not only an “omnipresent” idea that New Zealanders have about themselves (Major 2003, 228), but is now deemed to be necessary to ensure New Zealand’s economic survival. It is precisely the marketing of this image – and all the spin-offs in adventure sports, quality dairy products and the likes – that will continue to set New Zealand aside as a unique place in general and a unique landscape in particular. There is a large diversity of land forms, fauna and seascapes in a comparatively small space. Hence these landscapes are relatively easy to access: one rarely has to travel more than an hour from an urban centre to find unspoiled environments. Ideal places to meditate are readily accessible to urban Buddhists.

⁷⁴ The full report is available at <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/sus-dev/clean-green-image-value-aug01/>

⁷⁵ <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/sus-dev/clean-green-image-value-aug01/> (Accessed 5th April, 2008.)

Because New Zealand's population is small, solitude in this "dynamic landscape" (Brown 2005, 8) is still easily achievable. The Arcadian myth is powerful, even for urban dwellers. We believe we are an outdoor nation, even if "outdoors" now means subtle architectural design in an urban context: "indoor-outdoor flow" is a selling point when buying a home. Even though demographic realities pressure New Zealanders into greater urbanisation, the myth continues to be grounded. Chris Carter, Minister for the Environment, said in 2005 that "New Zealanders are more and more seeing the landscape as part of who they are" (in Brown 2005, 9).

"Who we are" has been explicitly articulated by many as Arcadian. If one googles "Arcadia" and limits the search to "New Zealand", the first nineteen pages turn up eight motels with the name, a decommissioned theatre (Waimate), two health shops, one design shop, an online shopping website, a building company, an Auckland street name, a girl's name, a wood burner (made by Masport), an acronym for the Auckland Regional Authority's database, the domain of a website, a play which showed in Wellington in October 2007, and a P&O ship (commissioned in 1954) which visited New Zealand periodically during its lifetime.⁷⁶ In other words, the name is known and widely used. More interestingly, "Arcadia" is still linked explicitly with the green, homely, agricultural nuance it has always had, specifically located in landscape: it is the name of the basin in which Cardrona ski field is located, the name of a publishing company specialising in maps, the name of a miniature horse stud, and even the name of a wine: perhaps a Central Otago vintner had the laughter, music and frivolity of Virgil's Arcadia in mind when naming his sparkling wine "Arcadia Brut (NZ)"?

⁷⁶ As an interesting aside, I myself travelled between Mumbai and Auckland in 1963 on the *Arcadia*.

Implicitly, Arcadia is embedded in our identity as a nation, and we project and present that identity to the world. For example, the “landmark” film *This is New Zealand* which played to over two million at Expo 70 in Osaka, Japan, and launched the New Zealand landscape into the world’s consciousness showed “everyone who we were”, but more importantly “where we were”.⁷⁷ One could add the Air New Zealand television advertisements which played in 2007 and 2008 where one is flown over the landscapes of New Zealand to be reunited with loved ones. The Speight’s beer advertisements of the “southern man” play up the idealised rugged male in his natural habitat, a back country shepherd in a wild yet pristine place. New Zealand’s adventure tourism offers unique risk experience against the backdrop of stunning scenery. Arcadia is truly “escapist”. The 100% Pure New Zealand advertising campaign, launched globally in 1999 offers to the world “100% pure” landscapes in which the “forever young” can play. This “highly successful” campaign minimises urban vistas.⁷⁸ An advertisement of Property Brokers Ltd. on The Breeze radio station on April 6th 2008 drew on the expressed interests of foreign buyers who “wanted to buy a piece of paradise” in New Zealand. Additionally, the classic New Zealand bach/crib could be rallied in support of the desire to live in an idealised rural, rugged or agricultural landscape where one can enjoy food, music, laughter and the good things of life, in essence, Arcadia.

At risk of seeming presumptuous with my own evaluation of New Zealand and an Arcadian impulse, I sent out a questionnaire on April 7th, 2008 to a selection of people on my email address with a simple question to which I invited them to respond. I chose the people on my email address list who were New Zealanders (or had a New

⁷⁷ <http://www.nzff.telecom.co.nz/n4930.html?region=3> (Accessed 4th April, 2008.)

⁷⁸ This campaign can be accessed at http://www.tourismnewzealand.com/tourism_info/about-us/100-pure-campaign/100-pure-campaign_home.cfm#

Zealand ISP), rather than because of their religious affiliation. The question I posed was “What, in your opinion, are some of the most endearing images we have of ourselves as New Zealanders?” Fifty one people replied: twenty nine people (57%) replied specifically with images about landscape and the environment and how we relate to it.

According to the respondents, we believe New Zealand to be a “beautiful country” with “beautiful landscapes – bush, beach and mountains” particularly the back country which is “quite untouched”. It is indeed “Godzone, one of the best countries on earth with clean air, plenty of water, marvellous harbours, beaches and temperate climate”. In addition, we believe ourselves to be a “great outdoors nation” being “men and women of the land” with an “outdoor active lifestyle”. We “love the open air, farm, rivers, surf, sun and sea”; we are “beach and bush people”. We idolize the “southern man, grounded in the land and solitude”, embodied in Sir Edmund Hillary. We are “at home” in the outdoors where we experience the “good life”, often associated with simple things like “BBQs at Christmas [in the summertime]”. The New Zealand environment is a “playground”. We also believe ourselves to have deep “environmental consciousness” and “concern” and take environmental “action”. Three people specifically used the terms “clean and green” of New Zealand. We are proud of “our Nuclear Free stance”. Dr. Geoff Troughton, historian at Victoria University of Wellington, who responded to my question, believes that “the idea of New Zealand as a country of natural beauty and abundance is still quite powerful”.⁷⁹

Troughton’s comment resembles James Davis’ formulation of Arcadia: nature was benevolent, and there was an assumed harmony between man and nature (Davis 1981, 31). Davis’ Land of Cockayne could also perhaps be alluded to as informing a

⁷⁹ Dr. Troughton has given permission to be identified.

New Zealand mythology: we certainly like to think of ourselves as being class-less, and socially liberal, “forever young” as the 100% Pure New Zealand campaign would convince the world. If New Zealand is a Cockayne land of indulgence, then it is certainly also an Arcadian land of escapism, perhaps indeed an ideal place to practise Buddhist meditation.

Buddhism in Arcadian New Zealand

I have mustered evidence to demonstrate that some of the most endearing images we have of ourselves are carried in the ideal of Arcadia. The ideal society of Arcadian New Zealand has humanity and nature in harmony, with minimal interference from institutions, and where the landscape is prioritised over city-scape. The rural lifestyle is idealised, and the noble shepherd and the rugged individual are idolised. We are now at a place where I can explicitly link Arcadia with Buddhism in New Zealand. Before making this link, it may be judicious to note a further aspect regarding Arcadia.

It may well be argued that the New Zealand Arcadian myth is nothing unique. In some sense this is true. From late 2000 to early 2001 the New York Public Library, in conjunction with the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, exhibited *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*,⁸⁰ demonstrating a rich and varied history of the very notion of utopia and idealised societies throughout the history of the Western imagination. Grand projects such as the French and American revolutions sought to embody ideals of liberty, equality and justice. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels offered in their *Communist Manifesto* (1848) a radically different utopia which would be realised out of class struggle and proletarian revolution. Other visions have proliferated amongst small social groups who sought to set up alternative communities to counter

⁸⁰ <http://utopia.nypl.org/Pt1exhibit.html> (Accessed 15th September, 2008.)

the social evils of the day. Some were simply reform movements, others were informed by religious motivations. All believed they had found the answers to universal happiness.

An agricultural myth, that of the yeoman farmer, which at first glance looks Arcadian, is one of the founding myths of America. Thomas Jefferson envisioned a noble cultivator who would be the backbone of a new democratic society. The vast potential garden stretching west across America would be tilled in small holdings by honest and hardworking men. Jefferson's vision would lead to an ideal society because the land had been given by divine authority, and that farming life was more ethical than urban manufacturing. Jefferson's vision was not to be in the long run, and Alexander Hamilton's more industrialised vision for America took hold.

Utopian studies are prolific and the New York Public Library's exhibition did well to precipitate out some of the key historical dynamics. Nuances to these visions vary, as do the likely sources and histories of each idealised society myth. The religious literature of the world is full of idealised societies here on earth or as some future state. Popular culture, especially the movie industry, constantly produces images of utopia-yearned-for or bemoaning utopia lost. In our technological era, some have proposed that the internet may be a place in which an ideal society could exist.

However, Arcadia, as a species of the genus utopia, finds a unique expression in New Zealand due to the domestic language that the Buddhist interviewees used. It is in this domestic language that Arcadia and Buddhism come together. I will argue that the domestic language they used betrays a longing for an Arcadian home, and that

ultimately this home in New Zealand is also informed by Buddhist notions of a Pure Land.

The language of domesticity

I have already demonstrated that the notion of New Zealand being a “good place to practise Buddhism” is broadly supported. There is also an abundance of domestic language in the interviewees’ transcripts when they talked of their Buddhist practice. This language is down to earth, often about “fit”, or “making sense”, or “resonance” signifying a sense of personal comfort with the teachings and practice, and often appropriating language of “home”. In an Arcadian sense, “home” is a place of safety, of community, abundance and peace. In this, it is a place of identity, where one can “fit” and belong, and so re-stabilise and re-order the soul.

For example James Langley talks several times in interview about the world beginning to “make sense” when he starts doing meditation, and especially attending Zen *sesshin*. Jennifer Yule noted that it was the content of one of the Dalai Lama’s books which she read which “made sense”. Liddy Holloway, actress and writer, had a sense there was “something beyond even the intellect and the imagination”. She found in Buddhism “something that truly resonated” (Dekker 2005, 6). Wade Lambert talks of Buddhism as being “like finding a long-lost hidden treasure” (Lambert 2005, 29). Joel McKenzie was attracted to Zen because the teachings “fitted” with him. When taking Zen *jukai* “it was the right thing to do. It was the natural thing, harmonious”. Andrew Smith found Buddhism was “natural”. Ron Burrows talks of an “intimacy” he experienced in Buddhism especially with regard to the inter-connectedness of all things when reflecting on the physical beauty of New Zealand’s landscapes. Philip Jolliffe articulates that he was looking for spiritual “resonance” and “fit” in Buddhism. When

encountering Zen in New Zealand he “knew that this was something [he] wanted to pursue. [This resonance] is like an intuitive response in which I have faith, and in which I tend to trust.” He readily talked of “coming home” to Buddhism.

In a similar vein Rachel Pike recalls taking up the practice:

So I enrolled to do a meditation course with FWBO, and when I went there it was like wow! this is like homecoming. And I remember my very first retreat in Strathean in Otaki, and after meditating for one or two days, I remember walking outside and it was like I saw the sky and the camellias for the very first time, like I’d never seen those things before and it was like I just saw them with this pristine freshness and newness, and it was just completely awesome.

When she later discovered Tarchin Hearn, teacher at the Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre, she “wept for three days” and experienced a “divine homesickness”. Mary Jaksch, leader of the Maitai Zendo in Nelson relates that “as soon as I encountered *zazen*, I knew I had come home at last – it felt so familiar” (Jaksch 1999). Barry Farland freely uses home language in his interview, especially around an overwhelming emotional response he experienced when listening to the Gyume monks chanting and the “karmic resonance” he felt. This is not a psychological or nostalgic or romantic “at home-ness”, but rather in terms of *deja vue*: for Barry Farland it was karmic. He was “at home” in Buddhism because he had returned to Buddhism in this life due to the law of *karma*. Clare Hardy (SGI-NZ) talks of her “defining moment” as the time when she “enshrined [her] own *gohonzon* in [her] own home”. She recalls it was a “coming home. It’s like something [I’ve] always known is going to happen. And it feels familiar”. Anne Cowie also talked of “coming home” to Buddhism. In a similar fashion Barry Davey, struggled to interpret an experience he remembers as a baby, that of knowing that his parents were “seeing me” when he was in the cot. When he discovered Buddhism, he was able to interpret that experience of infant awareness. He “instantly knew” Buddhism was for him, and he describes this two ways: he “realised” he was a

Buddhist, but he also “chose Buddhism”. However, the summative words he used to explain this paradigmatic infant experience was that he “returned home” to Buddhism.

However, language of domesticity or “coming home” is not unique to New Zealanders who take up the practice of Buddhism. Indeed, it could be argued that “coming home” is a common way of expressing the emotions about religious conversion *per se*. I myself have heard it anecdotally on numerous occasions amongst Christian converts. Graham Harvey (1999) also offers “coming home” as one way of conceptualising how people become Pagans. The “coming home” of New Zealanders who embrace Buddhist practice that sets them apart as unique is that they “come home to Buddhism” in this particular place (New Zealand) and more specifically, this unique landscape, a landscape we have invested with Arcadian ideals. I intend at this point to summon evidence to this end.

This particular land

This domestic language of “coming home” to Buddhism is more often than not located in a place, particularly some image of New Zealand, or of a perception of home in the landscapes of New Zealand. This natural sense-making in place and landscape was a common thread throughout interviews. It is part of the “fit” or domesticity, or “at home-ness”, and is embodied in impulses we have already considered.

For example, speaking on behalf of himself and other Zen practitioners, Philip Jolliffe believes Zen practitioners “would tend to be reflective, passivist, and environmentally conscious. Those would be the three main characteristics”. Gavin Snell agreed: “It would probably be true to say that Buddhism, as I experience it in this particular [Zen] school, [has an] environmental strain. It gets talked about. There is a

concept called right livelihood”. Right Livelihood is one of the core ideas expressed in the Noble Eight-fold Path. The right livelihood these interviewees were talking about was their care of the physical environment which was motivated explicitly by their Buddhist worldview.

This “right livelihood” is exercised by Stephen Webster, a Zen Buddhist, in his role of a New Zealand university environmental lecturer. Webster also mediates in environmental disputes. This synchronicity between his Zen ethics and environmentalism (and environmental conflict) came together in the idea of “interdependency”:

‘Interdependency’ is a scientific word as well as a Buddhist word. This is an example of where the two disciplines inform each other. Environmental activism then becomes my Zen practice. I call myself a ‘compassionate environmentalist’. This works out as me resisting holding fixed views on anything, and being willing to listen to all sides of an issue.

For Webster there is no dichotomy between the rational, logical scientific approach to his environmental studies and the “not thinking” in Zen. He felt that he could hold the two in tension, and even integrate them. “My interest is in environmental ethics, and I’m an activist, so I’m applying compassion and being in the moment all the time to environmental issues”, and this in a unique New Zealand way. For his wedding ring, he insisted on getting New Zealand West Coast gold, but that it be panned gold, not mined, “so that I didn’t contribute to the environmental abuse of the land”. He sums up the integration of being an environmental scientist, a Zen practitioner, and a New Zealander:

My Zen practice informs my professional context. I can deal with stress, anger, conflict with staff much better. Since a lot of my environmental stuff is conflict management over resources [here in New Zealand], Zen is really helpful. There is no differentiation between on and off the cushion. Each informs the other. My professional life is an outward

working of what happens on the cushion. I am always seeking to be very much in the present.⁸¹

Several others also make the link between their Buddhist practice expressed as “right livelihood” and a commitment to the New Zealand land and environment. For example, Jennifer Yule relates that she

bought a book on ecology which made quite a big impact [on me]. I was quite interested in environmental issues, more in a personal way, not a political way: also in animal rights, and trying to be as environmentally friendly as possible. That was the way I was [leading] my life. Buddhism and [environmental] science were [both] making an impression on me.

For Ron Burrows, his environmentalist commitment preceded his interest in things Buddhist, birthed out of a love of mountaineering, tramping, skiing and botanising.

In fact the first thing I really did with my life was saving native forests. That kind of nature thing seems to me to be all tied in with my spiritual leanings, softening me up really to be interested in a more holistic eastern view of spirituality. I think the best definition for me of my spiritual ambition, which I think is a quote [by the Buddhist Dogen]: ‘enlightenment is intimacy with all things’; that kind of notion really appeals to me as a way of living.

Joel McKenzie expands on this notion: “I think [Zen] philosophy really addresses concerns of environmentalism particularly, and also human interaction, in a much more practical way than other philosophies”.

This “right livelihood” is expressed in environmentalism by Jacob Maskill as well. Although having become a Buddhist “only for the last four years” when I met him, he had already made the connections between his Buddhist practice and his role in an environmental business venture. For others, their Buddhist commitment to the environment is expressed in their political commitments, seeing Labour and the Greens as more sympathetic to positive environmental outcomes. Their Buddhist practice and

⁸¹ Being “on or off the cushion” is a Zen euphemism for a daily meditation practice. “On the cushion” is a euphemism for the act of meditating.

identity led them to commit themselves to political agendas which they perceived were located in the priorities of care for this particular land and environment.

If environmental concerns in this particular place of New Zealand are common amongst Buddhist practitioners, it should be no surprise to discover that Buddhist traditions welcome the opportunity to become located in this particular landscape. Moreover, several now have a history in specific locations and are creating their own narratives of place. Sally McAra's study of Sudarshanaloka is a prime example of this (McAra 2007). There is a high priority on retreat attendance at centres away from urban contexts, and several of the large Buddhist traditions now have established retreat centres or facilities. For example Bodhinyanarama is nestled into bush at the head of the Stokes Valley, near Wellington; the Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre in the Wangapeka valley, west of Nelson, is on a steep ridge in rejuvenating native bush and exotic pine; the Mountains and Rivers Order of Zen has its yearly national *sesshin* in St Arnaud, surrounded by the Nelson Lakes mountains; FWBO members from Auckland attend retreats at Sudarshanaloka, in the Tararu Valley, near Thames; two FPMT centres are in semi-rural locations (Chandrakirti in Upper Moutere, Nelson, and Mahamudra in Colville, Coromandel); Dharma Gaia, in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh is hidden in the bush on the Coromandel peninsula. Even traditions that have a more urban profile, like New Kadampa, and Shambhala, have retreats in the countryside, even if only infrequently.⁸² Representative of this impulse for Buddhist groups to locate themselves in the New Zealand landscape is the Diamond Sangha, based in Christchurch. It intends to build a retreat centre near Oxford, Canterbury, because the sangha believe the location to be "excellent for meditation". From the Diamond Sangha website:

⁸² New Kadampa Tradition have had retreats over the Easter weekend in Otaki, while Shambhala, based in Auckland and Wellington have annual retreats at Taumarunui.

We own 8200 square metres of land at Glentui, fifty minutes from Christchurch. The land is at the edge of Mt Richardson State Forest and actually includes some native beech forest. The immediate surroundings are picturesque and on a fine day, the views are breath taking. On one side lies a densely forested valley with hills rising to about 1000 meters. On the other side the expanse of the Canterbury Plains stretches towards Christchurch and the distant ocean. *Without doubt this is an excellent spot for meditation* (italics mine).⁸³

This pattern of retreat is easy enough to observe, and it can be argued that it is not necessarily unique to Buddhism. Indeed, the New Zealand countryside is dotted with numerous retreat centres and outdoor education centres that cater for many religious and secular groups (see for example Hasslacher 2000, who has attempted to catalogue these). Spending a week, for example, at the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre in Tongariro National Park has become “a rite of passage for many New Zealanders”.⁸⁴ One could arguably surmise that attendance at retreats located in picturesque locations is woven into the very cultural fabric of being a New Zealander.

Nevertheless, meditation retreats are also part of the fabric of Buddhist practice and identity, informed by the Buddha’s sitting in meditation under the *bodhi* tree and also the annual rainy season retreat of early monks. A casual flick through any issue of *Tricycle* magazine reveals dozens of retreats on offer in beautiful locations around the world. Several of the New Zealand interviewees had spent long times – up to a month – in secluded meditation in huts in the New Zealand bush. Wangapeka and Sudarshanaloka, as two examples, specifically have remote huts for private extended meditation practice. It is retreats and practice in this New Zealand location, appropriating iconic New Zealand symbols that offer a unique opportunity for New

⁸³ <http://www.diamondway-buddhism.org.nz/retreat/retreat.php> (Accessed April 25th, 2008.)

⁸⁴ I heard one commentator use this phrase in the media comment after the tragedy in April 2008 where students and one staff member of Elim Christian College were swept to their deaths in a flash flood in the Mangatepopo stream valley which the centre uses for river activities.

Zealand Buddhist identity to emerge, and give it a sense of “home” for New Zealand practitioners.

This “home” is symbolised in several of the Buddhist centres’ appropriation of iconic New Zealand landscape symbols. Several have intentionally used native timbers for lining their halls or altar alcoves (Wangapeka, Auckland Buddhist Centre, Chandrakirti, for example). Clare Hardy, a Soka Gakkai member, had intentionally had her *gohonzon* made by a local joiner out of native timber, rather than buying an off-the-shelf one. The altar table at Sudarshanaloka is made from the local Kauri log which featured in McAra’s study of the centre (McAra 2007), and a Puriri tree located near the new community hall is prioritised in the centre’s historical narrative. Sudarshanaloka also has Buddha images tucked into the bush to discover as one walks on the tracks. Local rock often supplements structural components in centres, as well as ornamental aspects around altars.

Along with the standard offerings of rice, milk and fruit, iconic New Zealand products also appear at altars: Tim Tam biscuits, Keri orange juice, bottles of H2Go water, Griffin’s gingernuts. Local flowers grace altars, including irises and tulips, but also natives, like tussock arrangements. Lavender supplements incense. I was unable to establish if there was an explicit intention in using local New Zealand products in worship rituals: perhaps that they were ready to hand and usable is evidence enough that Buddhist ritual is not necessarily derivative and allows for innovation.

Nevertheless, there is evidence of intention vis-à-vis New Zealand iconic offerings and décor, symbolically anchoring Buddhist places into the landscape. Local crystals and gemstones also enhance small votive offers at shrines and altars. There is a

flax woven stylized nikau palm hanging over the altar at Dharma Gaia (Coromandel); a large wall hanging, which is stylized from a Tibetan *thangka*, adorns the library wall of the Auckland Buddhist Centre (FWBO). It has motifs of New Zealand place, particularly the landscape of the Tararu valley, home of Sudarshanaloka. Wangapeka's altar niche is back-dropped with stained glass which represents the local colours of the landscape, and the Nelson MRO *zendo*'s altar has a locally quilted throw-over representing the colours of the local stones. Chandrakirti's outdoor toilet at the *gompa* is an organic one, deliberately designed as such for environmental reasons, informed by ethics derived from Buddhist precepts.

Furthermore, four Buddhist groups have appropriated iconic New Zealand symbols in their branding. Auckland Zen Centre and MRO Zen both use stylized koru,⁸⁵ New Kadampa Tradition uses the silver fern, and SGI-NZ uses the southern cross constellation. While these can be seen as deliberate attempts to give these traditions a New Zealand face by locating them in geographic icons, it is also noteworthy that Fo Guang Shan, the large Chinese centre in Botany Downs, Auckland, has also appropriated iconic flora and materials into its centre. The buildings are built in the traditional Chinese manner fashioned after Tang dynasty architecture, but there has been a deliberate attempt to "localise" by appropriating and embedding New Zealand symbols. The courtyard not only has traditional cherry trees, but also New Zealand natives (*coprosma* and *hebe*, mainly). The large wall that backdrops the main Buddha figure is local stone intentionally mined from an Auckland quarry: the wall itself has two low windows through which native vegetation is clearly visible. This is a deliberate attempt, according to Jane, the guide who showed me around on October 29th, 2006, to "bring New Zealand's flora symbolically into the meditation hall". With respect to more

⁸⁵ The koru is a the tip of the unfurling fern frond. It is symbolic of new life, and appears in a wide variety of cultural locations in New Zealand. It is most easily recognised in a stylized form as the symbol for Air New Zealand.

social symbols, at least two centres have given a nod toward Te Reo Maori: Wangapeka has named its buildings with their Maori names, and the Wellington Insight Meditation group subtitles its logo in Maori. One can even enjoy walking meditation because of the “indoor-outdoor flow” at some centres. The large balcony around the meditation hall at Chandrakirti, for example, offers the opportunity for walking-meditators to enjoy views of the Mt Arthur mountain range.

Through these appropriations of New Zealand iconography, I suggest practitioners are seeking to create spaces of familiarity. This domesticity, the being here and now, combined with domestic language suggests they are creating a “home”. This home is in New Zealand landscape, both geographical and cultural. These are physical places which are becoming Buddhist, but which are also “kiwi”, and therefore offer to the practitioner a socio-cultural space to “stabilize the self” (Leone 2004) where they are safe to practise, but also from which they can take the risks to innovate with their emerging identity.

Conclusions

I have in this chapter argued that the notion of Arcadia is a significant cultural myth in New Zealand, and that it offers to the establishment of Buddhism a socio-cultural place of fit. However, I have gone further than this and proposed that the myth of Arcadia is socio-cultural soil into which Buddhism can be planted, or to keep with the narrative metaphor, Arcadia is the cultural parchment on which the narrative of Buddhism can be written. Practitioners, in the domestic language they use in their interviews, allude to the ideal of making New Zealand a home for Buddhism, and also creating for themselves a home in that Buddhism. This home is located in this particular landscape and environment, making their expressions of home unique. The

iconic myth of Arcadia offers a socio-cultural place in which Buddhism can find a home.

In the next chapter I will continue to explore issues of identity, and will offer four locales in which a new Buddhist identity in New Zealand might play out. These four locales will demonstrate an emerging parochialism in New Zealand Buddhism, and will contribute to answering the second question of this thesis, that is, in what ways do Buddhists continue to find meaning and identity as Buddhists in this particular place, New Zealand?

Chapter 6: New Zealand as a 100% Pure Land

‘Oh, this is a piece of *Sukhavati*.
This is a piece of [the Buddha] Amitabha’s Pure Land fallen to earth’.

Lama Zopa

Introduction

We can now say that Buddhism is *in* New Zealand. In this chapter I further discuss several notions of identity, and argue that Buddhism is becoming *of* New Zealand. In other words, while not neglecting its connections to global influences, Buddhism in New Zealand shows signs of becoming parochial. To demonstrate this, I wish to discuss four social locales.

The first is a socio-political locale: Dhargyey Buddhists and a Maori sub-tribe in Northland contest an identity linked to alleged genealogy of that sub-tribe to Tibet. The consequences of this contestation spill over into both Maori identity vis-à-vis Treaty of Waitangi claims, and also Buddhist identity in relation to potential place in New Zealand. This has proven thus far to be an opportunistic conversation for both parties. I offer this as a locale for identity as it represents the culturally pluralistic context of New Zealand that welcomes new worldviews to its shores.

The second locale is socio-geographical. Buddhism is becoming *of* New Zealand in that it is being embedded into the social and geographical landscape in quite literal ways: the landscape of New Zealand is being “buddhafied”. In this literal buddhafication of the landscape, Buddhism has the opportunity to make its presence felt. This phenomenon is both the consequence of a liberal socio-political context and representative of the potential for further pluralistic expression in New Zealand.

The third locale is soteriological. Because New Zealand's socio-political context is open to new imaginings, New Zealand can be conceived of by Buddhists as a Buddhist Pure Land. I build this argument by extrapolating from the imaginings of one particular interviewee, Ella Brewer, who is a mature and articulate FPMT practitioner and also a trained Tibetan *thangka* painter.

The fourth locale is personal. For New Zealand to become a Pure Land, practitioners' practice will entail an ethical commitment to making Buddhism work not only for themselves, but for the country. Where practice thus far has generally meant "practice of meditation", I outline how fifteen of the interviewees also articulated that "practice" meant "practice of personal ethics" as well. In the practice of Buddhist ethics, they not only seek to restabilize themselves, but also seek to create an eu-topia – a good place – or, in other words, seek to create the Buddhist Pure Land in New Zealand.

Buddhism of New Zealand: four parochial locales

A quest for identity: Dhargyey Buddhism and Te Waiariki

The possibilities of creating a unique New Zealand identity vis-à-vis Buddhism's location in a unique landscape is played out in a socio-political locale. In Northland, a conversation has begun between Dhargyey Tibetan Buddhists and a Maori sub-tribe (hapu) called Te Waiariki. I propose that precisely because there is a sense of being "at home" in New Zealand, a robust conversation can happen as these two parties explore identity. Te Waiariki, whose mountain is Panguru (north Hokianga) – "the only summit in Aotearoa-New Zealand never given over to the Crown"⁸⁶ – claim a genealogy (whakapapa) going back to Tibet. In short, they claim to be descended from Tibetans. Dhargyey Tibetan Buddhists have shown an interest in this claim.

⁸⁶ This was communicated with some pride by two locals to me personally.

Dhargyey Tibetan Buddhism has three centres in New Zealand, one in Dunedin and one in Whangarei, and smaller one in Christchurch. The movement is named after Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey. Geshe Dhargyey was invited to New Zealand by Cathi Graham and others to set up the Dunedin centre, registered as a charitable trust in 1984. Geshe Dhargyey died in 1995, but nevertheless, the movement has grown to include the Whangarei centre – Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling – and Thubten Shenphen Dhargyey Ling in Christchurch. The *stupa* on the Otago peninsula (near Dunedin) is a reliquary for Geshe Dhargyey's remains, and is the *stupa* about which Erich Kolig wrote a critique (1997).

I discovered this claim, that Te Waiariki believe themselves to be descended from Tibetans, on 2nd November, 2002. TV3 aired a documentary entitled *Kiwi Buddha* about the discovery of a New Zealand-born ethnically Tibetan boy, Karma Kunsang,⁸⁷ believed to be the reincarnation of a Tibetan lama. In the documentary, Walter Te Wharu Erstich, a Maori, was interviewed. He noted:

this [boy-]monk is associated with one of our common ancestors of all the northern tribes. There's a hapu (sub-tribe) whose name is Te Waiariki. They say that the waka (canoe) that they came on was made out of feathers, and it came from Tibet. Basically what they're saying is that they flew here (Carey 1999).

What are we to make of this claim? Does Te Waiariki hapu have credible connections with Tibet, even if in the dark mists of un-verifiable history? Or is Erstich tapping into some deep mythology amongst northern Maori for other reasons? Moreover, is there something that Tibetans might gain in this mythology? Do Tibetans or New Zealand Buddhist practitioners have any interest in appropriating anything in this story? If so, what, and why? What notions of place and identity may be at stake?

⁸⁷ Karma Kunsang is the son of Lama Shedrup of Karma Choeling Buddhist Monastery in Kaukapakapa.

Te Waiariki is a hapu of Te Rarawa tribe (iwi), the bordered-territory (rohe) of which is roughly located between Hokianga harbour and the town of Kaitaia, west of an imaginary north-south line roughly in the middle of the North Island. The western border of the rohe is the coast from the northern head of Hokianga harbour up to the southern reach of Ninety Mile Beach. Te Waiariki meeting grounds (marae) are Tamatea, in Motuti, and Ngatimanawa and Waipuna, both in Panguru township. There are also Te Waiariki families in Ngunguru on the east coast, north of Whangarei, as well as various families who have intermarried or moved away to other parts of New Zealand. In summary, it is not a large hapu.

If only a small hapu, it is not an insignificant people, nor is Panguru a geographical back water. Dame Whina Cooper (1895-1994) was Te Waiariki, and Bishop Pompallier (1801-1871), first Catholic Bishop in New Zealand is interned at the parish church at Motuti. Thus Panguru and surrounds has had national attention in that it is the birthplace of Catholicism in New Zealand (and also overlaps with the history of the French and the Marist brothers), as well as having had high profile due to Dame Whina Cooper's land-rights protests.⁸⁸ The Hokianga harbour itself plays a significant part in Maori immigration lore, being the place where the Pacific explorer and progenitor Kupe allegedly landed. The Spanish may also have visited, and there are also stories of Chinese colonies exploiting the flax on the coast to make ropes for shipping.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Dame Whina is noted for her major contributions to Maori political re-emergence from the 1970s due to her leadership in addressing Maori housing needs, land rights and other projects. Her highest public profile was when she led the Maori Land March to Parliament in 1975, gathering thousands of marchers *en route* and 60,000 signatures on a memorial of rights to redress outstanding grievances due to colonisation.

⁸⁹ I have not seen this documented anywhere nor is it generally part of standard New Zealand history. This was relayed to me verbally during my visit to the area. One interviewee took me physically by quad bike over the sand dunes to where there had allegedly been Chinese villages.

The legend mentioned in the TV3 documentary is carved into the side studs (pou) of the meeting house (wharenuī) at Tamatea marae, Motutū. It depicts two ancestors, Te Māwe and Rakaihautu, the former carved with wings over his head. Below these two figures is the bow of a canoe with feather motifs. The rafter beam (powhai) descending from the central ridge beam (tahuhu) and connected to the pou on the side wall has a repeating painted motif of a Tibetan lama with stylized canoe images on it. The implication is, due to the descent of the powhai from the tahuhu to the pou, that the Tibetan lama in the powhai could be understood to precede in some way, either in time or importance, the representation of Te Māwe and Rakaihautu in the pou.

In its simplest form, the story says that Te Waiariki flew to New Zealand from Tibet, and predate the Māori. Is this possible? Does Te Waiariki actually believe it in an historical sense, or does the story serve some other purpose? It is tempting to relegate the story to New Age fancies, as scholars have done in their critiques of publications like Barry Brailsford's *Song of Waitaha* (2003), which claims the existence of a pre-Māori confederation of peaceful races in New Zealand. Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney, in the introduction to *Disputed Histories* (2006), note "methodological diversification" in the assessment of New Zealand's social history, where the limits and conventions of New Zealand's history are probed, and where conventional readings of New Zealand history can be opened up for exploration and debate:

[recently] we have witnessed a flowering of indigenous histories grounded in the particular perspectives of hapu and iwi. These works are ... grounded in the primacy of whakapapa, attach great significance to oral narratives and trace the development of descent groups through the deeds of important ancestors ... Their methodological presuppositions, causative explanations and intended audience (members of the descent group itself) gives these works a very different look and feel from the mainstream of social history (2006, 12).

Apart from the oral genealogy, there is no material evidence to locate this story in historical actualities. That Te Waiariki's story has been canonised in the carvings of

Tamatea wharenui begs the question of how, and when, the story arrived at that status, and what implications the story has for Maori and Tibetan self understanding, identity, and possibly Buddhist identity.

We can assume that the legend serves a real purpose in Te Waiariki's self-understanding, for as Margaret Orbell observes, "when historical interpretations are abandoned, the marvellous events in these stories are no longer an embarrassment" (1974, 6). Te Waiariki's arrival on "feathered waka from Tibet" may well be metaphorical, emphasising the speed of the canoes, or the fame of the canoes' captains. Alternatively it could signify a spiritual, rather than a literal journey. Similar stories exist amongst other iwi: the ancestor who arrived on an albatross, the canoe that travelled along a rainbow, or ancestors who arrived riding whales, for example.

Even though myth is clearly at work here, I am not suggesting that Maori in general, nor Te Waiariki in particular conceptualise their relationships to the land in Arcadian categories, in the European, Romantic sense. Locals in Panguru and the coastal settlement of Mitimiti could name the beach (which I walked on) where the "flying waka from Tibet", the Huruhurumanu ("the many feathered bird"), allegedly landed. Maori are allied to the land, and this particular land, but in different ways. Informants in Panguru and surrounds related to me how they perceived the landscape to be alive with ancestor and spirit, and because of this, land was at the very core of both their individual and iwi identity. In broader Maori worldview, the word whenua translates both as "land" and "placenta". Natural features are not mere memorials of great stories, or markers of mythology, or representatives of great ancestors. The geographical features within a rohe are considered by some to be the actual ancestors. When I visited Hokianga harbour in March 2007, I was informed that two large rocks in

the harbour were not representative of Kupe's dogs, they were Kupe's dogs. This, accompanied by many accounts of spirit dogs in local peoples' dreams gave credence to this belief in the minds of the locals. Hence in terms of time, the past is a constant presence within the landscape where "the natural world thereby connect[s] both the spiritual to the physical and the past to the present and future" (Brown 2005, 9).

I put forward a tentative possibility as to why the Te Waiariki legend has only now come into focus, following Ballantyne and Moloughney (2006, 9). During the 1980s, historians began writing "history from below", embracing methodologies that would restore minorities to the historical record, and highlighting social inequalities. Questions of race relationships emerged, and Maori gained momentum in seeking to reclaim their cultural heritage. With the growing acceptance of the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840),⁹⁰ and the Waitangi Tribunal's work on settling land claims, "hidden histories" were given a degree of legitimacy, due to the assumption that genealogy – delivered orally, and rarely written down – could be admitted as evidence for land claims. Thus the socio-political climate was conducive for Maori to correlate their stories explicitly to land-claims (indeed, genealogies and landforms are intimately related) because large land-claims were at stake as redress for alleged colonial grievances.

While this explanation may address the emergence of Te Waiariki's story, the explanation for the unique "Tibetan-ness" of the story is embodied in the person of Dame Whina Cooper. Informants in Panguru related how the Dame, in the normal course of daily greetings, asked a local Te Waiariki elder once "what is your waka?",

⁹⁰ The Treaty of Waitangi is regarded by many as the founding document of New Zealand. It is a compact or covenant agreement between the British Crown and Maori tribes, signed at Waitangi, Bay of Islands, in 1840. The Treaty is neither constitution or statute law, but a three part broad statement of principles and promise within which both parties could work together to found a nation state, due largely to the pressing challenges faced in the mid 19th century.

that is, on what canoe did you arrive in New Zealand? This is a euphemism for “what tribe are you?” In response, the elder replied “we flew here”. This piqued her curiosity, and exploring this further, she proposed the connection with Tibet. This was mentioned on local Northland radio at one point which prompted the original visit to Panguru by the Tibetans in 1982. As part of the welcoming ceremonies Dame Whina recited the Te Waiariki whakapapa and stories to the group. She then made explicit to them what she understood to be the likely cultural connections. What motivated Dame Whina explicitly to link Te Patu nui-a-rua⁹¹ (for that is the homeland in the genealogies) with

⁹¹ Nobody in Panguru attempted to explain to me what Te Patu nui-a-rua may in fact mean, or whether there had been any linguistic work done on the actual word. The word appears on a supplementary narrative card which sits next to the pou in the wharenui at Tamatea marae. All the people I talked to (around seventeen) knew of the card, but simply accepted Te Patu-nui-a-rua as “Tibet” uncritically. My own preliminary reflection follows, based on an initial assessment by Adrienne Troughton, a bilingual scholar.

“Te Patu” means “club”, that is, the short handled weapon used in close combat. It can also mean “wall” or “boundary”. A town in Northland is called Te Patu: it is not clear which meaning the town’s name refers to. “Nui” means “large” and “rua” is the number two. With a vowel change from “rua” to “roa” (as could be possible in oral transmission), the meaning can change to “long”. Hence a translation could resemble “large long wall” (or, if “rua” is kept, then “two large walls”). Either way, it is plausible that this could be a reference to a mountain range. In the context of Te Waiariki’s whakapapa, this would mean the Himalayas. While feasible, this explanation remains highly speculative, and grammatically suspect.

I have not been able to find an official translation for Te Patu-nui-a-rua in any bilingual dictionary. Adrienne Troughton believes it could mean a number of things, though only one seems likely. Where a patu is a hand-held club-like weapon, patu can also mean “kill” or “hit”. Rua is likely to be a person’s name. It can mean the number “two”, but a name seems most likely, as witnessed in other cases like Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington), and Turanga-nui-a-Kiwa (Gisborne), where “a” means belonging to: Tara and Kiwa are the names.

Therefore, the most likely meaning would be something like “Rua’s big patu”, or “Rua’s conquest” (literally “Rua’s big killing”). In other words, the context could be one of battle. It is the use of “nui” (meaning “big”) that implies conquest. It is unlikely that rua would mean “two” in this context. If it was changed to “roa” (meaning “long”), then it would be hard to see the grammatical sense in it because the “a” means “belonging to”.

Overall, Troughton thinks “Rua’s conquest” would be the most probable meaning. It could be a corruption of “roa”, particularly if Roa is a person’s name. There is another possibility along the lines of “ancient” or “long battle”, but it’s not as grammatically feasible. If “Rua’s conquest” is the most feasible rendering, then this may refer to the arrival of a tribe in the distant past.

Patu can also mean “wall” where there are macrons on both the “a” and “u” (c.f. pātū or paatuu). It can also mean “boundary” or “edge”, and there is another minor meaning referring to a part of a waka. In the former meanings, “Rua’s wall”, or “Rua’s boundary” or “edge” would be possible. Hence a mountain range may be possible.

Without macrons, there is also the meaning of “thatch”, which could therefore leave a translation like “the thatching of Rua”. This may be a reference to the use of woven flax as the material for the sails of ocean going double hulled canoes.

Overall, my hunch, from talking with informants in Panguru, was that the Dame proposed Te Patu-nui-a-rua as “Tibet” for nothing more than a vague linguistic similarity between the words. In other words, they

Tibet may never be known. With the Dame's active involvement in the Maori renaissance, it could have been anything from wanting legitimacy for land claims, to empathy for Tibetans due to a perceived similar plight as Maori at the hands of colonial oppressors.

Dame Whina's alleged connections – derived from the stories told to her by her ancestors – have become, or perhaps represent, common lore in Panguru, Motuti, and surrounds. The Dame's proposal has not been made in a vacuum. Alleged anthropological connections are woven into the genealogy. In my interviews conducted in March 2007, hygiene rituals, death rituals, morphological similarities, and linguistic commonalities were put forward as evidence of the connection.⁹² One story has an ancestor flying from Panguru to Ngunguru (which means “thunderclap”, an allusion to the sound of his landing), imitating the alleged flying capabilities of highly realised lamas, like Tibet's famous sage Milarepa. The critical tie that was perceived to bind Te Waiariki to the Tibetans was the twinning of Mount Maunga-taniwha (“Mountain of Demons”)⁹³ in north Hokianga, and the mythical Tibetan Mount Meru (embodied physically as Mt Kailash, western Tibet). Thus the Dame's alleged connection has been placed firmly within a religio-mythical paradigm. One of my interviewees went further than this and announced a triangle between Mt Meru, Maunga-taniwha and the mountains of Hawaiiki.⁹⁴ Alternatively, like Kupe's dogs, Mt Maunga-taniwha can well

sounded similar: Te Patu – Tibet. This in my opinion is inadequate reason to make the link and will, I suspect, remain the archilles heel for the genealogy of Te Waiariki.

⁹² It is unclear whether these alleged anthropological similarities are now articulated *because* the Dame had raised the possibilities of the connection, or that the Dame had made the connection because these similarities were already so much a part of the tribal lore.

⁹³ In common parlance, a taniwha resides in water, that is, it is a water monster, perhaps informed by the shape and movement of lizards. It was the locals in Panguru who translated “taniwha” as “demon” with reference to the name of the mountain.

⁹⁴ Hawaiiki is generally regarded by most Maori iwi to be the mythical land from whence they originated. There are various arguments as to whether Hawaiiki was an actual place, with many possible Pacific islands put up as possibilities. Some argue that there is no need to even attempt to locate it as it serves a mythical purpose only.

be conceived of actually being Mt Meru. Where myth and reality are often conceived of as one in Maori worldview it seems the most natural thing for the Maori of Panguru and surrounds actually to consider a critically valid history where Te Waiariki and Tibetans are one people. Indeed, I have heard anecdotally from Maori that they believed there was a “Tibetan tribe in Northland”.⁹⁵

Finding a New Zealand born Tibetan boy as a reincarnation of a Tibetan lama may well now anchor this as a legitimate religio-cultural aspect of New Zealand’s history, and so legitimize Tibetan Buddhism as something genuinely belonging to New Zealand – perhaps a “deep” or “hidden” history – rather than a recent import. On the Tibetan side, it was Cathi Graham of the Dhargyey Centre in Dunedin who arranged the original visit. Geshe Nawang Dhargyey and attendants (Ven. Khedrup, and Ven. Thupten Gendun) as well as Ven. Felicity, an Australian nun, and two other New Zealand female practitioners made up the entourage in 1982. Another group from the Dhargyey Buddhist movement visited Tamatea marae in Motuti in 2002. It was Catholic Father Henare Tate who initiated and commissioned the carving of the pou at Tamatea wharenui as part of a general renaissance of the marae in the mid 1990s. I am not proposing that there is any scientifically valid evidence that confirms a verifiable link. What is of interest is that there is a perception of a link, and this perception is becoming widely mythologized amongst both Te Waiariki hapu, as well as Dhargyey Centre practitioners.

⁹⁵ In the course of my investigations, several Maori in Panguru and also in Hawkes Bay believed that the Dalai Lama had visited Northland, because “there was a lost Tibetan tribe there”. To verify this, I wrote to the editor of the Northland Times (Kaitiaki), as well as The Northern Advocate (Whangarei) to enquire if they had heard of or reported at all on this alleged visit. They both replied with a definitive “no”. The Dalai Lama has never visited Hokianga. Confusion has crept in due to the visit of Geshe Dhargyey in 1982, rightly perceived as a high lama but confused by many Maori with the Dalai Lama. The myth around the possibilities of the Maori-Tibet connection has grown considerably!

Much ambiguity remains. Seeking to work with pre-histories is fraught with speculation and ideology, and, as I have demonstrated, has become politicized due to the Dame's promotion of the story. The historical actuality of a waka flying from Tibet must be left as conjecture: the story serves as a tribal creation myth which gives one particular hapu a sense of identity. Is it wise to build a whole identity on the interpretation of one woman, revered and respected though she may be? The legend of Te Māwe and Rakaihautu is also found in the whakapapa of Ngai Tahu, the dominant South Island iwi. Whakapapa of other iwi also mention the Huruhurumanu waka. Nevertheless, the point is clear. For Maori, the past, present and future are co-terminus in the land. Hence consideration of new spiritualities becomes a possibility, especially when those new spiritualities also intentionally relate to the land.

This conversation regarding identity is not confined only to alleged whakapapa or flying waka. Maori have not only been accommodating but intentionally involved in blessings of the constructions of Tibetan *mandala* throughout New Zealand in 2001 and 2003 promoted particularly by the Whangarei Dhargyey centre. Maori elders (kaumatua) have participated in the dispelling of the *mandala* sand into waterways at the end of the event to appease water spirits/demons: taniwha for Maori, and *naga* for Tibetan. Maori have also participated in ritual purification ceremonies for new Buddhist temples and structures at various times and places around New Zealand (Kolig 1997, McKay 2001, Buddhist Ceremony Cleanses 2003), demonstrating a certain synchronicity and mutual empathy around issues of land purification and personal empowerment. While neither Tibetan or Maori has articulated their relationship in terms of Arcadian or utopian categories, there is in this informal partnership an idealisation of each other, and commonalities in their desire to sacralize land and history. Both have

socio-political identities at stake: Maori can appropriate tikanga-Tibet⁹⁶ to argue for longevity in the land and hence increase their profile vis-à-vis land claims. Tibetans, and Tibetan Buddhists on the other hand, may well have found a narrative of convenience: because Maori have generally been warm and cooperative with Tibetan cultural events, it gives Tibetan Buddhism a potentially more public and legitimate profile throughout New Zealand.

The buddhification of New Zealand: interconnectedness and landscape

Land and its purification – making the land and its waterways ritually pure – bring both Maori and Tibetan together (including New Zealand practitioners associated with Tibetan centres) in a socio-political locale. This seems to be an explicit attempt not only to appropriate symbols of New Zealand landscape by Buddhist traditions, but also to appropriate ontologically in some way the landscape into Buddhism, or perhaps, vice versa, to embed Buddhism into the actual landscape of New Zealand: to “buddhafy the landscape” (McAra 2007). This I propose is a second locale for Buddhist parochialism.

I have already discussed the notion that Zen practitioners in particular identify with the Buddhist concept of interconnectedness and explicitly appropriate this in their identification with environmentalism in New Zealand. Zen practitioners can be understood to be connecting in spiritual ways to the land in their practice, or alternatively, allowing the land to spiritualise them. Geoffrey Shugen Arnold Sensei, who is the New York based leader of the New Zealand chapter of Mountain and Rivers Order of Zen, explains this. Shugen has been coming to New Zealand every year (and sometimes twice a year) for twenty years to lead *sesshin*. He has observed a number of

⁹⁶ Tikanga-Tibet is my own term. Broadly, I mean simply “things Tibetan”. In a more technical sense, it can mean the cultural protocols and systems that guide life and society. In popular usage, we would normally hear the conjunction tikanga-Maori, from which I have derived the term.

unique social and geographical aspects that he says are uniquely “kiwi” amongst his students.

I think kiwis have certain characteristics. New Zealand, in terms of culture [has] a slower pace. [Kiwis] are a little less frantic [than in America]. They are very generous in hospitality and very warm and embracing people. On the other hand, kiwis have a kind of independent spirit.

There hasn't been [much change in MRO Zen to accommodate New Zealand culture]. The wrapping cloths we use for the bowls [in New Zealand] are tie-dyed in kiwi colours, but that's not that significant. But I think it's true that [kiwis in my sangha express themselves in terms of this interconnectedness and then immediately link it to right action and ecological projects]. One of those specific contexts in New Zealand is nature. Particularly interconnectedness. It's a strong part of most kiwis. It's something I recognised very early on: not just love for, but their presence in nature. Just the general knowledge that so many people seem to have about the trees and the wildlife and so on. So I think that is definitely very strong, and we have done some environmental programmes as part of our own training, and that involvement with nature is an important part of Zen.

Throughout my interview with Shugen, he made frequent comparison with his own American context, implying that by the contrasts, New Zealand culture and Buddhist practice were unique, or at least different from American. Shugen approves of the connection with nature which is done at Lake Rotoiti in *sesshin* each year, amongst the mountains and bush of the Nelson Lakes district. However, he also leads *sesshin* in the urban context of Christchurch, a context not unfamiliar to him, as he is also the director of the Fire Lotus Temple in New York city. While acknowledging that New Zealand's landscapes are a good place to have *sesshin*, he nevertheless differentiates between the location (“where people are”) and their state of spirituality (“where people are at”), emphasising the latter as more important. Thus practice in an urban context should be equally potent.

It makes sense for *sesshin* [and Buddhist practice] to be where the people [live and work], and there's definitely benefit of removing oneself and going to a place like [Lake Rotoiti] where you're nourished and supported. But when we do *sesshin* in New York city, we close the

doors, but you can hear the sirens go by and the helicopters, and people on the streets: it's very alive. And to find that stillness and that clarity within that context is very powerful, because particularly for those people who live there, they begin to develop a different kind of connection with that state of consciousness and their home: it's not associated with a place far away [where they went on retreat], where everything is quiet. They're beginning to realise that it's not dependent on *where* they are. It's dependent on where they *are*.

Indeed several gave a similar qualified affirmation on the questionnaire in which I explored whether "New Zealand is a good place to practise Buddhism". Three examples will suffice:

Anywhere, and right now is the best time to practise Buddhism. Buddhism is just another way of saying "my life". Ultimately there isn't a difference between a Buddhist life and a non-Buddhist life: This is it! How each of us thinks, feels, talks, and acts is important, but whether New Zealand is a good place to practise (or better than some other place or not) I have no idea.

There is no such place that is not good to practise Buddhism. This is the whole point – we practise exactly where we are, wherever that is and in what ever circumstances that prevail. Buddhism can be practised in any situation.

[We kiwis are] close to an understanding of 'inter-being' or inter-connectedness which is a profoundly important tenet of the Buddha's teaching. In the relatively small country that we are and the relatively smaller communities we have, we know intuitively perhaps that we are all in this thing called 'life' together.

These practitioners, in other words, have identified with New Zealand as their place to practise their Buddhism, particularly the interconnectedness of the components of the New Zealand landscape, the culture and their own lives. Or, to put it more poetically (as one respondent did):

There is no bad place ...
and I am
here.

Those in the Zen traditions (or in traditions influenced by Zen) understood their practice to connect to New Zealand through Buddhist notions of "interconnectedness",

and they experienced this, often in *zazen* meditation, in places located in unique geography. In some sense they allowed the land to “buddhafy” them, or to be the vehicle through which they had their moments of realisation. In contrast to this, those in the Tibetan traditions expressed themselves in more material ways. What I mean by this is that they connected to this land in more intentional concrete behaviours and material items, drawing on a set of different Buddhist ideologies than the Zen practitioners. Those in the Tibetan traditions acted in ways that betrayed an ideology of “buddhafying the landscape”, of materially, symbolically and ritually imposing Buddhism onto (and into) the landscape. To illustrate this I wish to reflect on three Buddhist materials: the *stupa*, the *mandala* and the vase.

When a Buddhist tradition is established in a new place, one of the priorities is to build a *stupa*. A *stupa* is a unique form of construction to Buddhism which stands alone, often near a meditation hall. It may vary in height – often well over two metres – and smaller portable *stupa* may be found on altars in temples (McFadden 2001). They are essentially circular, with a square base, and culminate with a spire. *Stupa* contain a plurality of meaning: they may be a depository of human remains (in essence a tomb), and/or of relics of the Buddha or of famous teachers. Thus they serve as a memorial. They are usually “empowered” with offerings of the local sangha which are embedded in them during construction. Various texts and inscriptions suggest that *stupa* are also considered to *be* the Buddha, or at least represent his actual presence (Snodgrass 1985, 365, Schopen 1997, 125). A *stupa* also serves a teaching function, where the various shapes within the overall structure represent aspects of Buddhist doctrine, particularly that of the mind. Because of this multifarious meaning, *stupas* become a potent location of Buddhist practice, piety and pilgrimage. They are believed in some traditions to be

power centres at which good merit can be generated.⁹⁷ The building of a *stupa* often serves as a narrative that binds a sangha together. As one British practitioner states: “so the whole process for us, from the moment we decided to build a *stupa*, became more of a mythic journey, one that involved a lot of ritual, and a lot of symbol” (Satyananda in McAra 2007, 101). Adrian Snodgrass (1985) summarizes the function of a *stupa* as reliquary, as memorial and as location for votive offerings (1985, 353).

There are eleven *stupa* in New Zealand that I have visited or know of. There may be more than this, but the most obvious ones are easily identified. Dunedin’s Dhargyey Centre has built one on the Otago peninsula, near Portobello (see Kolig 1997), while Whangarei’s Dhargyey centre completed theirs in February 2008. All three FPMT centres have large *stupas*. Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre (near Nelson), Bodhinyanarama Buddhist Centre in Stokes Valley (Lower Hutt), Sudarshanaloka (near Thames) and Karma Choeling Buddhist monastery in Kaukapakapa (near Auckland) all have *stupa*, as does a Cambodian centre in Island Bay, Wellington. Wellington Zoo has a small *stupa* as part of its promotion of the Himalayan red panda exhibit.

Erich Kolig (1997) and Sally McAra (2007) have discussed the religio-social context of *stupa* in New Zealand; Kolig the Otago peninsula one, and McAra Sudarshanaloka’s. McAra notes, quoting Todd Lewis (1997), that a *stupa* becomes “a focal point and the singular landmark denoting the tradition’s spiritual presence on the landscape” (McAra 2007, 103). In Tibetan Buddhism, a *stupa* suppresses malevolent spirits of the land, and hence has a purifying function. Because of the style of the *stupa*, and the sangha that erects it, a *stupa* also symbolises continuities of a tradition, hence it symbolically locates a narrative that is larger in space and time. Thus a *stupa* has a role

⁹⁷ The *stupa* at Chandrakirti Buddhist Meditation Centre, Upper Moutere Valley, Nelson, has an extensive pictorial display next to it, outlining what the *stupa* means, and what circumambulation of the *stupa* might achieve. The display board’s location and content clearly position it to have a didactic function.

in globalizing Buddhism: as *stupa* are built in new lands, indeed around the world, Buddhism itself is anchored into the very land itself, as well as into a long and widening historical narrative. Thus for New Zealand, these eleven *stupa* (and others to follow) will be multivalent, as Kolig clearly explains in his study of the Otago peninsula one (Kolig 1997). They announce the presence of Buddhism, and serve as locations for piety. They are symbols which link Buddhism in New Zealand to a global and historical narrative. More importantly they are symbols of localisation, announcing enduring presence but also vanquishing local spirits. In essence they are matériel which buddhafies the landscape, permanently anchoring Buddhism into location.

The Tibetan style of *mandala* also buddhafies the land, but in different ways. The *mandala* is a circular sand sculpture laboriously created by monks over a number of weeks. It has complex ideology invested in it: suffice it simply to note that it is a symbol of both physical and spiritual aspects with representations of myth and deity contained within. Unlike *stupa*, *mandala* are not permanent matériel, nor are they uniquely located. Rather, on completion of the construction, the *mandala* is broken up and the sands ritualistically poured into a nearby body of water. This dispelling is to remind the practitioners (and observers) of the Buddhist notion of transience and impermanence (Benson 2006): the pouring into the waterway is offered as a “gift to all beings, to our region, and the wider biosphere and our universe” (Peter Small in Benson 2006).

Mandala have been periodically built and dispelled throughout New Zealand over the last ten or so years. The most public ones were part of the “*Mandala* Tour” of 2001/2002, initiated by the Dhargyey Centre in Whangarei, which were built in every major city and town throughout New Zealand. It was followed up in 2003 by a

“Reconnection Tour”. What is significant with the *mandala* is that it has drawn in the participation of local Maori kaumatua who sympathise with the cultural aspects of the Tibetan art work, but also willingly participate in the blessings of the construction of *mandala*, and the subsequent dispelling of the sands into a local river or lake (Buddhist Ceremony Cleanses 2003). Where Tibetans are interested in restoring the balance of water spirits (*naga*), Maori are interested in appeasing taniwha (water serpents/spirits). Not only is Buddhist matériel used symbolically to dissipate Buddhism locally (rather than imbed it, as a *stupa* might), but it is regarded by both Maori and Tibetan-Buddhist in a multiconceptual way of cleansing the land from perceived spiritual pollution, and restoring it to some ideal state.

Similarly, a group based in New Delhi, going by the name of Siddhartha’s Intent,⁹⁸ is slowly placing “peace vases” in what they describe as key locations throughout the world.⁹⁹ The instigator of this project is one Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (1910-1991). These vases are essentially treasure vases (*tergum*) which are packed with significant empowering materials (much like a *stupa*), and then placed in “the major oceans, lakes and rivers, holy places, places of war, strife and ecologically degraded or endangered natural sites”, to protect “against misfortune and promote positive, healing energies” so that there is “created a sustained, harmonic environmental grid that pervade[s] the surrounding area”.¹⁰⁰ So far over 4,000 have been placed around the world including eighteen in New Zealand. According to Siddhartha’s Intent’s website, the placing of the vases in New Zealand has been completed.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ <http://www.siddharthasintent.org/> (Accessed October 13th, 2008.)

⁹⁹ <http://www.siddharthasintent.org/peace/index.html> (Accessed October, 13th 2008.)

¹⁰⁰ Quotes are taken from Siddhartha’s Intent’s website, October 13th, 2008.

¹⁰¹ These places are two in Auckland, and two in the Southern Alps, with one in Christchurch, Cook Strait, Dunedin, Fiordland National Park, Great Barrier Island, Lake Taupo, Mount Cook, Stewart Island, Takahue, the Tasman Sea, Tongariro National Park, Waiotapu, Waitomo Caves, and Wellington. There has been a certain pragmatism in placing these due to denial of access or the impracticabilities of reaching

Several dynamics are at work in Siddhartha's Intent's location of peace vases throughout New Zealand. The idea with the vases is that they "cover" the whole country. In other words, they could be understood to be symbolically claiming the country as Buddhist. This is not an innovation necessarily. Songsten Gampo (617-650), Tibet's first Buddhist king is said to have ritually nailed down the Tibetan demoness Srinmo (an archetypal variant of the Mother Earth figure) when he built the Jokhang temple in Lhasa (Trimondi and Trimondi 2003). Additionally, much like *stupa*, Siddhartha's Intent is incorporating New Zealand into a global programme: the means of representing the connection is the commonality of peace vase placements. Thirdly, the peace vase project is only one of several material and social programmes that are conceptualised as a *mandala* itself, named the Khyentse *Mandala*, named after the founder of the organisation, which socially and geographically encircles the globe.¹⁰² Lest it be thought that this is an external group that is imposing its agenda onto New Zealand and its landscape, Siddhartha's Intent is represented by a group called Buddha Down Under, founded in Auckland in April, 2003.¹⁰³

Thus through *stupa*, *mandala*, and vases, New Zealand's landscape is being buddhified by Buddhist matériel. In the Tibetan context, Victor Trimondi (2003) demonstrates that the act of "nailing down [Srinmo] is repeated at the construction of every Lamaist shrine, whether temple or monastery and regardless of where the establishment takes place – in Tibet, India or the West" (Trimondi and Trimondi 2003: Part II, chapter 2). Outside these three matériel, New Zealand based Tibetan lamas

the more significant aspect of a site. For example, one in Auckland is on Mt Eden, but not on the summit, as one might imagine it should be. It is located in Eden gardens at the foot of the mountain. See <http://www.siddharthasintent.org/peace/australia/nz.htm> (Accessed April 26th, 2008.)

¹⁰² <http://www.khyentsefoundation.org/pdf/mandala.pdf> (Accessed April 26th, 2008.)

¹⁰³ <http://www.siddharthasintent.org/centres.htm> (Accessed October 13th, 2008.)

continue to do *puja* around the country that are landscape based. For example, during the electricity crisis of 1993, when the southern lakes were at an alarmingly low level, Lama Samten visited Lake Tekapo in the winter and did “a number of *pujas*” by the lake to “placate the [*naga*] spirits that lived in that area” and to bring “natural balance [back to] the MacKenzie basin”. A week later, the lakes had filled to the point where “the government was confident enough to announce the end of the crisis” (Herrett 1993). I myself attended a ceremony at Ahuriri beach, Napier on September 21st, 2003, the International Day of Peace, for a water purification *puja* conducted by Lama Samdup and attendants. It was conducted “to purify the waters of the Napier harbour” as a contribution to world peace. Additional Tara *puja* were said. Tara is the “earth touching” deity and thus, by implication what was ritualised was a grounding in the very land and water of Napier. That it was done on the International Day of Peace meant that there was an implied global context for the *puja* uniting the forty one practitioners and observers on the day with many others around the world.

That public Tibetan Buddhist rituals are becoming more common throughout New Zealand raises the questions as to what issues of identity are at stake. Can the alleged link between Te Waiariki and the Dhargyey Buddhists be seen as a “Buddhafication of the landscape”? When Te Waiariki claim that they “flew” here from Tibet, before the Maori did, they are claiming in essence to be a Tibetan tribe preceding the more recognised Maori arrival in New Zealand. Then to claim that some of their cultural rituals are informed by Tibetan rituals, and by implication by Buddhist ideology is to locate themselves in historical and geographical priority to Maori. While serious questions can be raised over the historicity of this connection, nevertheless, it is now there in the perceptions of both Te Waiariki and Tibetans in New Zealand, and those New Zealand Buddhist practitioners associated particularly with the Dhargyey tradition.

Moreover, that Te Waiariki continue to note the alleged connection between Mt Meru and Mt Maunga-taniwha again is an example of the staking of Buddhist mythology into the landscape of New Zealand.¹⁰⁴ While I do not suggest that Maori or Tibetan are in any way explicitly conceptualising this connection in an Arcadian sense, nevertheless there is an idealisation of both the Tibetan culture (and by implication its religion) and the priority of locating it in “our” place, that is New Zealand.

Conceptualising New Zealand as a Buddhist Pure Land

I wish at this point to explore a third locale in which Buddhism in New Zealand is becoming parochial. One interviewee, Ella Brewer,¹⁰⁵ identified herself ethnically as of the Maori iwi Ngapuhi. Ngapuhi’s iwi borders the rohe of Te Rarawa (of which Te Waiariki is a hapu); in other words, Brewer’s identity (mihi) is located in Northland, both in geographical and cultural proximity to Te Waiariki.

While not explicitly aware of any stories linking Te Waiariki to Tibet, she was nevertheless articulate and animated in interview about general alleged Maori connections with Tibet. I quote her at length here to demonstrate how she makes her case: firstly on New Zealand as a place to practise Buddhism, but also that she believes that New Zealanders in general intuitively link the land with their own restorative needs.

[New Zealand is a good place to practise Buddhism] because it’s quiet, it’s clean, and it’s peaceful. There’s lots of advice [in Buddhist traditions] about where one should go in order to meditate. I wish I could give you the exact master who said it – it’s a modern master, someone like Sogyal Rinpoche – said that ‘if the external environment is good, then meditation will happen just by itself’. And I think a lot of kiwis

¹⁰⁴ It would be wise to note at this point that the Mt Meru mythology may be informed more by the Bön religion which was in Tibet before Buddhism arrived from India. Either way, “Tibetan Buddhism” as a tradition, is by definition that expression of Buddhism which has incorporated Bön or other forms of central Asian shamanism.

¹⁰⁵ Ella Brewer has given written permission for her name to be used throughout the following discussion.

know this. They're all just natural meditators. They all just want to go to the beach. They just want to sit there and look at the water. So many kiwis do this.

She then frames this in karmic categories:

They go to their little refuge, the bach.¹⁰⁶ It's like a whole nation of people with [karmic] imprints to withdraw from the busyness and just relax. So I think in New Zealand there's this real consciousness about how nature is restorative and even though people do insane things like kill things all day long in the water, there is this peace, this serenity that comes.

Brewer trained as an artist in the University of Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts, and has specialised in Tibetan *thangka* painting. A *thangka* is a unique form of Tibetan art – usually a wall hanging – depicting some aspect of the Buddha or a *bodhisattva*, and used in ritual and meditation. Moreover, Brewer explicitly introduces the Buddhist notion of the Pure Land into her *thangkas*. The Buddhist Pure Land gives its name to Pure Land Buddhism, which prioritizes the three *Sukhavati-vyuha* texts (*sutra*) and is a tradition of Buddhism significant to millions in East Asia, particularly Japan. While much of its history and teaching is complex, simply put, the sect of Pure Land Buddhism posits that there is a Pure Land called Sukhavati into which one can be saved by the Buddha Amitabha (Gomez 1996/2002).¹⁰⁷ The Pure Land is not an ultimate temporal destination in the sense of the Christian idea of heaven, but rather a “Buddha field” – a state of existence over which a Buddha presides – in which the dharma can be practised unimpeded and from which one can then achieve *nirvana*. In the *sutras*, the Pure Land is variously conceptualised by way of visions of various Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*. In general, it is paradisiacal, containing beautiful fountains, abundant gems and pavilions of gold, soft light, golden sand, lotus blossoms and the

¹⁰⁶ A bach is a sea-side or lake-side holiday home in New Zealand. In the south of New Zealand, they are referred to as “crib”. A bach/crib traditionally has usually been a building with some history to it: they tend to be quaint and weather beaten, extended eclectically, and cluttered holiday paraphernalia.

¹⁰⁷ Variations of this basic theme exist, including spellings. I have used the sanskrit words.

likes (Gomez 1996/2002, 146). Pure Land Buddhism is a Buddhist school containing several sects. However, Pure Land notions are not confined solely to this school.

Brewer explicitly raises the possibility of conceptualising New Zealand as a Buddhist Pure Land:

Like this piece of land [here at the Dorje Chang Institute, Avondale, Auckland]: when Lama Zopa was checking, doing divinations as to whether we should buy it, he came out with ‘oh, this is a piece of Sukhavati. This is a piece of [the Buddha] Amitabha’s Pure Land fallen to earth’.

Granted, a Tibetan lama originally suggested the idea, but Brewer explains:

The Pure Land of Tara is called the Land of Turquoise Leaves. New Zealand is unbelievably green. It is a fantastic place to meditate. Just because there are not many people and it’s a very soft [landscape]. Even when we do a *mandala* offering, we imagine this offering and we imagine this Pure Land to the Buddhas and one of the descriptions is that the ground is soft and free of sharpness; you know in Tibet there are a lot of sharp rocks and stuff. New Zealand is probably the only country in the world where you can be a hobbit, and you can walk around bare foot. There are no snakes. There’s no nettles. There’s hardly anything that will get you.

For Brewer, the answers for New Zealand’s “unique challenges” could be realised through an appreciation of New Zealand as a Pure Land:

I think there’s enormous potential for New Zealand if we really realised how hungry people are for spiritual food and a good environment to do that in. It would be wonderful for that to be incorporated into the New Zealand psyche, I think. For a start, it’s a fantastic way for the economy. If we don’t hold on to what we’ve got, which is so precious, we’ll just turn into another great big mall.

It is this possibility of New Zealand being a Buddhist Pure Land that Brewer expresses in her *thangka*:

What’s important to realise is that the *thangka* are not pictures of Tibet. They are pictures of the deity’s Pure Land. But they’ve been painted by a Tibetan with a Tibetan’s idea of what a Pure Land looks like: everybody recognises these now as a Tibetan genre of art. So I’m not really interested in painting Chenresig over the Auckland Harbour Bridge, or Tara walking down the High Street in Sydney, or whatever.

In one particular *thangka*, commissioned for the Chandrakirti Centre, Brewer calls on Buddhist ideology and Tibetan art motifs to conceptualise New Zealand as a Tibetan Buddhist place. Brewer does this by locating the goddess Tara in her Pure Land, depicted as an idealised New Zealand landscape, and in particular the landscape of western Nelson province, visible from Chandrakirti.¹⁰⁸

My idea is that what you're showing is the Pure Land and the ideal environment, as well as the deity. However, because of the nature of creativity, I will always make a New Zealand Buddha because I can't do anything else, because I am a New Zealander with New Zealand eyes, New Zealand education and so on.

The most kiwi artwork I've done is one painted for Chandrakirti and it has the skyline of what you see when you're at their *gompa*, looking out across to Mt Arthur. So the landscape is a local New Zealand one. And there's a little kereru (wood pigeon) and things that indicate that this is Tara's New Zealand Pure Land. But it's not New Zealand. It's a transformed landscape, just as the deity is the human being with hindrances transformed into an enlightened being, so is the environment a transformed environment where there is no pollution and everything is pure and in a nature of bliss. If you are in a Pure Land, everything you touch, see, taste and smell is of the nature of bliss.

It is in this notion of New Zealand potentially being a Buddhist Pure Land, that Brewer then explicitly appropriates an Arcadian notion. The *thangka* is obviously a New Zealand scene – the Mt Arthur range – but Brewer calls it a “transformed landscape”: this landscape is still New Zealand, but it has been purified and idealised. Brewer further conceptualises New Zealand as a salvific paradise for humanity should some natural disaster befall the world:

We have expectations ourselves that New Zealand is sort of ‘God’s own’ – it’s this sort of Noah’s Ark of refuge for the whole world. New Zealand is clean and green.

This impulse, that New Zealand is in some way a Pure Land, or is home because it can become a Pure Land, is also imagined by Sally McAra, in her study of the FWBO

¹⁰⁸ To view this *thangka*, go to <http://www.pureview.co.nz/green-tara2.html>

centre of Sudarshanaloka (McAra 2007). She believes that the members at the centre were “making an unfamiliar place into one that feels like home”, and in this they resembled immigrants “who attempt to make unfamiliar places resemble homelands through imaginative work” (McAra 2007, 150). In other words, immigrants particularly – whether people who have physically moved to New Zealand from an Asian homeland, or a “spiritual immigrant”, that is someone who has moved into Buddhism by choice – often seek to “make an unfamiliar place resemble home”. They would normally bring with them their religio-cultural “baggage” and impose it and invest it into the socio-geographical landscape of the new place. This is in effect what Geoffrey Moore (2004) argues in noting that Vietnamese immigrants find “cultural solace” in their Auckland temple.

However, in contrast to this, McAra argues that the FWBO members have made a familiar place, that is a very normal Coromandel valley that has the flora and fauna of New Zealand, as well as representations of modernist and colonial history, into somewhere exotic: indeed Sudarshanaloka means “Land of Beautiful Vision”. Where Brewer artistically conceived of a “transformed landscape”, the Sudarshanaloka residents are physically making their property into a Pure Land. This has been effected by embedding into the land *stupa* and other religious symbols. These symbols are both Buddhist and kiwi (particularly related to Puriri and Kauri tree). This transformation into a “land of beautiful vision” has also been achieved by the writing of a new narrative. This is a narrative of the “culture they have invented, a dynamic stream of being and becoming that is continually, creatively reshaped and renegotiated by its constituents and inseparable from them” (McAra 2007, 150). McAra concludes that it is through their interactions with the land and the discourses they have about those

interactions that those New Zealanders who have adopted Buddhism out of choice will continue to transform their own “land of beautiful vision” (2007, 151)

Creating a Pure Land through the practice of ethics

Context influences the meaning of a word, and “conversion” and “identity” are no exceptions. I have demonstrated that “taking up the practice” is a type of conversion metaphor. New Zealanders who identify with Buddhism understand themselves to be practitioners, and their practice is in the main meditation. This is consistent, on the whole, with other studies in the West. James Coleman (2001) for example, in his survey of 359 Buddhists, concludes that “if there is a single characteristic that defines the new Buddhism, it is the practice of meditation” (2001, 14). However, my study offers another dimension, and it is in this further dimension that I posit a fourth parochialism. This is the personal practice of ethics.

In his study of the Pacific Zen Centre (California) in the 1960s, Steven Tipton recognised that “practice” for a Buddhist, included “all activity” pertaining to the Zen centre he was studying (1982, 100). While this perhaps could have been understood implicitly in my auto-narratives, only one further activity to meditation was clearly articulated. “Taking up the practice” – and I have alluded to this throughout the thesis – is also about taking up the practice of a certain ethical framework. This is a conscious orientation to good that is embedded in several of the narratives. “Taking up the practice” is in both meditation, and adoption of the ethical precepts of Buddhism.

Fifteen of the interviewees talked of taking up the precepts of ethical practice as part of their “taking up the practice of Buddhism”. They both meditated and reordered their lives to be more in line with an explicit ethical code outlined by Buddhist textual

orthodoxy. Eight of these interviewees were Zen practitioners who had a set formal pathway of rites to progress through. Across Buddhism, especially in its Asian contexts, subscribing to the ethical code is often associated with ordination: one “takes up the [ethical] precepts” when ordaining. Also notable is that for those interviewees who had participated in the Three Refuges ceremony, there had often been an invitation to take up the precepts as well. Not all interviewees accepted the invitation, preferring to remain “lay” in the broadest sense of the word.

The precepts are collected around five key ethical injunctions common to all traditions. Traditionally they have been formulated as personal vows to desist from non-virtuous deeds of body and speech, but in their Western context, have often been restated as positive injunctions. In my tour of various sites in New Zealand, it was not uncommon to see these five posted somewhere publicly or readily accessible in brochure form in centre foyers. From the wall in the courtyard of the Dorje Chang Institute, Avondale, Auckland:

1. Protect life – do not kill
2. Practice giving – do not steal
3. Be honest – do not lie
4. Respect relationships – do not misuse your sexuality
5. Stay always aware – refrain from intoxicants

At times, additional vows may also be undertaken. For example, at Chandrakirti, there are an additional ten vows displayed on a public notice board:

With kindness and compassion and the aspiration to attain enlightenment
we:

1. cherish all living things
2. be generous without attachment

3. maintain discipline
4. speak the truth
5. reconcile adversaries
6. speak gently
7. celebrate other's good qualities
8. be content
9. be kind towards each other
10. trust the law of cause and effect

In addition, some of the interviewees talked of taking *bodhisattva* vows. A *bodhisattva* is a Buddhist who dedicates their entire being towards a single goal, that is, to bring about the release from suffering of all sentient beings. In the words of the Dalai Lama: "the bodhisattva ideal is the aspiration to practise infinite compassion with infinite wisdom" (Gyatso 1990, 225). With my interviewees, it was expressed more simply as a vow to help all sentient beings through to enlightenment. For example interviewee Natalie Prenter:

[so I took] the *bodhisattva* vow, and the precepts in front of the whole sangha, and [I was saying] that [I'm] putting the dharma first. So it's like we're not just doing it for us, it's for the sake of all beings. You don't receive all these amazing teachings and then it stops here: there's got to be a flow.

For others, like Graeme Rice, it simply meant "helping others".

The *bodhisattva* vow is a huge consideration. [Our teacher's] aspiration is to help cultivate beings who are willing to go and help others in whatever capacity, to enrich what they're already doing, and to use that vehicle to help others.

In their Western context, the ethical precepts are often regarded as ethical principles to live by, rather than formal vows to take preceding ordination. Most introductory books on Buddhism outline the precepts, and place them in their historical,

social and personal contexts (see for example Gombrich 1988, Harvey 1990, Lopez 2001). Because of this, I wish not to delve deeply into the precepts or discuss Theravadan and Mahayana nuances, or whether there are five, eight, ten or sixteen.

Rather I wish only to note that they exist, and that some of the interviewees articulated that “taking up the practice” meant “taking up the ethical practice of living by the precepts”. In this there was a conversion – a change – to a new code of living. This is consistent with what the Buddha allegedly taught, that purity was better than birth (Lamb 1999, 84). It can be argued also that King Ashoka converted to Buddhism for ethical reasons: when he realised the devastation he had wrought on the people of Kalinga, he adopted Buddhism because of its ethics, as he sought to lead his new empire in a more peaceful way. Similarly, Ambedkar led the Untouchables into Buddhism for ethical reasons: that they would receive a better lot in life because of a new way of living offered to them in the Buddhist precepts. In the New Zealand interviewees, “taking up the practice” was not only the taking up of meditation, but taking up a new ethic as well.

Steven Tipton (1982), in his study of three countercultural groups in the 1960s (which included a Zen group), concluded that their members wanted to make moral sense of their lives. In a similar way, by taking up of a new ethic, practitioner-Buddhists embrace new moral meaning for themselves, but they also offer to New Zealand a moral framework for society. In their auto-narratives they reformulated how they had become good through the ethical practices, as well as articulating their intention to continue to become good. Others explicitly outlined how if they “meditate more” they will generate more good *karma*, and this will benefit New Zealand, because good effects will arise from the good causes (their meditation, or their intentions when meditating). Where

New Zealand offered to practitioners a “home” in which to practise meditation and ethics, practitioners now offer to New Zealand a moral imperative and agenda by which New Zealand can become a better place. They perceived this in a wide variety of ways: several were committed to environmental activism; most voted left due to a perception that the left offered a more liberal and hence favourable context for Buddhism. Several expressed alarm regarding New Zealand’s agricultural and fishing sector due to the mass killing of animals. Others simply articulated that meditation and chanting would make New Zealand “more peaceful”. If New Zealand was “a good place to practise Buddhism”, then they were determined to keep it that way, and this they conceptualised as active creation of and commitment to peace, compassion and caring communities.

Thus the Pure Land of New Zealand is both a context for Buddhist practice, and Buddhist practice – ethical behaviour – on the other hand creates a Pure Land. The Pure Land is good: it is a good place, an eu-topia (Collins 1998). It is good in that it is “good for practice” – practitioners can meditate well and can practise their ethics – and it is becoming good in that practitioners intentionally seek New Zealand’s welfare by undertaking good behaviours, dictated by the ethical precepts they have adopted.

An explicit example of this is in the auto-narrative of Patricia Rutland who says that “real” Buddhists are the ones practising ethics, and these ethics are tied to the law of *karma*:

Rutland: Well from [taking refuge] on you can say you’re Buddhist. But to *really* be classified as Buddhist, you have to be observing the law of cause and effect. Practising morality. *Karma*. People can say ‘oh, I’m Buddhist because I did a refuge ceremony’, but [if it’s] from the heart, you should be following the law of *karma*.

Kemp: What does that mean in practice?

Rutland: Practising virtue: not killing, not stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lies, no harsh speech, all that stuff: practising virtues.

Otherwise there is no distinction between someone who says they're a Buddhist and someone who isn't. So the main thing is practising virtue. [The list of ten ethical behaviours on the wall] is the foundation, really, of ethics.

In other words, by practising virtue as defined by the ten precepts she is following, good *karma* will be effected. This good *karma* will benefit not only herself, but New Zealand society as a whole.

Kemp: Tell me about this law of cause and effect for you. [Are you] trying to create good *karma*? How does that all work?

Rutland: Well it's not really a religious thing even. It's more how to keep society together. Because imagine if nobody killed, nobody stole, there was no sexual misconduct, no lies – those four things, wouldn't this world be a better place? You don't have to be Buddhist; you don't have to believe in anything. Not kill, not steal, not lie, and no sexual misconduct. So it's not particularly a Buddhist thing, although it's a foundation – it's a universal cornerstone of how to live a good life. So really that's why you do it. You want to live a life without problems. You don't want to have more suffering than you need. So the way to reduce your suffering in this life, and they [the lamas/the teaching] say in the next, in our future lives, is to restrain your behaviour now.

This dynamic inter-relationship of society and self – which I have articulated in the Pure Land metaphor and suggested can be embedded in the Arcadian myth – is nuanced in this auto-narrative when Rutland explicitly notes that this ethical behaviour is done so as to have reflexive benefits for herself. If she practices virtue, so society will improve. If society improves, it allows her (and by implication others) to have an opportunity to practise the essence of Buddhism which is an action by the self, that is “meditation on the true nature of reality”.

Kemp: So by behaving [with virtue] you're creating good *karma* ?

Rutland: Yes, good *karma*. So if you don't kill anything, you're not going to get killed. If you don't steal anything, you're not going to get stolen from. And if you don't tell lies, you're not going to be cheated. And then if you have a life that's free of problems, then your mind is going to be happier, and more freed up to practise *the essence of Buddhism, which is meditation on the true nature of reality*. And most people can't do that because they're so wound up in their whole story about some drama that's going on, that they haven't got time to pull their senses back in to do the core practice. (Italics mine.)

However, I am unsure from this micro-narrative whether Rutland is referring to the benefits to New Zealand society as a whole, or to reflexivity back onto the individual practitioner. Ultimately, is Rutland more interested in benefiting New Zealand society by intentionally acting towards the four key ethical behaviours she mentions, or is she more interested in gaining her own benefits, that is, to have a better opportunity to “practise the essence of Buddhism, which is meditation on the true nature of reality”? Is she being altruistic, or selfish? Perhaps it is both. She benefits from New Zealand as a Pure Land, and she also contributes to New Zealand becoming a Pure Land.

The above example reminds us that moral views and ethical principles may well become an amalgam of several ideas, and indeed have points of inconsistencies. Despite ambiguities in the above example, there is not necessarily a wedge between the practice of meditation or the practice of ethics. In the narrative analysis I did in chapter four, I isolated and analysed four worldview factors across the micro-narratives. When interviewees talked of the practice of meditation and the practice of ethics, they were often inseparable in a micro-narrative. Often the factor I designated as “involvement” was precisely about ethical behaviour. For Zen practitioners, moral ambiguities may well be dissolved in the act of meditation. A highly regulated ritual, with sixteen ethical imperatives for the Mountains and Rivers order did not suppress an ethic of spontaneity or direct self-expression and situational responsiveness. Steven Tipton (1982) found this also with the Zen practitioners he studied: “in Zen you express your ‘Big Self’ through a meditational orthopraxy and moral rules, instead of simply ‘doing your own thing’ (1982, 109).

It was precisely in meditation, or because of meditation, that the ethical imperative came to life. As I have mentioned already, for Stephen Webster, “everything we do off the cushion informs what we do on. And everything on the cushion informs what we do off. As you connect with everything [in meditation on the cushion], you have compassion on all, this is a ‘selfish compassion’ I guess, because it is also you”. In contemplating the interconnectivity of all things, for example, so one might be motivated to save all things. In meditating on the doctrine of no-self, one might experience the rise of compassion for a neighbour, because there is no ontological difference between you and your neighbour. Tipton (1982) recognised this when he observed that, in the case of Zen, its “realisation of monist pure awareness engenders an attitude or disposition of character at the heart of its ethic: ‘a love-compassion-gratefulness-awe for the people and things of this world’”. Tipton noted that this attitude of compassion was outside of likes or dislikes and subjective wants or interests. Compassion, as it arose through meditation “amounts to a cardinal moral virtue that gives rise to behaviour in accord with Buddhism’s moral precepts” (1982:102). Meditators may then be conceived of as actors playing a role in theatre. Using this metaphor, Richard Sennett (1976) suggests that “man as actor arouses belief” (1976, 35). Without the acting (meditating), belief (the demonstration of compassion as important and necessary) would otherwise not be forthcoming. The logic of the interviewees is as follows: to make a compassionate contribution to New Zealand society (to aid in the creation of a eu-topia, a “good place”, or a Pure Land) then meditation must be the highest priority. Indeed, several believed that their “role” (to use Sennett’s metaphor of the theatre) in New Zealand society was solely to meditate.

Conclusions

I have sought in this chapter to demonstrate four locales where Buddhism in New Zealand can be seen to be parochial. I have brought these four locales together under the general rubric of idealised place or Pure Land. The first was the socio-political locale of the Te Waiariki-Dhargyey Buddhist conversation where identity was being explored by each party with reference to each other, as they sought to appropriate schemes to give themselves legitimacy. The second locale was in the buddhification of the landscape, where landscape was conceived of as something that needed purifying, and again, both Maori and Buddhist found themselves with commonalities in this desire. Ultimately this desire for a “pure land” finds expression in a third locale, articulated by Ella Brewer, in the soteriological expectation of the Buddhist Pure Land as outlined particularly in Buddhist *sutras*. To create this Pure Land as a real place in New Zealand, a personal fourth parochial locale was offered in the notion that “taking up the practice” was also articulated as committing oneself to Buddhist ethical principles. In doing this one was aiding in the creation of an eu-topia, a “good place”.

In some sense, these four locales – or very similar locales – could be articulated as representative of Buddhist peculiarities in other Western countries. However, what brings these together in a unique New Zealand expression is that “home” is linked to land: Dhargyey Buddhism and Te Waiariki are joined by vested interest in the history and future of land; buddhification is of land; paradisaical notions are to do with land. More specifically, it is this land – our *turangawaewae*, the place where New Zealanders stand – that gives these parochial notions unique valence. The creation of eu-topia, a “good place” – because of the exercise of ethical principles – was not just any or every place: eu-topia was particularly *this* place, that is New Zealand. Because of the

foundational myth of Arcadia, this land offers to Buddhism a potentially unique place that stories Buddhism differently than in other Western nations.

These four locales could be held loosely within a culturally iconic idea which has become an international marketing slogan: “‘100% Pure’ Land”. This represents a certain parochialism that is emerging in New Zealand Buddhism, demonstrating a potential conjunction of Arcadia and the Pure Land. Particularly within Buddhism in this location, New Zealand, a practitioner may well find the potential in a 100% Pure Land in which there is a unique opportunity for the restabilizing of the self. In this, New Zealand itself is conceived of as a place of salvation, that is, a Pure Land in which one can practise better than in other places, and hence speeden one’s journey towards enlightenment.

Conclusions

“A society can be said to have come of age when it begins to live by the light of an imaginative order of its own”

Charles Brasch

Introduction

Issues of identity have been woven through much of the preceding material. To conclude, I would like to focus more specifically on the implications of my material for specific configurations of identity in the New Zealand context. In commenting on the lack of public support for the sesquicentennial celebrations in 1990, one journalist suggested New Zealand is a “teenage nation”¹⁰⁹ because, much like a teenager, New Zealanders ask teenage questions about themselves: “who am I?” and “who are we?”. Charles Brasch suggested that a society will have come of age when it can live by the light of its own “imaginative order” (Wilson 1981, 172). I wish not so much in this last section to discuss whether a new imaginative order exists in New Zealand, but to assume that, since the journalist’s comments were made eighteen years ago, some growing up has occurred. Nevertheless, questions of identity continue to be forefront in the psyche of the nation, but in different ways. In this final chapter I wish to posit some possibilities as to how Buddhism might find a place within New Zealand’s growing “imaginative order”, and perhaps contribute in some way to a deeper understanding of who a Buddhist New Zealander might potentially be.

In this concluding chapter I wish to do two things. Firstly to review briefly the general flow of the thesis, precipitating out some final reflections on conversion, identity, and the establishment of Buddhism in New Zealand. I will do this in a summative fashion, but will highlight some final comments on sangha, leadership, and

¹⁰⁹ I regret being unable to cite the journalist, but the comment has stuck with me over the years.

the potential for a national movement to evolve. In the latter half of this chapter I gather the thesis together within the conceptual domain of *turangawaewae*. *Turangawaewae* is a Maori concept utilized broadly for notions of identity. Literally, it is the “place to stand”. Not only is it a Maori word, but it continues to gain traction, like many other Maori words, as part of the New Zealand English dialect. Practitioner-Buddhists in New Zealand are offered a *turangawaewae*, a place to stand, due to the socially liberal context of New Zealand pluralism, but more specifically, *turangawaewae* is a *place to stand*: not only is it a notion of identity, but it conceptualises an imaginative order in which the re-stabilised self can find a home, and particularly a Buddhist home, in a physical place, New Zealand.

Conversion, identity, and the establishment of Buddhism in New Zealand

By the end of 2008, Buddhism had been established in New Zealand in ways that reflected both ongoing influence from overseas sources, as well as parochial imaginings. It would be judicious to recognise that taking an exceptionalist stance on Buddhism’s history in New Zealand could prove to be problematic. However, Buddhism in New Zealand is being significantly shaped by local factors as well. No doubt, issues of conversion and identity will continue to be played out as Buddhism continues to be established.

Conversion to Buddhism is a possibility in New Zealand, if conversion simply means “change” to a new religion. However, in the New Zealand context, conversion to Buddhism is more nuanced and complex. The Buddhist rite of taking refuge, while defended by some as the prescriptive rite of conversion, continues to be problematic for many. Embrace of Buddhism varies, and self definition is expansive. On the whole, the interviewees of this study were intentional actors in their own journey towards

Buddhism, rather than passive converts. “Taking up the practice” was the broadly accepted and understood euphemism for moving from not-Buddhist to Buddhist, and, in the main, it was to the practice of meditation. New Zealanders took up the practice of meditation for both negative and positive reasons.

Consequently, their preferred identity is as practitioner, that is, someone who does Buddhist meditation in the first instance. In addition, they conceived of themselves variously as doers of virtuous deeds to gain karmic merit, as well as intentional doers of ethical behaviours. In the telling of their stories, practitioners revealed an ongoing pragmatic identity, where belief followed and often interpreted the practice they had embraced. Orthopraxis, at least initially, was often more important than orthodoxy. This is not to ignore belief however, or reduce Buddhism to mere action. Rather, as belief followed practice in time, it more importantly interpreted the practice, and so offered a new worldview. As practitioners continue to tell their stories, either self-reflexively, to their sangha, or to outsiders, their identity will continue to take shape.

The arrival of Buddhism in New Zealand can be explained by conceptualising both sending and fetching mechanisms. Additionally, some have proposed that New Zealand has a propensity to import culture. This may be a symptom of New Zealand’s young identity or simply due to its remoteness and comparatively short history. Miles Fairburn for one, has suggested that because of these factors, New Zealand has been predisposed to becoming an “unusually heavy borrower of other cultures” (2006, 167). This is the irony of exceptionalism. New Zealand culture is a pastiche, and if exceptional, then only so in the distinctiveness of the pastiche. Buddhism, like popular culture, has been constructed from elements imported from Britain, the United States

and Australia (and elsewhere),¹¹⁰ and these international expressions potentially overshadow local developments.

That Buddhism continues to be sourced from overseas should not be a surprise. The “convert”/practitioner-Buddhism – if we continue to allow a “two Buddhisms” typology¹¹¹ – is imported mainly from Western sources, even though its various sectarian expressions continue to look remarkably like their original Asian roots. Other religions in New Zealand, notably Christianity, source much of their inspiration from Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.¹¹² Sally McAra (2007) suggested the word “bricolage” to describe the identity formation at Sudarshanaloka. “Bricolage” and “pastiche” may well be words that describe religion in New Zealand in general. Will a corporate narrative emerge, in which the various Buddhist lineages seek to find common ground – perhaps a new “imaginative order” – and consequently construct a unique New Zealand Buddhism? To ask this question does not mean that uniformity is a virtue or that commonalities are necessarily desirable. Quite the contrary, for New Zealand continues to move toward ever diverse pluralities, and indeed celebrates this. By being novel and recent, Buddhism as a broad construct may well be able to write itself into the narrative of New Zealand society and culture because so much of New Zealand’s narrative itself is relatively novel, recent, and still being written.

If a new “imaginative order” is conceived, and religious expression in New Zealand – of whatever shade – can be broadly considered to be a “bricolage” or

¹¹⁰ Asia too is of course a source of Buddhism, and even popular culture now. The familiarity of *manga* comics, and Japanese martial arts competitions, sitcoms and reality shows on New Zealand television are examples of this. However, this thesis has been chiefly about “conversion” rather than the “baggage” Buddhism of immigrants, and so I refrain from exploring immigrants’ Buddhism further.

¹¹¹ Paul Numrich argues persuasively that the two Buddhisms typology should continue to be considered. After a detailed survey of the history of the typology, he posits that scholars should continue to acknowledge its “validity” because its “potential has not yet been exhausted” (Numrich 2006, 223).

¹¹² This is reasonably easy to identify: Alpha (England), Hillsong (Australia), Promise-keepers (U.S.A), New Wine (England), Forty Days of Purpose (U.S.A) are a few recent examples of imports.

“pastiche”, then the way is open for Buddhism itself to find a socio-cultural niche and stabilize in New Zealand just as New Zealand itself culturally stabilizes from its “teens” to its “coming of age”. Where vertigo may occur for an individual, it may also occur for a religious tradition. When an ancient tradition undergoes a cross-cultural translation, conceptually, temporally and geographically, then instability occurs. Vertigo is experienced by that tradition. This is plainly evident in interviewees’ stories of the trials involved in trying to get Buddhism established in New Zealand. These trials were variously described, and are periodically reported on in the media. There are socio-cultural barriers that need to be overcome by New Zealanders.¹¹³ Town planning regulations for the placement of *stupa* and buildings are to be negotiated.¹¹⁴ Acquisition of residential visas for Tibetan lamas are to be supported.¹¹⁵ Legal battles over lineage and reincarnation are to be fought.¹¹⁶ Internal authority issues are to be negotiated.¹¹⁷ These and other issues are not necessarily unique to New Zealand, and have already occurred in American Buddhism and elsewhere in the West. These challenging dynamics are normal when a new religion arrives in a new location: a new religion is more often than not reconceptualised and newly interpreted. How Buddhism fits within the imaginative order of New Zealand may well be determined by its unfolding narrative of success (or otherwise) as to how it translates into New Zealand society, a society which itself is seeking to stabilize in its cultural pluralities.

¹¹³ One interviewee, for example, related how she consistently gets mistaken in public for being a Hare Krishna devotee.

¹¹⁴ Erich Kolig (1997) noted the dramas around getting the Otago peninsula *stupa* built due to town planning rules. The proprietors of Chandrakirti related how a neighbouring farmer refused resource consent for proposed new buildings at Chandrakirti.

¹¹⁵ Several centres have had challenges getting residency permits for Tibetan lamas. Dorje Chang Institute for example, sent out an email to its mailing list on October 11th, 2006 appealing for support in the process of getting Geshe Thupten Wangchen registered. DCI was appealing to Hon. David Cunliffe, the Minister of Immigration to throw his weight behind the application.

¹¹⁶ There have been extensive wranglings over the legal ownership and right to occupy the Karma Choeling Centre in Kaukapaka related to the controversies as to which claimant to the Karmapa’s reincarnation is genuine. See “Court Halts Buddhist Case: Dispute a Spiritual not Legal Matter, say Appeal Judges,” *The Dominion Post*, June 19th, 2006, 2.

¹¹⁷ For example, interviewee Daniel Owen related how sexual indiscretions in the leadership of New Kadampa caused a rapid and radical restructure of the national leadership in 2007.

Even though Buddhism continues to translate into New Zealand, I have demonstrated that it is stabilizing in New Zealand, and unique parochial locales can be identified. I have argued that this is as much about the receptivity of New Zealand worldview as it is about any inherent expansivist impulse there may be in Buddhism. I offered Arcadia as a concept that encapsulated how New Zealanders perceive themselves, and argued that it was in this notion that a parchment was offered to Buddhism on which to write its own story. Arcadia is an already existing conceptual religio-cultural receptor. Many practitioner-Buddhists believe New Zealand is a good place to practise Buddhism. “Home” serves as a powerful sign, or metaphor. “Home” is Arcadian, an idealised place. The combined narratives of the new Buddhism are potentially sacralizing New Zealand, creating a conceptual Pure Land, or for some, an actual Pure Land here on earth. Practitioner-Buddhist commitment to environmentalism, the buddhification of the landscape, the practice of Buddhist ethics – these are all perceived as means for purifying the land. Thus we are free to conclude with Leone that “religious conversion is primarily a conversion of meanings” (2004, 173). This is a “new language” or a new set of metaphors which other Buddhist practitioners can understand, and this new language is of home, Arcadia and potentially, the Pure Land.

Where there are signs of emerging stability, there are concurrently signs of risk. Buddhism reflects dynamics in New Zealand culture, but also interprets New Zealand culture in new ways: it is both mirror and lens. Arcadia is both a desire within, and a critique of New Zealand society. It encapsulates something about what we want to be, or we think that in fact we can be, as well as critiquing what we are not. Where Te Waiariki Maori and Dhargyey Buddhist appropriate each other’s mythologies, they may well, as Paul Ricoeur (1986) suggests, be appealing to a sort of “escapist” notion

implied within the notion of Arcadia (1986, 17). Te Waiariki appeal to the mysteries of Tibet to aid in the construction of their own identity, while Dhargyey Tibetan Buddhists appeal to alleged connections to pre-Maori peoples to locate themselves in New Zealand socio-political discourse. Both these notions are escapist in as much as they are pre-historical and speculative, and hence pose some risk. Yet they do serve a purpose to those who propound them. They seek to legitimise the proponents' existence generally, but more specifically locate both Tibetan-Buddhist and Te Waiariki in a notion of home as identity.

This is only one explicit example of how identity may be worked out. Further constructions of identity in this particular landscape will no doubt be contested. A number of essays in the May 2008 edition of *Landfall* discuss this very notion. In the editorial, it is suggested that the “romantic re-enchantment of the land”¹¹⁸ is now worth reflecting on, because it, together with the “landscape pagan myths”, is reflected widely in our literature and national branding. The re-enchantment of place – a return to considering a spiritual dimension to life and location contra to the experienced aridity of modernism – is popular and persistent. To re-enchant New Zealand is to entertain both safety and risk. Buddhists are now part of the broader pluralistic cultural shape of New Zealand: each lineage tradition continues to form its own community, and practitioners may belong to and practise within these communities. Yet Buddhists also construct for themselves personal identities, and are content in their individual-ness: they are perhaps, the virtuosos of meditation, the quintessential archetypal “man alone”.

¹¹⁸ I am aware that “re-enchantment” is a theory in its own right, developed by Christopher Partridge (2004, 2005), Jeffery Paine (2004) and others. I do not mean to engage in depth with this theory, other than to note that the contributors to *Landfall* draw on it to conceptualise their writings. I use it loosely to mean “re-spiritualising” vis-à-vis the perceived aridity of the Enlightenment/modernist project.

If this is the case, they do not restrict themselves solely to Buddhism. When eclectic, they celebrate their eclecticism. They build their own identities in a DIY spiritual marketplace, much like Robert Bellah et al. (1996) identified in one of their interviewees. Sheila Larson described her own faith as “Sheilaism”, a self construct, which was “my own little voice. [Sheilaism is] try to love yourself, be gentle with yourself. Take care of each other” (1996, 221). Larson’s sentiments were common amongst my New Zealand interviewees. The ideal of transcending the limitations of psychological anxiety, or social discord, or self-limitation were common notions throughout my New Zealand examples. A spirituality of self transcendence and self empowerment is appealing for New Zealanders as it has been with Americans. To this end, New Zealanders appropriate spiritual tools from a variety of sources, including Buddhism.

However, if all that Buddhism contributes to New Zealand is an endorsement of individualities, then it risks marginalisation in an ever growing pluralistic society. If Buddhist practice is merely functional, and nothing more, then Buddhists are destined to be meditators alone, and little else. If the modernist project resulted in a dry rationalism, devoid of spiritual dimension, then re-enchantment can be understood as being to do with integration, reconnectivity, and re-spiritualizing of space. Buddhist practice needs to go beyond personal meditation to be able to find a place to contribute to the wider society. The fifteen practitioners whom I interviewed who had identified and articulated ethical practice, may represent an essential impulse amongst Buddhists through which a genuine contribution to society can be made. While I have not dealt specifically with it, mainly because none of the interviewees offered it, Engaged Buddhism offers an institutionalised way forward where sanghas can pull together and contribute to New Zealand society in concrete ways. Engaged Buddhism, conceived and conceptualised by

Thich Nhat Hanh and others, is a socio-political movement which invites Buddhists to demonstrate spiritual qualities and ideals through active social and political projects. The Amitabha Hospice in Auckland is the only institutionalised form of Engaged Buddhism that I have found in New Zealand to date. This seems odd, in that Engaged Buddhism has quite some momentum in some Western countries (see for example Queen 2000).

A practical engagement – an intentional agenda to create an eu-topia – may well fit with perceptions of what it means to be religious in New Zealand. The religious sects that carry respect in New Zealand are often those who are perceived to have practical social outworkings, like the Salvation Army. If “taking up the practice” includes a commitment to a new ethic, then Buddhism in New Zealand may function as a renewal impulse. If, for whatever motivation, some New Zealanders behave better, and they call on fellow New Zealanders to do likewise, then Buddhism surely serves a good function. New Zealand will continue to become an eu-topia, a good place, a Pure Land. This will be so, because Buddhists intentionally act to make it so.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Buddhism will become the dominant worldview or religion in New Zealand. Secular hegemony mitigates against this, even though it is readily demonstrable that New Zealand has a history of experimentation with alternative spiritualities. Buddhism, like any other new arrival in New Zealand, risks being manipulated politically, marginalised, or exploited as a marketable fashion. If practitioners remain only meditators, limited to introspection and the functions of their own minds, then there will be little transformation of New Zealand society. Transformation of society does begin with each individual, and in the Buddhist sense, as the individual transforms his or her own mind. Nevertheless, meditation must go hand

in hand with ethical action, and several interviewees recognised this. To do this, there needs to be an on-going nourishment in sangha, where sangha can help to bestow identity, but also be transformed by the very presence of each individual. Most people need the nurture of communities that have moral traditions that reinforce their own aspirations.

What should sangha look like? What types of networks, or support groups are possible for Buddhists in New Zealand? All but a very few of the Buddhists I have talked to locate themselves in recognisable lineages: sangha is one of the three treasures, along with the Buddha and the dharma. If they did not formally take refuge in them, then more often than not, they still seek to practise and live within their general orbit. All the lineages claim to go back to iconic historical figures, like Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), even the Buddha. Some lineages come more recently through Western contexts. If a lineage group is merely a support group where people are “alone together” (Wuthnow 1994, 3) then there would be little civic consequence because they will remain a collection of people with common interests, but with few meaningful interactions. Several lineages – Wangapeka, Bodhinyanarama, Sudarshanaloka for example – are experimenting with new ways of residential sanghas and the intentional building of alternative communities. If New Zealand continues to embrace an intentional pluralism – and there is every indication it will – then its social structure will include not only Buddhist immigrants, but practitioner-Buddhists (that is, “converts”) and their sanghas.

To this end, I suggest that the findings of this thesis challenge the broadly accepted notion of convert/ethnic Buddhism on at least two fronts. Firstly, the boundaries of Buddhism are not well defined in New Zealand, or rather, if definable, are

porous. If one can be a practitioner, that is, do meditation informed by Buddhist technique and not have to commit to rite, ritual or dogma, then multiple belonging is possible. Therefore there does not need necessarily be any sense of “conversion” in terms of a ritualised unique moment or event (although, as I have mentioned, practitioners more often than not still identify with a lineage tradition).

Secondly, if ethnic Buddhists can “take up the practice”, as three interviewees at Fo Guang Shan said they had, then ethnic Buddhism’s boundaries are also porous. Chinese immigrants to New Zealand who come with their own cultural form of Buddhism may well articulate a conversion narrative or describe a conversion event in which they changed from culture-influenced-Buddhist to convinced-practising-Buddhist. In addition, Fo Guang Shan is going to extraordinary lengths to “localise” and attract the pakeha population of Auckland. Nevertheless, Fo Guang Shan looks very different to an austere Zen *sesshin* amongst the mountains of Nelson Lakes National Park, comprising pakeha practitioners. Yet both have committed practitioners amongst them who are New Zealanders (although of differing ethnicities). So-called ethnic and convert sanghas may be mere communities of convenience, more to do with social structure and expectations than with anything inherently Buddhist.

Harnessing this spectrum of expression has been attempted periodically in the possibilities of forming a New Zealand Buddhist Council. There have been three attempts at this, the earliest probably being in 1956 (Spuler 2002, 140), with the most recent being in early 2006. A certain sectarianism worked against it initially, and on the second try, alleged embezzlement of funds set it back. The most recent attempt seeks to bring a combined voice to common issues, as described by interviewee Amy Wright who is one of the initiators of the Council:

[Buddhist groups in New Zealand] have quite a lot of common problems that we don't talk to each other about, so energy is being used to do things that we could be saving energy on if we were comparing notes. And one of those issues which is quite pressing is immigration laws, around the requirements especially for work visas and permanent residency. And what it does is disadvantages Buddhist groups because what they can usually do is get somebody in on a work visa but then it's hard to get the permanent residency, and so that person will go back [to his home country], and somebody else will come, and so you don't get the continuity of leadership, and you don't get the leaders learning about New Zealand society. They're here for a while and then they go back and you don't get the integration happening.

Continuity of leadership is crucial for the ongoing viability of some Buddhist groups. Viability was a concern because of the belief that Buddhism had something worthwhile to offer to New Zealand society, and it could do this best by ensuring stability in its leadership. Thus the intention of the formation of a united Buddhist voice is to be able to contribute in an ethical sense to New Zealand society. A “stable belief structure” (Savage 2003) in New Zealand may be less important than a stable practice and ethical contribution.

A united Buddhist Council may well offer some institutional stability, although the awkward history of attempts to get one going may pose further problems. Nevertheless, stability, I suggest, is a vital component of identity. To know oneself is to experience cohesion and integration of the self: in other words, to be stable. A growing stability is demonstrated in the interviewees' use of domestic language, in particular the language of “home”. “Home” can be understood as representing the sentiments of Arcadia, where “home” is in the unique socio-geographical landscapes of New Zealand. Arcadia and the Pure Land merge when “home” is both present and future, both temporal and paradisiacal. Thus “home” can be conceptualised as a semiotic device where one can reconstruct the self into a “stable identity” using a new language. The

new language is as much about a practitioner telling their auto-narrative as it is about conceptualising New Zealand as an Arcadia or a Pure Land.

For a Buddhist practitioner (a “convert”), New Zealand is both Arcadia (because the practitioner is a New Zealander) and potentially a Pure Land (because the practitioner is Buddhist). Their personal narrative of “how I took up the practice” is part of the socio-cultural narrative of New Zealand itself. This potentially stabilizes the self’s identity now, in this moment in history, in geographical place (New Zealand’s landscapes), cultural metaphor (Arcadia) and religious expression (Pure Land). Thus this “new language” of the self also offers a teleological potential where the safety of a geographically and culturally located home is the present context in which a Buddhist future can be created. This “stabilized self” can be in a present temporal Pure Land (New Zealand itself, temporal and concrete), or a future Pure Land (either temporal or ethereal), something that the practitioner, by ethical engagement or meditational consistency can assist in creating.

Turangawaewae: a place to stand

I propose that a Buddhist future in New Zealand can be conceived of in the light of an imaginative order informed by the Maori concept of *turangawaewae*. I have chosen to use this term not only because it carries congruent etymological and cultural meaning for my purposes, but because it is a unique New Zealand term. Martin Sutherland (2001), for example, has appropriated the term to discuss issues of identity amongst New Zealand Baptists. In the interests of conceptualising how Buddhism may possibly have some sort of unique identity in New Zealand, it makes sense to explore a concept that belongs to New Zealand. *Turangawaewae* encapsulates both stability and identity. Etymologically, it is derived from *turanga*, meaning “foundation” (like the

foundation of a house), and waewae, which means foot/feet. Therefore it means the “firm/foundational place where my feet stand”. It is commonly used to denote identity, both in common Maori parlance, but more and more within New Zealand English dialectical usage. One’s turangawaewae is the “place where one stands”, that is, the place from which one takes his or her identity. This identity is derived from a place of stability. One’s turangawaewae is both physical place (perhaps one’s marae or birthplace) and one’s social place (family, genealogy).

From turangawaewae – the place where one stands – one is able to construct one’s mihi. The mihi is the triple identity of one’s mountain, one’s river, and one’s genealogy that one uses in formal greeting rituals. These are bold images of stability and place. Hence, because I was born in India, I can claim the Himalayas as my mountains, the Ganga as my river, and my genealogy (whakapapa) traces back fourteen generations to the Shetland islands. Part of my whakapapa is being able to name the waka (canoe) – or in my case, the immigrant ships – on which my ancestors came to New Zealand. On my mother’s side, HMS Peter Henry and on my father’s side the USS Niagara. This in essence gives me identity in a tribe, that is the “tribe” of immigrants, particularly those from the Shetland Islands. The recitation of mihi as part of the ritual greeting process in public events in New Zealand is becoming common place. These protocols are certainly influenced by Maori culture, but they are becoming more and more mainstreamed within the broader culture.

That pakeha New Zealanders are able now to appropriate these elements of Maori protocol is indicative that identity is dynamic and multivalent. Because this is so, we can now ask how might the second chapter of Buddhism’s narrative in New Zealand read? Where might the turangawaewae of Buddhist practitioners be? How might they be

able “to stand” in a recognisable socio-cultural place in New Zealand? New Zealand practitioner-Buddhists have chosen to embrace a new worldview – new ways of viewing the world, and constructing realities – and they have done this by locating their Buddhist practice in a variety of Buddhist traditions that have growing vitality in New Zealand. In the concept of *turangawaewae* Buddhism can now articulate being *of* New Zealand in as much as it is in these mountains, amongst these rivers, and with identifiable lineages/genealogies. These are bold landscape images, representing strength and longevity. Similarly, individual practitioners may now be able to recite a *mihi* from a place of stability: “I am a Buddhist practitioner. I practice in the unique landscapes of New Zealand. I can trace my tradition’s lineage back through these particular masters”. In essence, Ella Brewer, in conceptualising New Zealand as Tara’s Pure Land in the *thangka* she painted has, perhaps unintentionally, provided a new “imaginative order” in offering to Buddhists a way of conceptualising *turangawaewae*, that is, their identity.

Brewer’s Buddhist practice is worked out, amongst other disciplines, in *thangka* painting. She has imagined New Zealand as a better place, a Pure Land. The Pure Land is a land of bliss and purity. In general, Buddhism claims to offer a path to happiness, and New Zealanders continue to view the country as a playground of “100% Pure” landscapes, in which one can play and be happy through indulging in a wide selection of extreme sports. If New Zealand can offer extreme sports as a path to happiness, then surely New Zealand can offer Buddhism as an “extreme [spiritual] practice” as a path to happiness as well? If in fact New Zealanders are a frontier nation of innovators – or at least we perceive ourselves to be – then this is quite a reasonable idea. This may be pushing the metaphors too far, but why not? Is it not also possible to conceive of New Zealand as a “100% Pure Land” in a Buddhist sense? The place where Buddhists stand

– their turangawaewae – is both a physical Pure Land, but also a cultural place of identity. If pleasure and the pursuit of it is fundamental in our cultural psyche – we live in an Arcadian ideal place – then it seems that Buddhism may well offer both personal and social means to happiness, and offer a thrilling ride in the process?

If we reduce Buddhism in New Zealand to a mere “100% Pure Land” sound-byte with little further definition, then it offers the possibility of reconceptualizing what actually counts as Buddhism. This I raised when discussing the census data in chapter two, and this will remain an ongoing challenge. The category “Buddhism”, like “religion” does not have agency. It is interpretive and hence open to constant re-negotiation. Additionally, Buddhist practitioners are self-reflexive by the very nature of the meditation they do. Hence Buddhism will continue to be a challenge to simplistic notions of meta-narratives, like globalization, because Buddhist practice is not simply the result of external forces. Its very shape and nature is determined internally, both in the minds of its practitioners and the sanghas in which they locate themselves, as much as culturally or politically. The culturally located sense of turangawaewae is a foil to the meta-narratives that may pressure Buddhist expressions in New Zealand to be merely derivative of what happens elsewhere.

These various challenges are representative of the ambiguities around and the de-regulation of religious symbols, perhaps due to the decline of institutionalised religions in the West. When symbols are de-regularised, they can be exploited in new ways. In the case of Buddhism’s coming to the West, and particularly New Zealand, this is not necessarily something to mourn. Rather, as I have demonstrated, Buddhism is sourced not only from Asia, but also from other western nations. Hence there is the real possibility that Buddhism will lose control over its own symbols. This may or may not

be celebrated: Buddhism may begin to look “less Buddhist” or “more Buddhist”; it may begin to look less western and “more Kiwi”, precisely because New Zealanders will be able to manipulate the symbols differently. Thus New Zealand Buddhists may well have opportunity to define their own *turangawaewae*: they will be able to stand in a place of identity, the symbols of which they themselves control.

However, Buddhism is still linked firmly to lineage controls at this stage, and will continue to be so into the foreseeable future. This will, no doubt continue to influence identity. Those whom I interviewed usually reveled in their exotic associations, whether they were sourced from Tibetan, Japanese, Thai, or even American traditions. There is little indication that in the future, Buddhist traditions that are currently represented in New Zealand will weigh anchor from Asian shores. It can be argued that even those lineages claiming to be innovative for the West, like FWBO, are still, by their very nature, defined by lineage. Even with New Zealand’s own Wangapeka movement, lineage is “offshore” from Canadian sources.

These lineage controls must not detract from the possibilities of forming a unique place to stand. I have proposed that New Zealand can be conceived of as a “100% Pure Land” only because of the endearing (and enduring) image of the ideal society that New Zealanders continue to embrace in the myth of Arcadia. The mythology of Arcadia is itself a narrative. Conceptualised in Virgil’s writings, appropriated in European literature, blended with colonial aspirations in New Zealand, it is a story of emerging identity. While recognising that Arcadia is contested, I have committed myself to one position. There may well be other ways of talking about New Zealand’s history and its appropriation of interpretive metaphors.

If New Zealand is still a teenage nation, asking teenage questions of itself, then ideology, especially imported ideology will continue to be contested in the public arena. I have conceptualised a home for Buddhism drawing on one of New Zealand's arguably deeply embedded cultural symbols, Arcadia. Arcadia may well be both a place of arrival and departure. Arcadia provides an open page on which to continue to write a Buddhist narrative. Buddhist traditions may conceptualise themselves further as within a Pure Land in New Zealand, and thus capitalise on a socio-historical impulse – that New Zealand is perceived to be 100% pure, at least in its landscapes – that is contained in the very worldview of the nation. However, Buddhist traditions may also depart from here, for Buddhism's notion of the Pure Land is larger than just New Zealand or one particular Buddhist expression. Our New Zealand history is an extension of the Enlightenment modernist project as mediated through colonialism, but it is also a history of a Pacific nation where now the notion of tangata whenua – the people of the land – is contested. Will Maori capitalise on the offerings of Tibetan Buddhism and/or will the Tibetan Buddhist traditions continue to seek legitimization by calling on alleged Maori connections? Where Buddhism is now part of the West's historical narrative, and New Zealand is part of the West, so Buddhism can become a part of New Zealand's narrative.

This “imaginative order” is birthed out of our history, from the memory of relationships and ideas, and in particular, from our historical appropriation of an Arcadian worldview. Today, our identity as a nation is nurtured in experiences of current relationships, relationships which are only possible because of the socially liberal pluralistic society we cherish. Taking up the practice of Buddhism and identifying with Buddhist traditions, from whatever sources, is now a viable option.

In sum, this thesis offers a challenge: Western Buddhism must not neglect geographical and social place. Buddhist identity in New Zealand can be said to be tied to land, and this because so much of New Zealand self-identity itself is related to land. Identity is often created in relationship to a place – *turangawaewae* – in physical geographical locations, and in the cultural locales where people stand. In New Zealand, people do construct for themselves identities associated with the land, and not any particular land: it is with *this* land. The land is their *turangawaewae*, literally, the place where they stand, that is, the place where they have (and form) their identity. In notions of ecological interconnectedness, or the buddhification of the landscape, or the ecological responsibilities that come out of Buddhist ethics, or in whatever future socio-cultural locales may emerge from a new “imaginative order”, so New Zealanders may well continue to find resources to construct Buddhist identities that are unique to these islands.

Appendix 1: Buddhist Groups Mentioned¹¹⁹

Bodhinyanarama Buddhist Monastery

Rakau Grove, Stokes Valley, Lower Hutt, Wellington.

Website: <http://www.bodhinyanarama.net.nz/>

“The Bodhinyanarama community has its roots in the Theravada Buddhist tradition, more specifically in the ‘forest’ meditation tradition as taught by the Thai meditation master Ven. Ahan Chan, and his senior western disciple, Ven. Ajahn Sumedho”. (From the website.)

Dhamma Medini - Vipassana Meditation in New Zealand (S.N. Goenka)

153 Burnside Rd., Kaukapakapa.

Website: <http://www.medini.dhamma.org/>

“Vipassana is a practical technique which enables one to lead a more positive, balanced and happy life. This path of self-development through self-awareness is remarkable in its simplicity, its lack of dogma and above all its results. The basis of any healthy, harmonious society is always the healthy and harmonious individuals who populate it. Only if each individual has a pure, peaceful mind can we expect peace in society”. S. N. Goenka. (From the website.)

Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

22 Royal Tce., Dunedin.

Website: <http://dhargyey.org.nz/>

“The Dhargyey Buddhist Centre in Dunedin is a charitable incorporated society founded in 1984 for the study and practise of Buddhism under the guidance of the senior Tibetan Lama, Gen Rinpoche, The Venerable Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey. To our great sadness he passed away in August 1995, since which The Venerable Jampa Thupten Tulku and The Venerable Jampa Khedrup Lhagon Tulku have assumed the role of spiritual guides. A commemorative *stupa* has been built for Gen Rinpoche and it was finished and consecrated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in September 1996”. (From the website.)

Dharma Gaia Garden – Centre for Mindful Living and Meditation.

608A State Highway 25, 3 kms south of Manaia village, Coromandel peninsula.

Website: <http://www.dharmagaia.org/>

Informed by the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh.

“We cannot say that Dharma Gaia is only a physical entity situated in time and space. It is true that one aspect is this physical address, a place with buildings, gardens, pond and gently swaying hammock. However, Dharma Gaia is also this moment – right now, right here ... you reaching out in curiosity, the miracle of technology and our chance to offer you a lotus flower and a smile of human warmth and connection. We do not have so many words here at Dharma Gaia. We have wonderful conditions which enable us to simply stop ... to rest deeply into the present moment, to be supported by incredible natural beauty,

¹¹⁹ All websites listed in this appendix were checked as accurate on May 1st, 2008.

tranquillity and stability and to simply come home to our own true nature”.
(From the website.)

Diamond Sangha Zen

c/o 4a Mayroyd Terrace, Nelson.

Website: <http://www.zendo.org.nz/>

“Robert Aitken Roshi and his wife Anne founded the Diamond Sangha in 1959 in Hawaii. This lineage now has thirty-six teachers world-wide including Ross Bolleter; Roshi in Perth, and Mary Jaksch Roshi in [Nelson] New Zealand. Glenn Wallis Sensei is based in Dunedin. As the lineage has roots in both the Soto and Rinzai schools of Zen, Diamond Sangha teachers offer both *Koan* study, and *Shikantaza* (‘just sitting’). Diamond Sangha is a lay lineage, not a monastic lineage, with the ideal of bringing to our practice the joy and pain of everyday life”. (From the website.)

Fo Guang Shan (Buddha Light International)

2 Stancombe Road, Manukau, Auckland.

Website: <http://www.fgs.org.nz/ibt/main.htm>

“Fo Guang Shan seeks to propagate Buddhist Teachings through cultural activities ... to foster talent through education ... to benefit society through charitable programs ... and to purify hearts and minds through Dharma functions like Taking Refuge in the Triple Gem and Undertaking of the Five Precepts, Meditation Retreats, Eight Precepts Retreat, etc.” (From the website.)

Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT)

Chandrakirti Meditation Centre

289 Sunrise Valley Rd., Upper Moutere, Nelson.

Website: <http://www.chandrakirti.co.nz/>

“The Chandrakirti Centre is a Tibetan Buddhist study and meditation centre, situated on a beautiful five acre property in the rolling hills of the Nelson countryside. FPMT is a world-wide network of over 120 centres under the guidance of renowned Tibetan master, Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Inspired by the visits to Nelson of Lama Zopa and his Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1996 and 2002, the centre aims to promote the wisdom, compassion and love that is at the core of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and practice”. (From the website.)

Dorje Chang Institute for Wisdom Culture (DCI)

56 Powell St., Avondale, Auckland.

Website: <http://www.dci.org.nz>

“Dorje Chang Institute for Wisdom Culture is a Registered Charitable Trust and Tibetan Buddhist Centre offering meditations, classes and a peaceful, beautiful oasis in the city. It is open to all. [Our aim is to] serve others by creating the conditions for people of all interests and inclinations to contact, study and practice the teachings of the Buddha”. (From the website.)

Mahamudra Centre for Universal Unity

Main Rd., Colville, Coromandel.

Website: <http://www.mahamudra.org.nz/>

“Mahamudra is a Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Centre established in 1981 under the guidance of two Tibetan lamas, Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Mahamudra centre is a charitable trust and a member of the FPMT, an international organization which has over 150 centres, hospices and projects worldwide. The purpose of an FPMT centre is to offer the timeless wisdom and methods of Buddhism as a means to attain the highest human and spiritual potential, especially those taught by the great 15th century Tibetan teacher and meditator, Lama Tzong Khapa. These methods act as antidotes to our everyday experiences of anxiety, fear and agitation and help to create instead, experiences of joy, compassion and understanding, not only for oneself but for everyone”. (From its website.)

Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO)

Website: <http://www.fwbo.org.nz/>

Auckland Buddhist Centre

381 Richmond Rd., Grey Lynn, Auckland.

Website: <http://www.aucklandbuddhistcentre.org/>

Wellington Buddhist Centre

64 Cambridge Tce, Wellington.

Website: <http://www.wellingtonbuddhistcentre.org/>

Sudarshanaloka

Tararu Valley, Coromandel Peninsula

<http://www.sudarshanaloka.org/>

Thames Buddhist Centre

701 Pollen St., Thames.

Website: <http://www.sudarshanaloka.org/thames-centre.html>

“The Western Buddhist Order, and Friends of the Western Buddhist Order are world-wide organisations founded in 1967/8 by The Venerable Ugyen Sangharakshita, an English Buddhist monk who spent twenty years studying and practising Buddhism in the East. Upon returning to England in 1964 he saw the need for a new interpretation of the teachings of the Buddha, a reinterpretation firmly rooted in the timeless fundamental principles of the Dharma that would speak to the modern Western mind and heart. In 1967 he founded the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and a year later conducted the first ordinations into the new Order”. (From Sudarshanaloka’s website.)

Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling

159 Parakiore Road, Kamo, Whangarei.

Website: <http://www.mandala.org.nz/>

A sister centre to Dhargyey Buddhist Centre, Dunedin.

“Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling is a Tibetan Buddhist Centre in the Mahayana (Gelug) tradition, and was founded in 1997 by Venerable Thupten Tulku Rinpoche. There are three resident monks living [at the centre] all from Sera Je Monastery in Southern India, [as well as] English Tibetan Buddhist nun, our spiritual coordinator who comes from Holland. We offer a regular teaching programme and retreat [with] Geshe-la and a special teaching programme from visiting lamas and western teachers. Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling is run by a Board of Trustees, whose responsibility it is to assist and guide the centre in its growth.” (From the website.)

Karma Choeling Tibetan Buddhist Monastery

66 Bodhisattva Rd, Kaukapakapa.

Website: <http://www.kagyu.org.nz/>

Kagyupa sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

New Kadampa Tradition (NKT)

Website: <http://www.meditate.org.nz/>

Bodh Gaya Buddhist Centre

43 Ganges Road, Khandallah, Wellington.

Amitabha Buddhist Centre

345 Broadway Ave, Palmerston North.

“New Kadampa Buddhism [is] a pure but modern and accessible presentation of the ancient wisdom of Buddhas. The meditation and Buddhist practices taught at our centres are proven, easy-to-use methods that are suitable for everyone, whatever their level of interest. Whether you seek simple relaxation or wish to pursue inner peace and happiness through the Buddhist path, we have something to offer. Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso is a fully accomplished meditation master and internationally renowned teacher of Buddhism”. (From the NKT website.)

Phuntsok Choeling – Hawkes Bay Tibetan Buddhist Centre

10 Herschell St., Napier.

Website: <http://www.phuntsokchoeling.co.nz/>

Phunstok Choeling is in the Sakyapa sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

“Our vision is to have a thriving Dharma Community in Hawkes Bay , with a resident teacher based in a Dharma House, with an ever-expanding library and schedule of events and teachings. Under the spiritual patronage of His Eminence Chogye Trichen Rinpoche and his successors we hope to be able to enjoy and offer to all beings in the Hawkes Bay region the cool blessings of enlightenment. As of April 2006, Phuntsok Choeling became a registered charitable trust.” (From the website.)

Soka Gakkai (SGI-NZ)

6F Laptop House, 23 Waring Taylor Street, Wellington.

Website: <http://sginz.org/>

“Based on the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism, the core philosophy of SGINZ can be summed up by the concept of “human revolution”. This is the idea that the self-motivated inner change of even a single individual positively affects the larger web of life. It is this dynamic process of self-reformation – from fear to confidence, from destruction to creativity, from hatred to compassion – and the resultant rejuvenation of human society that forms the essence of SGI’s vision of a peaceful world”. (From the website.)

Wellington Insight Meditation

c/o 31 Hobson Cres, Thorndon, Wellington.

Website: <http://insightmeditation.org.nz/>

“As well as the above health benefits, the ultimate purpose of meditation to explore what sustainable wellbeing means for all of us. Through a gradual process of inquiry and self discovery, meditation can assist us to renew our sense of sacredness, connection, and respect for all life”. (From the website.)

Zen Institute of New Zealand (Mountains and Rivers Order)

PO Box 30057, St Martins, Christchurch.

Website: <http://www.mro.org/smr/content/view/15/28/>

“The Zen Institute of New Zealand, SMR Inc., (ZENZ) is a national non-residential Zen Buddhist training organization associated with the Society of Mountains and Rivers (SMR), an international society of Zen Buddhist Centres that are part of the Mountains and Rivers Order (MRO). The spiritual leader of the order is John Daido Looi Roshi, abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery, located in Mount Tremper, New York. The Monastery serves as the main house and international training centre for the Mountains and Rivers Order. ZENZ members meet regularly for *zazen*, intensive retreats, and other activities throughout New Zealand, and provide Zen training and guidance for all persons interested in the practice of Zen Buddhism. There are currently sitting groups organized in Auckland, Christchurch, Nelson, Wellington, Manawatu”. (From the ZENZ website.)

Appendix 2: Schedule of Participant Observation

September 20th – 21st, 2003.

Napier. *Mandala* Reconnection Tour (JTDL and Phuntsok Choeling –

Gelugpa/Sakyapa)

“Greet the lamas” afternoon tea

Public talk by Ven. Geshe Sangey Thinley;

Informal interviews and conversations with participants

Participant observation at beach-side “Water Purification” *puja*

November 17th, 2003.

Stokes Valley, Lower Hutt. Bodhinyanarama Buddhist Centre (Thai Forest -

Theravadan)

Tour of site.

Informal interview with resident Ajahn and others

November 17th, 2003.

Wellington. Wellington Buddhist Centre (FWBO).

Tour of site

Participation in meditation and teaching for beginners.

Informal conversations with custodian and participants

November 18th, 2003.

Upper Moutere, Nelson. Chandrakirti Centre (FPMT).

Tour of site.

Informal interviews with directors and residents.

November 18th, 2003.

Wangapeka, Nelson. Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre

Tour of site.

Informal conversation with custodians.

December 10th, 2003.

Wellington. Bodh Gaya Kadampa Buddhist Centre (New Kadampa Tradition).

Tour of site.

Informal interviews with director and adherents.

December 10th, 2003.

Wellington. Red Chenrezig Empowerment by Pong Re Sung Rap Tulku Rinpoche (Karma Kagyu Trust, Kaukapakapa).

Participant observation of *puja* and empowerment.

Informal conversations with participants.

December 2nd, 2004.

Wellington. Stephen Bachelor on “Living with the Devil”.

Attendance at public lecture

Informal conversations with members of the audience.

February 9th, 2006.

Palmerston North. Amitabha Buddhist Centre (New Kadampa Tradition)

Tour of site.

Informal interviews with director and residents.

March 1st, 2006.

Palmerston North. Massey University Clubs day.

Informal conversations with Massey University Buddhist Association members
Observation and annotation of variety of Buddhist clubs on campus

April 10th, 2006.

Palmerston North. *Zazen*. (MRO Zen)

Meal with practitioners: informal conversation

Participant observation in *zazen*, including dharma talk.

April 30th, 2006.

Otaki. Short *sesshin* retreat (MRO Zen)

Participant observation in *zazen*, including dharma talk.

Lunch and informal conversation with participants

May-June 2006.

Palmerston North. Four-part lecture series on “The Stages of the Path to Enlightenment”

Attendance and annotation.

Informal conversations with participants.

June 2nd – 3rd, 2006.

Hastings. Calm Abiding Meditation Retreat (Phuntsok Choeling – Sakyapa)

Public lecture by Lama Choedak.

Participant observation in meditation sessions and dharma talks.

Informal interviews with participants

Lunch with participants.

July 8th, 2006.

Wellington. Workshop with Tarchin Hearn (Wangapeka/Namgyal Rinpoche movement)

Participant observation in dharma talk.

Informal conversations with participants.

July 11th, 2006.

Wellington. New Chanters’ Meeting (SGI-NZ)

Participant observation in chanting and testimonies.

Informal interviews with participants.

July 12th – 13th, 2006.

Canvastown, Marlborough. Maitreya Meditation Centre (Divine Light Mission).¹²⁰

Tour of the site and overnight stay.

Participant observation in *satsang*.

Informal interviews with residents.

July 13th, 2006.

Upper Moutere, Nelson. Chandrakirti Centre (FPMT)

¹²⁰ I have included the Maitreya Meditation Centre as a close-enough Buddhist entity, even though it is marginal and the three residents when I visited were not in fact New Zealanders. The Maitreya Meditation Centre claims to be informed by three sources: Osho (formally Rajneesh), Shivaism, and Buddhism. There was Buddhist iconography very evident, and Buddhist vocabulary and concepts used throughout the time I visited.

Guided tour and update of facilities.
Interviews with residents.

July 16th, 2006.

Aniseed Valley, Nelson. Chian Yeh Charn Lin Educational Charitable Trust (Taiwanese Mahayana).

Tour of site and informal conversation with resident monk

July 14th, 15th, 2006.

Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre.

Overnight stay: tour and update of developments at the site

Interviews with caretakers and residents

July 15th, 2006.

St Arnaud. *Sesshin* Retreat (MRO Zen)

Participant observation in memorial service and *zazen*.

Lunch together with participants.

Informal conversations

Travel with participants back to Nelson.

July 17th, 2006.

Nelson. Nelson Buddhist Centre - Dho Nyak Osel Ling (Tibetan Buddhist)

Participant observation in meditation session.

Informal conversations with participants.

July 17th, 2006.

Nelson. Maitai Zendo (Diamond Sangha Zen).

Participant observation in *zazen*

Informal interviews with participants

October 26th, 2006.

Hamilton. Hamilton Insight Meditation Group (Insight Meditation)

Participant observation in meditation session.

Informal conversations with participants.

October 27th – 28th, 2006.

Tararu Valley, Thames. Sudarshanaloka (FWBO).

Overnight stay: informal discussions with residents.

Tour of Sudarshanaloka site.

Tour of Lotus Realm shop and Thames Buddhist Centre.

October 28th, 2006.

Coromandel. Dharma Gaia (Long White Cloud Sangha and others: informed and inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh)

Tour of site.

Interview with custodian.

October 29th, 2006

Botany Downs, Auckland. Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Centre (BLIA).

Participant observation in English language Pure Land meditation.

Guided tour of site.

Lunch with monks.

Informal conversations in cafeteria.

October 30th, 2006.

Avondale, Auckland. Dorje Chang Institute (FPMT).

Tour of site.

Informal interviews with residents

Participant observation in Tara Puja.

Informal conversations with Tara Puja participants.

March 23rd – 27th, 2007.

Panguru, Motuti, Mitimiti; Northland.

Informal hui at Te Waiariki marae

Informal interviews.

March 27th, 2007.

Whangarei. Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling (Gelugpa)

Tour of site.

Informal interviews with residents.

October 17th, 2007.

Grey Lynn, Auckland. Auckland Buddhist Centre (FWBO)

Tour of site

Participant observation

Book launch of Sally McAra's *Land of Beautiful Vision: Making a Buddhist Sacred Place in New Zealand*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007.

Informal interviews

December 11th, 2007

Palmerston North. MRO (Zen)

Christmas barbecue

Informal discussion with participants

Appendix 3: Schedule of Formal Interviews

All names are pseudonyms.

Glen Fletcher
18 June 2004
Palmerston North
“Not Buddhist”, but actively exploring a variety of Buddhist traditions

Rachel Pike
8 July 2006
Wellington
Namgyal Rinpoche lineage of Wangapeka

Jan Anderton
9 July 2004
Invercargill
“Not Buddhist” but sits with Insight Meditation practitioners

Philip Jolliffe
28 March 2006
Palmerston North
Zen practitioner (Mountains and Rivers Order)

Charles Markham
20 April 2006
Palmerston North
Zen practitioner (Mountains and Rivers Order)

Mary Kingsbury
13 June 2006
Palmerston North
New Kadampa Tradition practitioner (Tibetan Buddhism)

Terry Hearsey
8 July 2006
Wellington
Namgyal Rinpoche lineage of Wangapeka

Clare Hardy
12 July 2006
Picton
Soka Gakkai practitioner

Patricia Rutland
13 July 2006
Nelson district
FPMT practitioner (Tibetan Buddhism)

Jennifer Yule
13 July 2006

Nelson district
Ordained nun in FPMT (Tibetan Buddhism)

Barry Farland
14 July 2006
Nelson district
FPMT practitioner (Tibetan Buddhism)

Robert Pierson
14 July 2006
Wangapeka
Namgyal Rinpoche lineage of Wangapeka

Graeme Rice
14 July 2006
Wangapeka
Namgyal Rinpoche lineage of Wangapeka

Natalie Prenter
14 July 2006
Wangapeka
Namgyal Rinpoche lineage of Wangapeka

Gavin Snell (with input from June Bush)
17 July 2006
Nelson
Zen practitioners (Mountains and River Order)

Glenda Nairn
17 July 2006
Nelson
Zen practitioner (Mountains and River Order)

Joel McKenzie (with input from Diana McKenzie)
18 July 2006
Nelson
Zen practitioner (Mountains and River Order)

Anne Cowie
27 October 2006
Hamilton
Insight Meditation practitioner

Melody Frew
27 October 2006
Hamilton
Thai Theravadan practitioner

Barry Davey
27 October, 2006
Thames district
FWBO practitioner

Anthony Banner
28 October 2006
Coromandel district
“Not Buddhist”, but practitioner informed by Thich Nhat Hanh
Dharma Gaia Centre for Mindful Living

James Langley
30 October, 2006
Auckland
Zen practitioner (Mountains and River Order)

Elizabeth Bremner
31 October 2006
Auckland
FPMT practitioner (Tibetan Buddhism)

Amy Wright
26 February, 2008
Wellington
Zen practitioner (Auckland Zen Centre)

Appendix 4: Summaries of the auto-narratives

Elizabeth Bremner described herself easily within spiritual categories and explored a number of spiritual pathways before acknowledging that yoga “opened [her] up” so that “[she] could find Buddhism”. This led eventually to the Tibetan form of Buddhism. She “became a Buddhist” decisively by taking initiation and refuge at a Kalachakra initiation in India. This was in 1995, and led by the Dalai Lama. Although not using the word “conversion” she articulated this as a clear event that resulted in a deep internal personal change. Her subsequent outworking of her Buddhism had thereafter been chiefly through practice, and the taking of many further unique initiations. She traced her growth in Buddhism through the inspiration of two teachers, namely the Dalai Lama and Lama Zopa. She is an activist rather than a theorist or dogmatist, and her Buddhist expression continues to be articulated in a regular daily practice, her artwork, and periodic one-off initiations. She was articulate in the belief aspect, but did not describe herself vis-à-vis identity, although she was well able to interpret her life-story from her current Buddhist perspective.

Robert Pierson expressed his Buddhism mainly in terms of involvement: what he does and how he lives as a Buddhist (or as a spiritual being), was very important. This interacted mostly with his practice/ritual and his identity. One key experience early in his Buddhist journey – which he names as an “enlightenment experience” - has defined his whole understanding of who he is as a Buddhist, and he consequently believes that the most important thing is enlightenment and believes this to be what he (and Buddhism in general) should be offering New Zealand. Thus this subjective “enlightenment experience” was paradigmatic at two levels: personal and societal. Although he was “more into dharma than into sangha”, overall, belief played a much lesser significance in how he framed himself. Practice – which he defines as his sitting meditation - both shaped his identity (if he is practising less, then he feels less of a Buddhist), and how he involved himself in sanghas or right practice (his involvement in society as a Buddhist).

Mary Kingsbury, a Maori, actively resisted framing her Buddhism in the paradigm of “journey”, choosing “social” as the main interpretive framework for understanding her Buddhism: hence she did not have a high reference for either time, or

self-awareness of her own auto-narrative. In some sense her priority was a social group, and it was coincidental that it was Buddhist. Nonetheless, a cluster of Buddhist beliefs did inform how she lived and acted. The interplay of identity, belief (she articulated seven Buddhist beliefs) and involvement were important: these merged in her dual-belonging and dual-practising in both the New Kadampa Tradition and the Theosophical Society.

James Langley spent a long time describing the lead into what he openly called his “conversion”. He articulated a well thought through understanding of both his path and what Zen is. His initial contact was casual and implicit, through his contact with the Beats, Jazz, and being caught up in the life of Zen Mountain Monastery in New York state. In other words, it was his social context and the imposition of Zen routine on him that initially drew James Langley into Zen. As he experienced the practice of Zen – without a commitment to it in the first instance – he experienced psychological benefits (he felt better and happier), his worldview was challenged and he began to reorientate it (began seeing the world differently), and he had a movement of insight from his head to his gut. James Langley articulated that he found two things in Zen: answers to the questions, and joy. He used the word “convert” voluntarily and easily: there was an affective conversion and a ritualistic one – “becoming a student”. Much of what he said came out of the “aha” of his first *sesshin*: it was formative and prescriptive. His ongoing expression of Zen is largely ethical vis-à-vis the precepts: to be enlightened, or to live in an enlightened way is to have fulfilled the precepts. His story was dominated by his practice and involvement. Although he articulated understanding of belief and his own identity, these were firmly rooted in, and came out of insights gained in his practice. His practice – that is, chiefly meditation – gave rise to his belief, or to use his words, helped to “uncover” the reality that was there.

Barry Davey’s introduction to Buddhism was by invitation by a friend and he met Sangharakshita, the founder of the Western Buddhist Order at his first Buddhist event. He interpreted all his childhood in hindsight within his Buddhist framework, emphasising re-birth as a dominant lens: he particularly articulated two “epiphanies” vis-à-vis Buddhist categories, one while a nursing baby and the other at age eight: the first with re-birth, and the second with the Wheel of Life and genealogies. He was very articulate and talked often in the second person (“this is what we do”) and implies that he himself had also done that, or that he was tightly located within the WBO. He used

several different descriptors to tell of his conversion and identity as a Buddhist, framing himself within Buddhist, rather than unique or innovative categories or sub-narratives. His matrix was dominated by involvement and identity; there were very few micro-narratives where there was an interplay of the different factors; he communicated mainly by way of one factor at a time. It seemed that his identity was shaped by and continues to be nourished by his involvement in the WBO; yet this within a defining belief paradigm of re-birth, informed particularly by the two subjective “epiphanies”.

Anne Cowie had a personal story with a large psychological component. Various crises drove her onto a spiritual journey, where she was looking for spiritual wholeness and healing, and believes she has found this in Insight Meditation after a tortuous journey in Sattipatana meditation. While able eventually to separate the teachings from abusive teachers, it is clear now that meditation was her main defining parameter: her involvement and identity were related to her place in a community of practitioners: involvement and identity were the most frequent categories in her matrix, and in particular, the interplay of these two. Anne Cowie articulated much of her journey in negative language. She did not express a sophisticated belief framework, or even practice, other than prioritising meditation as a tool to cope with stress. She called herself a Buddhist, but defined her comfort in this title from after her one year’s break from meditation; there were no rites of passage, but she had a “coming home” to the comfort of meditation.

Anthony Banner categorically resisted the label “Buddhist”, but conceded his spiritual life is informed by Thich Nhat Hanh’s “mindfulness practice” techniques. He used both domestic language and buddhistic language to demonstrate that in some sense this phase in his life was skilful means – these practices support him for now on his spiritual journey. He did not necessarily see himself as always embracing this particular practice into the future. There was a strong integrative characteristic of the way he expressed himself with involvement, belief and practice tied into together, and informing each other. His narrative of trauma was significant and had led him to embracing this practice to find happiness and healing; he articulated his practice as a therapeutic means to redress the bad energy he had created due to his relationship traumas. His narrative was nuanced with New Age generalities.

Melody Frew was articulate about her practice and was self aware in telling her own story. She scored highly in the practice and involvement factors, but tended to express these as unique events, rather than integrated dynamics. Drawing on intuition as a tool for knowledge she felt that meditation as a tool for making meaning was subject to whatever the context was. In other words, the context of her life in any point in time would determine whatever “makes sense” vis-à-vis a spiritual practice and what naturally “fits” her. Her Buddhism was not hugely framed in terms of belief or doctrine: her epistemology was based on the potential of meditation to be her mode of “deep knowing”, plus she felt she had yet to find a teacher that “fits” for her. She felt that she was not necessarily committed totally to the current spiritual path she was on: as her life context changes, so her spiritual practice will. She can articulate a commitment to Buddhism generically: she took refuge at ordination. There was a therapeutic nuance to her involvement in Buddhism: trauma had been around leaving the Christian sect she was raised in, and has continuing ambivalence about formalizing a relationship with Buddhist teachers even though she has spent much time in India and Thailand practising Buddhism and she seemingly has several Buddhist teachers or traditions from which to choose.

Gavin Snell articulated his Zen identity in terms of involvement in the sangha, and his identity in that same sangha; his practice was informed by and located in these two. There was insignificant reflection on belief as a defining paradigm. His appropriation of Zen had been gradual, but a defining moment of becoming a student could be equated to “commitment” in a public sense. Gavin Snell did not articulate either his involvement or identity in individualistic language, but more in a communal sense. Even the use of his unique dharma name was in the context of how the sangha used his name. Group practice in the *zendo* – a sense of “home” – was the biggest defining identity marker. What he does as a Zen Buddhist seems more important than what he believes.

Glenda Nairn explicitly juxtaposed her gradual embrace of Zen Buddhism against the traumas of her childhood. Her matrix was high in practice and involvement: her practice as an involved member of the sangha gave her her identity. She was a Zen Buddhist because she had been initiated into a sangha which did the same practice. She did not articulate a strong belief framework, other than that meditation (*zazen* and *sesshin*) allows her to realise herself and discover her “ground of being”. There is a

strong thread of therapeutic need throughout her story; hence her practice provided a tool for healing. This healing had been found in reframing her understanding of her traumas. In contrast, although her husband introduced her to Buddhism, he had maintained a good relationship with Christianity, and found the intellectual stimulation of Zen appealing. Nevertheless, Glenda Nairn reported that practice too dominated his embrace of Zen. To be a Buddhist was to be a practising member of a sangha.

Joel McKenzie's matrix revealed a common link between belief and involvement. For example, he illustrated how *karma* and rebirth worked out in life. He himself was in Buddhism because of the intellectual challenge of it (along with times of admitting it as therapy), but also linked his Buddhist-ness with the quantity of his practice. Practice in the matrix was a third factor, but was linked to the other factors in a spread out way. There was a strong rejection theme in his story – to accept something new, he sharply rejected something prior. For example, when he accepted Buddhism, he rejected his Catholic upbringing. When accepting a new tradition of Buddhism, he rejected the previous tradition. There was a sense of “fit” with Zen and hence a domestic tone, especially with the attraction of “Buddhist societies” he had visited or spent time in. Overall there was a romantic nuance to his auto-narrative, perhaps due to his ongoing travel to Asia, reading and a sangha who are all friends.

Jennifer Yule had a life story matrix of relatively even weighting: the matrix integration was not complex, with each category fairly compartmentalized. Her story was driven by her desire to be a nun, and because of this, “involvement” clearly stood out as a factor. She could articulate an emerging understanding of Buddhist beliefs, and her story demonstrated a conviction about *karma* and rebirth as defining worldview paradigms that she believed in but also applied. There was a subtle relationship between belief and life story: the beliefs explain her life experience, but not necessarily her meditative insights. But once she had learned of a belief through receiving teachings, it was determinative then of how her life story unfolded: the belief became prescriptive. Her “conversion” was slow, in hindsight, and her taking refuge was a ceremony which confirmed whom she had already become privately, that is, a Buddhist.

Natalie Prenter shied away from the concept of conversion to avoid an “us and them” mentality, yet by every indication, and from her own confession, she was a Buddhist. Taking refuge ceremony was highly significant, but she did not name this as a

conversion rite. She was less concerned about how she became a Buddhist – barely articulating this at all- than how she lived now as a Buddhist. Her matrix indicated this low level of identity, but high level of involvement and practice. Her practice was milestoned by significant retreats, and her personal practice was innovative and “in the moment”. Bipolar interplays between the three components of belief, practice and involvement were the most common. She did also have one-off comments about each of the four factors, but the identity comments were in the context of Wangapeka lineage mainly, and what that meant. To be a Buddhist for Natalie Prenter was to practice, go on retreat, and study, much of this with her Buddhist partner (Graeme Rice), but she downplayed (or failed to mention) much about meditation.

Graeme Rice’s first contact explicitly with Buddhist practice was via a retreat. He had since undertaken many empowerments and taken refuge with at least three different teachers, but also took refuge everyday. He resisted the label “Buddhist”, and insisted on a degree of ambiguity around both aims and direction, preferring to articulate the now, and the path of living in an increasing sense of awareness of knowing more deeply what is going on. His matrix was high in practice and belief, along with involvement: for Graeme Rice, this merely meant however that he talked a lot about these, but not necessarily in a favourable way. He was a technician, embracing tools from anywhere to fulfil his desire to “know what’s going on” in the world: hence his Buddhist practice, while looking very Buddhist, seemed merely a tool-kit means to an end, and he thought it should be transcended. He used conversion language (especially with respect to experiences he had at his first retreat), but argued that the label of Buddhist, while functional and usable for him, is not something he desires or needs.

Clare Hardy referenced herself repeatedly to the practice of chanting. She volunteered very little about belief, except when I had invited her to explain her *gohonzon*. Consequently, her matrix was very high in practice and involvement singularly, but also in interaction with each other. The highest three-way category was practice-involvement-belief. In other words, her Buddhism is an action orientated one, where to be Buddhist, she chants the *daimoku*. She had an inherent trust in the causal effect of chanting to fulfil her determinations; she was functional and technician. She also referenced herself clearly into the global movement of Soka Gakkai, even to the point of subsuming herself into the institution as part of her identity. This was implied,

rather than her articulating it. She did not volunteer much about identity, other than that she had “been practising for 20 years”: she could be identified as a Buddhist because she practises chanting. Her background was Catholic, but she used conversion type language: the definitive point of commitment was when she “became a member”, and “received her *gohonzon*” Subsequently, her practice was what now nourishes her; that is daily chanting on her own, and monthly chanting with other “members” and interested people.

Terry Hearsey’s expression of Buddhism was firmly rooted in involvement and belief, and the inter-relationship of these. To be Buddhist – and he lets others use this term of him – is to be engaged in learning in the world. Using the methodology of “enquiring mind” his practice was the process of learning. Dharma is in everything and accessible everywhere, not necessarily just in Buddhist teaching. He is in some sense a post-Buddhist (my term), or more-than-Buddhist in as much as he embraced Buddhist frameworks, but did not want to be constrained by them. Hence his “involvement” is in the world and life, just as much as in Buddhist dharma. He made little reference to unique Buddhist practice: his practice was in learning and teaching. Throughout the interview he referenced himself to concepts, but they were nuanced freshly by his own learning, and “multi-age” – a multiplicity of lineages and empowerments which he had taken into himself. He represented an eclectic blend of belief and practice. He was not concerned about the formation of a kiwi-Buddhism, questioning if in fact religion *per se* had a future. He had been a Buddhist monk for twelve years, but had found too much dissonance in this, living a contradictory life. There was a clear ceremony he undertook, and leads for others, which is the taking refuge ceremony, but he has nuanced it a new for a new 21st century context. He argued that all of life must be a continued ongoing taking refuge – and his definitions of sangha were innovative as well.

Philip Jolliffe gave the impression that his engagement with and appropriation of Buddhism had been slow, and his now deepening of that commitment to Zen Buddhism was also slow and deliberate. This seems to be the nature of Zen or the nature of Mountains and Rivers Order of Zen in particular. There was little urgency to save the world. In his matrix, he described factors in relation to each other, and therefore binaries were common. He talked a lot about involvement – what he did – in the orbit of Zen, and then interpreted that with the binary of belief and practice, which interpret each other. This was summed in his narrative with words like authenticity and integrity.

To be a Zen Buddhist practitioner was to have a practice consistent with the teachings of Buddhism. This to Philip Jolliffe seemed to be the key identification criteria as to when he became a Buddhist, or the right to which he can still claim the title. He is strong on some key teachings (like lineage), but these are really subsumed to be in support ultimately of practice.

Charles Markham's matrix was high in involvement and practice. Having formal "rites of passage" synonymous with "becoming a Buddhist" meant that practice and involvement were linked. This practice and involvement gave identity: to be a Zen Buddhist one undergoes ritual and one does ritualistic things, in the context of a new identity, both individually and within a sangha. Charles Markham's way of expressing his "process" of "becoming" or "taking up" as a Buddhist indicates he has completely reframed the world in which he exists, and therefore sees everything from a different place, wearing figuratively different glasses. There is a hint of domesticity in his interview, in that he was "comfortable" in the Mountain and Rivers Order liturgy, embracing this form of Buddhism because it was "there" at that moment in his life. In other words, he offered no critical reflection on the truth value of Zen, nor that that was what brought him into it. The journey is the destination and intention is more important than content.

Patricia Rutland's interview was dominated by doctrinal comments. She interpreted her Buddhism from within a clear Buddhology and cosmology. In her matrix, belief and involvement score the highest, and indeed, the interaction of these two outnumbers all others. Practice and identity barely register, although not completely neglected. Belief seemed very important to her. Her practice seemed only to make sense to her because it fitted within a doctrinal context (for example, a karmic view of existence). She did Buddhist things because she believed in a Buddhist belief that undergirded them: her belief system is taken uncritically from the lamas, however. There was a reluctance by Patricia Rutland to talk in the first person, even when I prompted her to do so. She talked about the theory, or what the lamas taught, and then imbedded her own experience within, or interpreted her own story in line with what that received teaching was. When probing for her own application, she returned to clichéd expressions of received doctrine. She resisted a "taking refuge" entry point to Buddhism, but insisted that a "real" Buddhist (that is, herself) needed to be practising virtue – that is, the 10 precepts - so as to continue to effect the law of *karma*. Hence she

implied that her own identity as a Buddhist was conditional on her congruity between belief and practice. Internal congruence was an essential part of being Buddhist.

Barry Farland articulated quite clearly a robust knowledge of Buddhist teaching and practice. The conversation was firmly imbedded in an informed Buddhology, even if it was clichéd somewhat. He was “dragged” into Buddhism by his partner (Patricia Rutland), and was exposed to several significant events, including taking refuge, but identified requesting a teacher of Lama Zopa to be the defining moment of his “decision”. He articulated everything through his karmic worldview, and since his defining point was submitting to Lama Zopa as teacher, he was strong on the role and efficacy of guru devotion. He was very active – his highest matrix category was involvement, with various combinations of involvement following – demonstrating his belief in *karma* and the need to create merit. In this sense his Buddhist practice, while not articulated in the common terms of meditation, could be interpreted as his activity. To be Buddhist is to do virtuous things so as to build up merit. There was a definite link that he articulated between his belief and his activity/involvement. Throughout, there was a sub-theme of Buddhism as psychology: he admitted to deep psychological anxiety and anger, and at times reduced his Buddhism to mere management of bad feelings. Hence a ‘healing’ nuance is implied throughout his life-story.

Jan Anderton resisted taking the label of “Buddhist”, but practised Insight Meditation and freely spoke of the benefits this brought to her. She was slow to “commit” due to perceived potential in-authenticities that may follow. She had taken only meditation as a technique from Buddhism, rather than embracing explicit Buddhist worldview or belief. She understood herself within more New Age categories with practices in Reiki and massage as well. She had adopted Insight Meditation technique to enhance her professional Reiki practice in the first instance. Her matrix scored high on involvement, due to her attendance on retreats and meditation practice. She also scored high on belief – these expressed within the orbit of Buddhism, but not explicitly sourcing them from Buddhism. There was very little integration of the worldview vis-à-vis Buddhism and this showed in her matrix having a wide and shallow distribution of numbers. She said she was moving towards Buddhism, but I would suspect that she will still only adopt convenient parts, perhaps delving into meditation as a tool for dealing with her own anxieties a little more deeply.

Appendix 5: Information Sheet



Buddhism in New Zealand

A PhD research project

Researcher: Hugh P. Kemp

Ph: 06-3594050; Email: h.kemp@xnet.co.nz

Information Sheet for Interview Participants

I am a PhD candidate in Religious Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of this degree, I am undertaking field research, seeking to find out why New Zealanders embrace Buddhism, in order to understand what it means for a New Zealander to live as a Buddhist in New Zealand today.

The university requires that ethics approval be obtained for research involving human participants.

I will want to gather basic statistical information from individuals: gender, age, ethnic identity, education, income, etc. I would then like to ask questions similar to the following (but not limited to these):

- “what is your experience with Buddhism?”
- “how/why are you attracted to it?”
- “what commitment do you have to it?”
- “describe your own spiritual journey”
- “what meaning/significance does a Buddhist commitment have for you today as a New Zealander?” (or alternatively “what significance did it have, and why have you left?”)

I will want to record interviews on tape, as well as take notes. I would expect that interviews would be around an hour's duration, and I may ask for further interviews with you to clarify issues and topics. A participant may withdraw from an interview and/or the whole project at any time without explanation, and any records will be destroyed at the participant's request.

Responses collected will form the basis of my research project, **and confidentiality will be assured**, unless you permit to be identified by way of written consent. Audio tapes will remain in my possession, but anonymous written transcripts will be available for my supervisors in the Religious Studies Department of Victoria University. You may request copies of the written transcripts of the interview. Tapes will be held for 5 years from the end of the project, and will be returned to the participant on request.

The outcome of this research will be a PhD submitted to Victoria University and subsequently deposited at the University's library. I will also draw on this research for academic presentations and journal publications.

All interviews will be conducted within the ethical framework outlined in a supplementary Consent Form. This form is an agreement regarding confidentiality and the collection, storage and disclosure of information.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact me. Or alternatively contact my supervisors Dr. Rick Weiss or Prof. Paul Morris at the Religious Studies Department of VUW: Ph: 04 463 5299 or Email: religious-studies@vuw.ac.nz

Hugh P. Kemp

Ph: 06-3594050. Email: h.kemp@xnet.co.nz

Appendix 6: Ethics Consent Form



Buddhism in New Zealand

A PhD research project

Researcher: Hugh P. Kemp

Ph: 06-3594050; Email: h.kemp@xnet.co.nz

Consent to Participation in Research

Name of participant: _____

Phone number: _____

Postal address: _____

Email address: _____

I have read the Information Sheet relating to this project, and/or have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project before data collection and analysis is complete without having to give reasons.

☐ I consent to information or opinions which I have given being attributed to me in any reports on this research.

☐ I understand that the researcher will handle tapes and transcripts which ensure their confidentiality and security.

☐ I understand that the information I provide will not be used for any other purpose than stated in the supplementary Information Sheet, or released to others without my written consent.

☐ I would like the tape recordings of my interview returned to me within 5 years of the end of the project.

OR

☐ I would like the tape recordings of my interview destroyed within 5 years of the end of the project.

☐ I understand that I may request a copy of the transcription of tapes of my interview/s, and that I may comment on their content, before they are used for analysis.

☐ I understand that there may be a secretary who will transcribe tapes (who will be constrained by a confidentiality agreement), and that only anonymous written transcripts will be made available to the researcher's supervisors.

☐ I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

☐ I agree to take part in this research freely and without coercion.

☐

Your signature _____ Thanks!

Appendix 7: Overall Summative Matrix

Table 5: Summary of factor frequencies across all interviews

	Factor	Frequency of mention
Single factors	PR	106
	SH	76
	BL	100
	IN	227
Two-way relationships	PR-IN	108
	PR-SH	46
	BL-IN	158
	SH-IN	72
	SH-BL	33
	PR-BL	88
Three-way relationships	PR-SH-BL	12
	PR-IN-BL	40
	PR-SH-IN	30
	SH-BL-IN	24
Four-way relationships	PR-BL-IN-SH	18
Summative frequencies	PR	440
	SH	299
	BL	456
	IN	665

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