Locating Lumbini:

Transnational Buddhism and the Construction of Heritage in Nepal

by

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ABSTRACT

This study offers a genealogical investigation of the modern manufacture of the Buddha' birthplace at Lumbini, in Nepal's rural Terai region. Throughout the twentieth century Asian and non-Asian actors employed the cross-cultural prestige of Lumbini in their overlapping agendas. These efforts emerged in response to the Buddhism's disembedding from traditional socio-political institutions under colonial governance across South and Southeast Asia and were further spurred by the rapid globalization characteristic of the mid-twentieth century. Lumbini was conscripted into colonial regimes of power, and also emerged as symbolic capital in the formation of national narratives within post-colonial India and Nepal. I argue that Lumbini presents a unique and interesting case of a protracted process of "heritagization" that is both multivalent and multivocal. As Buddhists have sought to ensure the survival of the Buddha's dispensation (*śāsana*) in modernity, they have mobilized Lumbini as a powerful symbol of peace, brotherhood, and global connectivity in conjunction with the prevailing logics of their non-Buddhist contemporaries. Focusing on Lumbini's modern (re)discovery and its successive development highlights conjunctures between "Buddhist modernism" and the secularizing processes of heritage conservation and display. This study finds that trans-Asian flows of investment in reconstituting the Buddha's birthplace throughout the twentieth century are antecedents to emergent forms of geopolitical and "geo-cultural" (Winter 2019) imaginations in the contemporary, as evidenced by Lumbini's inclusion in China's Belt and Road Initiative.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF FIGURES vii

NOTES ON BUDDHIST TERMINOLOGY AND TRANSLITERATIONS x

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS xi

GLOSSARY xii

PREFACE xiv

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION: HISTORY, HERITAGE, AND BIOGRAPHY 1

Manufacturing the Buddha's Birthplace, a Geneology 4

Material Culture and Transmission of Buddhism 11

Sources and Strategies 16

2 LUMBINI IN BUDDHIST TEXTS, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND FORMATIONS OF POLITY 19

From Biography to Pilgrimage: Lumbini in Text and Practice 23

The Buddha's Presence and Absence at Lumbini 27

Aśoka, the Pious Pilgrim and Patron 30

Transcending Pali and Sanskrit Epistemes 35

Lumbini and the Nepal Mandala 41

3 MANUFACTURING BUDDHIST ORIGINS: ORIENTALISM AND MONUMENTAL ARCHEOLOGY 50

Searching for the Buddha of History 53

CHAPTER Page

Colonial Monumental Archeology and the (re)Discovery of Lumbini.....59

Contesting Dr. Führer 70

4 BUDDHIST MODERNISM ON THE NEPAL FRONTIER 75

Buddhist Modernism and "Protestant" Buddhism.....81

Locating Lumbini by Way of the Maha Bodhi Society.....87

Theravāda on the Nepal Frontier.....98

Early Custodians of the Buddha's Birthplace.....104

Global Connections.....119

5 A COALITION FOR WORLD PEACE: U THANT AND THE UNITED NATIONS INTERVENTION 125

U Thant, An Avowed Buddhist in Colonial Burma 132

Development Interventions in Non-aligned Asia 138

The Secretary-General on Pilgrimage, April 1967 144

Garnering Support in the UN and Beyond 150

6 DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL BUDDHISM: FRICTIONS IN THE LATE-TWENTIETH CENTURY 162

The Kenzo Tange Master Plan for the Development of Lumbini.....167

Shifting Custodianship to the State 182

Foreign Investment, the Monastic Zone, and Tourism.....196

The World Fellowship of Buddhists 1972-1992 202

CHAPTER Page

7 BUDDHA WAS BORN IN NEPAL: WORLD HERITAGE, HISTORY, AND TOURISM AT LUMBINI..... 212

Heritage Politics and Lumbini's "Universal Value for All Mankind".....217

Caretakers of Lumbini's History: The New Lumbini Museum.....234

Nepal as a Dharma Destination.....242

8 END DISCUSSION: PLACE-MAKING AND BUDDHISM IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NEPAL.....252

Locating and Dis-locating Lumbini 256

REFERENCES.....262

APPENDIX I.....285

APPENDIX II 286

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE Page

Figure 1. Maya Devi Temple complex at Lumbini, June 2019. Photograph by author..... 3

Figure 2. "Book Cover from a Manuscript of the Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra," at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/37975)..... 45

Figure 3. Photograph of Aśokan pillar at Nigālī Sāgar from Anton Führer, Monograph on the Buddha Sakyamuni's Birth-Place in the Nepalese Tarai.(Allahabad, 1897). 66

Figure 4. Photograph of the Aśoka pillar at Lumbini from Anton Führer, Monograph on the Buddha Sakyamuni's Birth-Place in the Nepalese Tarai. (Allahabad, 1897). 67

Figure 5. Bust of U Thant installed at Lumbini in 2019. Photo by author. 126

Figure 6. Exterior wall of the Lumbini complex, June 2019. Photo by author. 163

Figure 7. Lumbini Master Plan footprint, June 2019. Photo by author. 164

Figure 8. Lighting butter lamps near Maya Devi Temple, June 2019. Photo by author. 176

Figure 9. "Route Map of Nepal" from Lumbini Development Committee publication Lumbini Kapilavastu, 1979, plate no. vii..... 191

Figure 10. "Lumbini Zone Western Development Region" from Nepal's Department of Tourism publication Lumbini Nepal, 1980, pg. 23..... 193

FIGURE Page

Figure 11.“Asian Highway Map” from Nepal’s Department of Tourism publication Lumbini Nepal, 1980, pg. 24. 193

Figure 12. “Buddha was Born in Nepal” slogan on taxicab in Kathmandu, July 2019. Photo by author. 233

Figure 13. Bronze Buddha image Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu, Nepal. January 2022. Photo by author..... 245

Figure 14. Scenes depicting the Buddha’s biography Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu, Nepal. January 2022. Photo by author. 246

Figure 15. Buddha shrine in sal tree within the Sacred Garden zone, Lumbini, Nepal June 2019. Photo by author. 260

NOTES ON BUDDHIST TERMINOLOGY AND TRANSLITERATION

All translations in the text are my own unless otherwise noted. This study uses predominantly Sanskrit terms unless referring directly to terms from texts in other languages. I have italicized and included diacritical marks for non-English terms in Sanskrit, Nepali, and Pali each noted in parentheses in their first usage. The names of historical Buddhist figures are presented in their English transliterations and rendered with diacritical marks, i.e., Śākyamuni. The names of modern figures appear with diacritical marks only in their first occurrence. The names of places in South and Southeast Asia as well as other proper nouns are rendered without diacritical marks for convenience, i.e., Lumbini rather than Lumbinī, Bodh Gaya rather than Bodhgayā. Direct quotes reflect the source orthography and unconventional spellings are noted with [sic]. The modern Nepali language has absorbed numerous loanwords from Sanskrit (such as *bhikṣu* and *vihāra*) and these have been designated in parentheses when useful. I have used *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* edited by Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr. for most of my translations.

ABBREVIATIONS

APECF	Asia Pacific Exchange Cooperation Foundation
ASI	Archeological Survey of India
DoA	Nepal's Department of Archeology
DS	Dharmodaya Sabha
DTC	United Nations Department of Technical Co-Operation
HMG/Nepal	His Majesty's Government of Nepal
ICDL	United Nations International Committee for the Development of Lumbini
KTMP	Kenzo Tange Master Plan for the Development of Lumbini
LDC	Lumbini Development Committee
LDNDC	Lumbini Development National Directive Committee of Nepal
LDT	Lumbini Development Trust
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
WFB	World Fellowship of Buddhist

GLOSSARY

ahiṃsā (Skt. and Pali)	Absence of harmful intention; "harmlessness"; "non-injury"; "nonviolence"
anātman (Skt.); *annatā* (Pali)	"No-self" or "non-self," more broadly "insubstantiality"
anitya (Skt.); *anicca* (Pali)	"impermanence"; all conditioned objects are subject to change, decline, and finally destruction
caitya (Skt.); *cetiya* (Pali)	"shrine" or "sanctuary"; does not contain a relic of the Buddha or other revered personage
cakravartin (Skt.); *cakkavattin* (Pali)	"wheel-turning emperor"; "universal monarch"; a monarch who rules over the entire universe; ideal monarch who rules according to the Buddha Śākyamuni's *Dharma* (teachings)
Dharma (Skt.); *Dhamma* (Pali)	"teachings" or "doctrines" of the Buddha Śākyamuni
dharmarājan (Skt.); *dharmarājā* (Pali)	"righteous king"; a monarch who rules in accordance with the Buddha Śākyamuni's *Dharma* (teachings)
karma (Skt.); *kamma* (Pali)	"action" or "activity"; doctrine of action and its corresponding "ripening" or "fruition" according to which virtuous deeds of the body, speech, and mind, produce happiness in the future, while non-virtuous deeds lead to suffering
karuṇā (Skt. and Pali)	"compassion," or "empathy"; the wish that others be free from suffering
mahāpuruṣa (Skt.); *mahāpurisa* (Pali)	"great man" or "great person"; a being with such physical marks as destined to become either a Buddha or a *cakravartin* "Wheel-turning king"
madhyamapratipadā (Skt.)	The Buddhist religious path between the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification or extreme asceticism
mokṣa (Skt.); *mokka* (Pali)	"liberation," "freedom," or "release"; the state of liberation from suffering and rebirth
nirvāṇa (Skt.); *nibbāna* (Pali)	"extinction"; cessation of suffering; the earliest and most common term describing

	the soteriological goal of the Buddhist path
parinirvāṇa (Skt.); *parinibbāna* (Pali)	"Final" or "complete" *nirvāṇa* (extinguishment); used commonly to refer to the passing away of the Buddha Śākyamuni
pāribhogikadhātu (Pali)	Relics of use
puṇya (Skt.); *puñña* (Pali)	"merit"; store of fruitful *karma* created by the performance of virtuous deeds
rūpakāya (Skt.)	The "physical body" of the Buddha
saṃsāra (Skt. and Pali)	The "cycle of rebirth" or the cyclical nature of conditioned existence
saṅgha (Skt. and Pali)	"community" or "order"; the monastic order of Buddhist monks and nuns
śarīra (Skt.); *sārīrakadhātu* (Pali)	Generally "relics of the Buddha"; specifically the corporeal remains
śāsana (Skt.); *sāsana* (Pali)	The Buddha Śākyamuni's dispensation, including teachings, institutions, and relics; expressed temporally and geographically. According to Theravāda calculation, the Buddha's teachings will last 5000 years and reached the halfway point in 1956.
stūpa (Skt.); *thūpa* (Pali)	"reliquary"; a structure that contains a relic of the Buddha or other revered personage
tīrthayātrā (Skt.)	Pilgrimage
udddesikadhātu (Pali)	Relics of commemoration

PREFACE

In a series of bizarre events that unfolded between 2011 and 2012, Pushpa Kamal Dahal (also known as Prachananda), the former military commander of the rebel Maoist forces in Nepal and the chairman of the Unified Communist Party, reportedly agreed to a deal with the China-backed Asia Pacific Exchange Cooperation Foundation (APECF) that would have, in essence, resulted in the sale of the Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini in Nepal's southern Terai region for three billion USD (Overdorf 2012). At nearly one-tenth of Nepal's 35 billion USD gross domestic product at the time, the pact represented a sizable economic boon. Dahal, who served as Nepal's Prime Minister from 2008 to 2009, 2016 to 2017, and who was recently reelected in 2022, formed the Lumbini Development National Directive Committee of Nepal (LDNDC) and designated himself the director in a powerplay to supplant the state-sponsored Lumbini Development Trust (LDT), which, since 1985, had been tasked with overseeing the conservation and development of the site (LDT 1985). APECF's executive vice president, Xiao Wunan, a member of China's Communist Party and ranking official in the National Development and Reform Commission, suggested at the time that the development plan would bring together all three schools of Buddhism: Mahāyāna, Theravāda, and Tibetan Vajrayāna ("The Lumbini project" 2011).

The proposed takeover of Lumbini's development aimed to construct a "Buddhist Mecca," by funding an international airport, a convention center, hotels, and even a theme park-esque observatory tower called the "Lumbini Cloud" ("The Lumbini project" 2011; Dhakal 2011; Sala 2013). In a closed-door meeting Dahal unilaterally signed a memorandum of understanding agreeing to the APECF's proposal without the support of

the LDT or other governmental agencies. The agreement spurred significant backlash from Indian officials wary of China's attempt to exert control in the region as well as from Dahal's colleagues domestically who were skeptical about the project's legitimacy (Acharya 2011). At the time, Karma Syangbo Sherpa, Vice-Chairman of the LDT, vociferously denied any knowledge of the Nepalese government's involvement in agreeing to a new direction for the Buddha's birthplace: "The LDT is not aware about any project involving APECF currently working on Lumbini. We have our own Lumbini Master Plan and we have not signed any agreement with external bodies" (quoted in Acharya 2011).

Declared a United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization's (UNESCO) "World Heritage Site" (WHS) in 1997, Lumbini is a prestigious destination, one with significant symbolic capital for the world's Buddhist population. In efforts to reclaim the "Buddhist Holy Land," modernist Buddhist organizations like the Maha Bodhi Society (est. 1881) and the World Fellowship of Buddhists (est. 1950) have repeatedly advanced the rhetoric of pan-Asian Buddhist heritage (Huber 2008).[1] These calls have sought to unite global Buddhist voices and foster ecumenicism among the various traditions. Similar appeals were recycled in the APECF's proposal to gain control of Lumbini and exert China's geo-cultural influence in the Himalayan region.[2] Despite insistence from the APECF that the project would bring together all three schools of Buddhism, leading

[1] The term "Buddhist Holy Land" is used here to indicate a uniquely modern articulation of the four biographical sites in northern India and southern Nepal corresponding to the locations of the Buddha's birth (Lumbini), enlightenment (Bodh Gaya), first teaching (Sarnath), and death (Kushinagar). A more detailed analysis of this nomenclature is provided in Chapter 1.

[2] For a thorough discussion of "geo-cultural" power see Tim Winter, *Geocultural Power: China's Quest to Revive the Silk Roads for the Twenty-First Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2019).

members of these communities were never consulted. Most notably, the Dalai Lama, head of the Gelug branch of Tibetan Buddhism and leader of Tibet's exiled government in Dharmsala, India, was conspicuously absent. Nepal has nearly 20,000 Tibetan refugees (many of whom live in the Kathmandu Valley region) and yet the Dalai Lama has not visited the birthland of the Buddha since 1987 for fear of political persecution (Budhathoki and Dahal 2021; The Times of India 2010). As journalist Jason Overdorf reported at the time:

> Some see China's enthusiasm for Lumbini as part of a larger 'battle for Buddha,' pitting Beijing versus New Delhi in the quest to expand 'soft power,' or cultural influence, within the region… In this struggle, India seeks to use its common cultural heritage [with Nepal] to overcome China's ethnic ties to the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, and China seeks to limit the damage from its repression of religious freedom in Tibet and its incessant sparring with the Dalai Lama (2012).

Xiao Wunan conceded APECF's role in advancing China's cultural hegemony in the region while distancing his organization from formal governmental activity, "APECF is part of the grander strategy of increasing China's soft power, but we are independent, and the Lumbini development project is our own idea" (quoted in Sala 2013). Reports at the time referenced a partnership between the APECF and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in the creation of a "special cultural zone" at Lumbini, but these were later retracted as the UNIDO denied any such agreement (Acharya 2011; Overdorf 2012). Although the pact between Dahal and the APECF was eventually nixed by the ruling Nepalese government, the UN, and UNESCO, the question of Lumbini's symbolic value in the geopolitics of Asia remains.

This is the conversation that piqued my interest in Lumbini in the fall of 2013 as a graduate student at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. How could the Buddha's birthplace, arguably one of the premier pilgrimage destinations in one of the

world's largest religious traditions, be bought and sold as a commodity on the global market? The conflicting reports that surfaced around the failed purchase attempt signaled that Lumbini is symbolic, and that its significance, value, and ownership could be contested at various levels. Initially, I was attracted (naïvely) to the artificial dichotomy of "religious" and "secular" interests; captivated by the negotiation of "Buddhism" and the "State" as if they were self-evident entities. In the years following I have come to learn that the failed attempt to "buy" the Buddha's birthplace was *not* an isolated event, but a continuation in a centuries-old project of locating Lumbini.

The Mauryan Emperor Aśoka (c. 3rd century BCE) was arguably the first to locate and patronize the sites associated with the most significant events in the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni. As the legends go, Aśoka, accompanied by the Buddhist elder Upagupta, undertook a massive pilgrimage to the biographical sites, paying homage to the enlightened master and marking them with monuments, reliquaries (Skt. *stūpa*), and shrines (Skt. *caitya*). According to the Sanskrit *Aśokāvadāna*, "Legends of Aśoka," (circa 2nd-century CE), "the righteous ruler" (Skt. *dharmarājan*; Pali *dharmarājā*) and "wheel-turning king" (Skt. *cakravartin;* Pali *cakkavattin*) constructed some 84,000 monuments following his conversion to Buddhism (see Strong 1983). Aśoka's legendary patronage of the biographical sites is paradigmatic in nearly all Buddhist traditions informing the creation of pilgrimage networks between distant locales and India's Gangetic Plain (Huber 2008; Asher 2009; Geary 2017) as well as the reduplication of monuments in emergent Buddhist polities across Southeast Asia (Strong 2003; Blackburn 2010). For centuries, political elites and monastic reformers have directed their gaze back to the Buddhist biographical sites, hoping to capitalize on their prestige and reassert the

territorial expanse of the Buddha's dispensation (Skt. *śāsana*). Through these efforts to locate the sites associated with Buddha's biography, the nativity has been reinforced as a soteriologically significant moment in which the entirety of the Buddha's teaching is made manifest. However, Buddhists are not the only ones who have been invested in the project of locating Lumbini.

Colonial intervention in South and Southeast Asia has left a lasting impact on the modern formation of Buddhist biographical sites, both in terms of their excavation and in the construction of a corpus of knowledge about Buddhist antiquity and heritage. Indeed, one argument of this study is that colonial knowledges about Buddhism—its historical emergence, climax, and eventual decline and degradation in South Asia—remain refracted in contemporary encounters at the Buddha's birthplace. As Douglas Ober (2023) has recently demonstrated, prevailing narratives about Buddhism's history in South Asia are riddled with useful fictions that helped shape the intellectual, religious, political and material landscapes of the region. The colonial archeologists who surveyed and excavated much of the Indian subcontinent in search of remnants of the figure of the historical Buddha, operated as extensions of an imperialistic regime that controlled its subjects, at least partially, through the construction of history itself (Cohn 1996). In response to this hegemony, Buddhist modernists redeployed the language of a "glorious" Buddhist past in the service of rapidly globalizing agendas that envisioned the biographical sites as a common heritage for all Buddhists. Repatriation of the biographical sites from their colonial custodians, and Hindu incumbents, to their rightful Buddhist patrons was tantamount to the promulgation of the *śāsana*.

In the wake of independence, Buddhist communities looked toward the biographical sites as repositories of symbolic capital and cultural memory from which to articulate new futures. Buddhist leaders from Burma (Myanmar), Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Japan sought to re-patronize the Buddha's birthplace. These efforts were furthered by the interventionist policies of the United Nations and her development subsidiaries, which supplanted colonial institutions with more "noble" aspirations of peace, social progress, and economic prosperity. These diverse investments in the "un/under-developed" Global South continue to capitalize on the social capital and cultural memory of the Buddha's biography under the nomenclature of "heritage." Attempts to control, repatriate, preserve, develop, and revitalize Lumbini ought to be read within this context. Tensions between various investors—or, as they are often called, "stakeholders"—in Lumbini's development reflect a particular nexus of political and socio-cultural power. The APECF's bid to take over development at the Terai site is a recent example in this protracted struggle between patronage and custodianship at the Buddha's birthplace.

The direction of this study and the sources that it relies on shifted in response to the Covid-19 pandemic that began in late 2019 and that continues to impact international travel and access to the Buddhist biographical sites today. As infection rates fluctuated, Nepal went through several waves of strict lockdowns banning foreign travel and limiting domestic mobility. As a result, Lumbini was closed to foreign visitors for nearly 18 months during the height of the pandemic and has yet to regain its pre-pandemic annual visitation rate of nearly two million. Initially this study sought to include ethnographic data locating Lumbini in networks of trans-national Buddhist pilgrimage. In-person semi-structured interviews with foreign visitors, local residents, and members of the current

LDT administration were envisaged as primary data for exploring the dynamics of these contemporary encounters. Although these remain valuable research trajectories, ones that I intend to revisit when I am able to return to Nepal in the future, the present study relies heavily on primary-source historical data—periodicals, photographs, newspaper articles, governmental documents, memoirs, and personal correspondence. The majority of these historical sources are in English. Several publications from Nepal's Dharmodaya Sabha in modern Nepali are included in Chapter 3 and are noted as such in their respective bibliographic entries. Limited ethnographic observations and informal interviews conducted in 2017 and 2019 enhance this study.[3] These materials reflect both the tensions and the potentialities in contemporary imaginations about, and encounters with, the Buddha's birthplace. My ethnographic conversation partners are depicted in this study using pseudonyms for privacy and safety except when the individual has requested to be named. Additional semi-structured interviews with members from the Lumbini Museum staff (Chapter 6) were conducted remotely using video conferencing and messaging applications in 2021 and 2022.

Drawing on these extensive primary source data and engaging critical scholarship in the fields of Buddhist studies, anthropology, sociology, and history, this study seeks to understand how the Buddha's birthplace has emerged as a global destination amid the shifting political landscape of the Nepalese state and the ongoing interventions of the international development apparatus. Adopting a genealogical perspective, the pages that follow trace several conjunctures between colonial monumental archeology, the cross-

[3] ASU IRB exemption status granted for STUDY00012831.

cultural repertoire of the Buddhist biographical genre, emergent forms of Buddhist modernism, Cold War geopolitics, and the cultural and world heritage paradigms. These conjunctures are constitutive of Lumbini's ascension to global recognition and prestige as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) in 1997. The project of locating and claiming Lumbini in the modern era attests to the ongoing significance of biography and practices of place-making in the constitution of local, regional, and global identities tied to Buddhism. These genealogical investigations are supported by archival data collected from various Buddhist organizations: The Maha Bodhi Society, Nepal's Dharmodaya Sabha, the Japan Buddhist Federation, the World Fellowship of Buddhists; as well as several development agencies: the United Nations, UNESCO, the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT).

As anthropologist Ruth Benedict suggests, "most individuals are plastic to the moulding force of the society in which they are born" (2000, 42), and as Catherine Bell more forcefully reiterates, "if all people are embedded within cultures and inevitably see other cultures through the lens of their own, then it stands to reason that scholars cannot see other cultures without the biases, both conscious and unconscious, that their cultural lenses inevitably confer on other people's reality" (2006, 39). Recognition of one's cultural embeddedness, and the inherent biases that it engenders, is not an easy task. Throughout this study have I have repeatedly wrestled with my own positionality to the topic at hand as a historian and ethnographer. Academia is a hermeneutic enterprise that, on its best days, induces a reflexivity of awareness and prompts a gradual—and surreal—recognition of the academic's perspective in relation to the others for whom they attempt to speak. This process is not at all a given, nor is it ever fully complete, but it is

aspirational; it demands us to wrestle with the implications of power and privilege, and to muster, if at all possible, a humble step forward. I have tried my best to limit the curation of my ethnographic and historical sources so as to provide space for the reader to wrestle with the psychological, emotional, and political stakes of locating Lumbini. I have been forced to make certain cuts in deciding which voices are represented in this study and which are left out. In the set of sources compiled here I have attempted to remain faithful to promoting dialogue around my central argument that contemporary encounters with the Buddha's birthplace have been indelibly shaped by shifting constellations of power-knowledge in modernity (Foucault and Gordon 1980). Therefore, my selection of historical and ethnographic sources catalogues the individual and institutional voices in the establishment and maintenance of these formations, recognizing that there are potentially others that remain elusive or simply behind the scenes, and others still that I have not yet been afforded the opportunity to encounter.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: HISTORY, HERITAGE, AND BIOGRAPHY

> Bhikkhus, Nuns, devout men and women should visit these sacred places famous in the history of Buddhism, with feelings of reverence and awe.[4]

> Monumental archeology, increasingly linked to tourism, allowed the state to appear as the guardian of a generalized, but also local, Tradition. The old sacred sites were to be incorporated into the map of the colony, and their ancient prestige draped around the mappers…Museumized this way they were repositioned as regalia for a *secular* colonial state.[5]

As our silver late model compact sedan came to a rolling stop in front of an inconspicuous hand-packed clay brick building, my driver, friend, and travel companion Samesh hurried out to open my door, welcoming me to "this most holy place, the birthplace of the Lord Buddha." This was the long-awaited end of the road; the conclusion of a nearly eight-hour drive across northern India from Kushinagar (the site of the Buddha's passing away). The trip included several traffic delays and a blistering hot four-hour wait in an over-crowded "parking lot" at the Nepalese customs and immigration office in the bustling border town of Sonauli. Four days prior we began our journey to visit the sites associated with the Buddha Śākyamuni's biography stopping at various "auspicious" cultural heritage sites across the northern Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.[6]

At first blush, Lumbini was not quite what I had expected. It was approaching the middle of June and the thousands of pilgrims who flock to this United Nations

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[4] A. Dharmapala, "Visit the Sacred Places Associated with the Master" in *The Maha Bodhi* vol. 44, no. 4 (1936): 192.

[5] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed (London: Verso 1991): 181-82.

[6] Here my use of the term *auspicious* is intended to convey the sentiments of my interlocutors who repeatedly described Lumbini and the other biographical sites in terms of awe, wonder, and reverence. Words such as "holy," "sacred," and "auspicious" are inherited from the highly Christianized verbiage of English.

Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site (WHS) in the Southern Terai region for the yearly Vesak Festival (variously called Buddha Jayanti or Buddha Purnima)—commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha—had all returned home weeks earlier. I don't know exactly what I had expected, I was after all quite aware that Buddhist sites frequently go through periods of disuse, but still, I was a bit underwhelmed, to say the least, by its emptiness. My travel companion, however, was almost giddy as he helped me retrieve my oversized luggage from the trunk of the car, repeating "this is a holy and auspicious place, the birthplace of Lord Buddha."

Samesh is a low-caste Hindu from Bodh Gaya, the small, but lively, town in Bihar where Siddhārtha Gautama, prince of the Śākya clan, is said to have attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree after renouncing his inheritance and living a life of asceticism. Despite his destitute lot in life, Samesh and his friend Naveen (who was born into a minority Muslim caste) grew up at the ankles of tourists, scholars, and monks. Together they have pursued the teachings of the Buddha, making a menial living wage guiding tourists around Bodh Gaya and organizing tours of historical sites across India for foreign visitors. It had been nearly a decade since Samesh had visited the auspicious Sacred Garden where the Buddha is said to have been born from the side of his mother Māyādevī (also frequently called Mahāmāyā). I imagine this visit resonates a little differently for him, now nearly thirty with three kids.

After we dropped my luggage off in my room, Samesh suggested that we walk to the Sacred Garden before sundown. We declined a rickshaw ride at the park entrance electing to quietly stroll along the empty dirt road toward the center of the park. After

circumambulating the outside of the manicured lawn skirting the fenced archeological site, we slipped our shoes off and made our way through the metal detectors at the single entrance to the Maya Devi Temple complex. Immediately upon passing through the security threshold, Samesh turned to me, lifted his forearm to my eye level, and signaling me to his goosebumps said, “Look! The Buddha is here! I can feel it! This is an auspicious place!” Samesh’s eagerness to walk in the footsteps of the Buddha, to feel his *presence* in this place, signals the affective qualities of travel to the biographical sites for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. As we walked through the Maya Devi Temple complex (fig.1) I began to feel the weight of the Buddha’s *presence*, not as a goosebump inducing force, but as a monumental historical figure who has influenced socio-cultural and political formations across Asia for over two millennia.

Figure 1. Maya Devi Temple complex at Lumbini, June 2019. Photograph by author.

Manufacturing the Buddha's Birthplace, a Genealogy

This study is a genealogy of a potent place—a place with the power to elicit intense bodily and emotional responses in everyday encounters, to subvert political regimes, to constitute identity and form community, and a place that continues to influence discourses of geopolitics in Asia and beyond. Lumbini's popularity and accessibility has grown exponentially in the last several decades giving hope to longstanding aspirations for renewed prestige and prominence. Since its (re)discovery at the hands of colonial archeologists in the late-19th century Lumbini has undergone a series of "rebirths" to restore the renowned pilgrimage destination to its "ancient" luster. These efforts have not always materialized as intended, nor have they been sustained without interruption. Subjected to periods of neglect, and at times intentional disregard by the ruling political elites, Lumbini's development remains an ongoing process.

Defining place, therefore, is a process of intervention: delimiting the vastness of space and assigning meaning to the relations between people and their material surroundings. As Tim Cresswell argues, "place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power" (2004, 11). Christopher Tilley, following Barbara Bender (2006, 303), echoes these sentiments, recognizing that places and landscapes are "contested, worked and re-worked by people according to particular individual, social and political circumstances" (2006, 7). While these "reworkings" cannot be reliably documented in succession throughout history, we can, however, recognize the persistence of imaginations about Lumbini and undertake a genealogy of its emergences and submergences in various arenas of discourse and practice. As Fredrick Asher states:

> Like most things that we might describe as works of art, these sites do not have a continuous, ever-evolving life that we can thoroughly or reliably document. We see,

> rather, moments punctuated by change recorded in literature or in modifications and ruins. We see snapshots in time resulting in an image of punctuated lives. We sense them through Buddhist literature, we view them through the memories of East Asian pilgrims, we understand them through the reports of archaeologists, and we experience them through their presentation as shaped by the authorities who are charged with conserving them. These perspectives, sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory, sometimes filling gaps in the manufactured record, sometimes creating new ones, sustain the sites as vibrant entities, ones with a history that becomes not more lucidly focused but rather ever more dynamic (2009, 245).

Similarly, Shelly Errington contends that viewing material objects, including monuments and temples, as having lives of their own, "has the virtue of encouraging us to notice that an object's meaning is not located in a single moment of its history" as well as that what an object, or place, "is" has the potential to change through the passing of time, and as it is encountered in new contexts (1993, 32). Paying attention to Lumbini as a vibrant and dynamic entity opens new avenues for interrogating broader social formations and regimes of power-knowledge (Foucault and Gordon 1980) that continue to shape our understandings of Buddhism's place within modernity (McMahan 2008; Huber 2008; Schober and Collins 2018). I concede here that 'Buddhism', as a discrete and unified tradition, is an artificial category; one that only coalesced under colonial and orientalist scholarship in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Almond 1988; Tweed 1992; Masuzawa 2005), but that has nevertheless persisted into the contemporary moment through various avenues of reproduction, including scholarly inquiry and publication. In foregrounding Lumbini, I wrestle with the complex exchanges and overlaps between textual and ritual modalities of presenting and re-presenting the values of a religious tradition that dates back two millennia. Due to the historical depth and the cultural breadth of the subject matter, perhaps it is better to state clearly what this study is *not*, before turning to a brief introduction of the argument.

This dissertation is *not* a chronological history of Buddhist encounters with the birthplace of the tradition's founder, nor is it a systematic compilation of cross-cultural textual and material (epigraphical and archeological) references to Lumbini. This study does *not* presume to present a comprehensive and complete characterization of Lumbini's significance. Rather, this dissertation attempts what Michel Foucault (1984) has termed a "history of the present" through a genealogical investigation.[7] For Foucault, "genealogy's aim is to trace the struggles, displacements and processes of re-purposing out of which contemporary practices emerged, and to show the historical conditions of existence upon which present-day practices depend" (Garland 2014, 373). Why do Buddhists need a "Mecca"? Why is Lumbini preserved as a place of "universal significance for all mankind," and what makes this the case? Why is the Buddha's birthplace a continual focus of Nepal's economic and infrastructural development, and to what ends? Why does China want to invest in Lumbini, and why has India sought to block such attempts? To approach an answer to these questions, I trace Lumbini's saliency in the discourses and practices of colonial monumental archeology and museology, Buddhist modernism, international development, and world heritage.

Arturo Escobar, following Foucault, notes that the history of Western and non-Western societies in the modern period is "a steady process of appropriation and consequent disposition of societal background practices, common social meanings, and cultural contents through a series of discourses, institutions, and practices" (1984, 381). This process of emergence and submergence frames regimes of power-knowledge that

[7] See Appendix I for a simple timeline of key events and socio-political transformations discussed in this dissertation.

bring the "the material conditions of life and the unspoken mechanisms of culture" into the "realm of explicit calculations" (Escobar 1984, 381). How is Lumbini rendered and re-presented in this ongoing process of appropriation and disposition?

In what follows I probe several episodes in which Lumbini emerges as centrally visible in the production and maintenance of knowledge about the Buddha and Buddhism. These conjunctures are snapshots that demonstrate the saliency of the Buddhist biographical genre (Schober 1997): its appropriation into popular and political discourses, and its commodification by regimes of power and prestige built around cultural heritage conservation (Peleggi 2012; Chapagain 2013; Weise 2013) and tourism (Nyaupane 2009; Shinde 2021). I also attempt to make sense of the failings, the ineptitudes, periods of invisibility and discontent as well as those chance encounters that have shaped imaginations about Buddhism's origins in Nepal.

By investigating the manufacture of Lumbini in the twentieth century I am interested in adding nuance to several scholarly studies (McMahan 2008; Schober and Collins 2018) that have sought to understand Buddhist encounters with the new social practices and institutional forms that characterize modernity (Taylor 2001, 1). In their recent edited volume *Theravāda Buddhist Encounters with Modernity*, Juliane Schober and Steve Collins explain, "modern Theravāda formations emerged in response to competing and especially secular bodies of knowledge, scientific technologies, globalizing networks and novel social practices" (2018, 8). Similarly, David McMahan points out that the formation of 'Buddhism' as a contemporary category of human experience and practice is the result of "a process of modernization, westernization,

reinterpretation, image-making, revitalization, and reform" that has been "taking place not only in the West, but also in Asian countries for over a century" (McMahan 2008, 5).

Where Schober and Collins are concerned with the shifting terrain of Theravāda in response to political, economic, and social transformations in modernity, McMahan is attuned to the production of a "popular Western picture of Buddhism" as a discrete category in the modern Euro-American social imaginary (Taylor 2001). These projects have been invariably linked throughout the twentieth century, finding their roots in, but certainly not limited to, colonial encounters in South, Southeast, and East Asia (Almond 1989; Lopez Jr. 1995). Both studies offer compelling paths forward for understanding the complex interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist actors in the proliferation of Buddhist belief and practice. This study embraces both perspectives, seeking to integrate Theravāda missionization in Nepal (LeVine and Gellner 2005; Emmrich 2005) within a broader discussion of global Buddhism recognizable in the modern Western social imaginary.

McMahan argues that the popular characterizations of Buddhism visible in the West are marked by fewer rituals and a deemphasis of the supernatural elements of Buddhist literatures in favor of "compatibility with scientific, humanistic, and democratic ideals" (2008, 5-6). This does not mean that traditional elements of Buddhist practice, such as pilgrimage, were simply dispensed with. Lumbini's prevalence in the entangled discourses of Buddhist modernism and modern Theravāda throughout the twentieth century demonstrates that Asian and non-Asian actors have selectively re-interpreted such practices within new modes of re-presentation under the idioms of cultural heritage conservation, and development. Lumbini's ability to capture the imaginations of a wide

range of stakeholders, from domestic Buddhist organizations to foreign investors in transnational heritage and development projects—such as China's Belt and Road initiative—reflects a muddled and contested history of patronage and custodianship into the present.

This study navigates the entangled genealogies of patronage and custodianship that circumscribe Lumbini today. I use the term patronage throughout to denote an idealized social relationship whereby a secular authority, i.e., the "righteous king" or "universal monarch," is tasked with supporting the religious authority, the monastic community or "sangha" (Pali/Skt. *saṅgha*), and by extension the entire dispensation of Buddhism to ensure the flourishing of all sentient beings (Tambiah 1973; Schober 1995, 310-11). This cultural configuration of power has characterized Buddhist interest in the biographical sites since at least the time of the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka (Strong 1983; 2004; Gombrich 1994) and remains salient to this day in institutionalized support of Buddhist material culture. In concert with the macro-level lens of patronage, I use the term custodianship throughout this dissertation to characterize the position of caretaking, whereby shifting conceptions of proximity and responsibility constitute a perceived right to identify with, and advocate for, the needs of the place.

In designating Lumbini as "manufactured" I am referring to Fredrick Asher's characterization of the Buddhist biographical sites as "products of the imagination of those who fabricate them" (2009, 233). This term is intended to invoke the multiple discursive and material agendas unique to modernity that have sought to produce, portray, and re-present the Buddha's birthplace as a static entity with a singular "universal" meaning. In this sense, the term is used to elicit a tension between the site's

ideological conceptions and its diverse material encounters which continue to give it content and character. The term manufactured also reflects the inorganic and systematic construction of Lumbini through modern development initiatives (Mead 1956; Rabinow 1992; 1995; Ekbladh 2010) at the local, state, and international level. Here the designation "modern" is a qualifier that indexes a set of epistemological, ontological, and moral presumptions about the natural and social worlds inherited from Protestant Christianity and the European Enlightenment. What defines the modern development paradigm is the tacit framing of human flourishing as an outcome of the proper arrangement of the natural and social worlds through technocratic intervention (Rabinow 1992; 1995).

As Arturo Escobar signals, in the years following the Second World War the "Third World" emerged as an object of discourse characterized, almost exclusively, by its "underdevelopment" (1984, 377). As I proceed throughout this study, I employ the terms "Third World" and "un/underdeveloped" not in the pejorative sense as pointing to an objective fact, but as historical artifacts representing a particular ideological assumption operating within the discourse of modern development throughout the twentieth century. The strident belief that economic, social, and material progress could be achieved through strategic technical intervention in the developing post-colonies is a logic underpinning the formation of the UN and its various development subsidiaries. These terms still inform contemporary configurations of power-knowledge at Lumbini, and it would be anachronistic to occlude them from my analysis.

A study of Lumbini's manufacture within the discursive fields of Buddhist modernism, development, and heritage conservation draws attention to the frictions

engendered by modernization, globalization, westernization, and secularization. Friction, as Anna Tsing notes, "makes global connection powerful and effective" and it also, without even trying, "gets in the way of the smooth operation of global power" (2005, 6). This is a productive lens for looking at how global Buddhist organizations, national governments, and the UN worked at varying speeds, and with varying degrees of efficacy, to implement a development plan at Lumbini in service of their own ideological commitments throughout the twentieth century. What is striking about Lumbini compared to the other Buddhist biographical sites in India is that early investment by the United Nations constrained the possibilities for development. This echoes the assertion that, "the conditions of modernity have created implicit parameters for what interpretations of Buddhism become possible and impossible" (McMahan 2008, 8). In the chapters that follow I attempt an archeology of Lumbini's modern manufacture.

Material Culture and the Transmission of Buddhism

The Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini is, as of its 1997 inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage program, a place of "universal significance to all mankind" and a symbol of world peace (ICOMOS 1997). The spatial and identity politics underlying the site's designation as a WHS foreground tensions among imaginations about Lumbini's present state and potential futures. Paralleling the insights of Tim Winter (2019, 7) I engage Lumbini as a case study for interrogating the force of historicity, biographical narrative, and heritage in shaping the geopolitical and cultural landscapes of post-colonial Asia. Globalization and the transnational movement of people, commodities, and ideas are not recent historical phenomena. Pilgrimage and the circulation of Buddhists texts and

images have shaped inter-Asian connections for nearly two millennia (Berkwitz et al. 2009; Neelis 2011; Sen 2003; 2014). The transmission of Buddhist teachings—in texts, art, and ritual—has been a multifaceted process involving interconnected networks of trade (Sen 2014) and monastic missionaries (Learman 2005; Berkwitz et al. 2009). Throughout this process, Buddhist teachings have undergone complex alterations and adaptations as they were incorporated into local contexts.

Although the main focus of this study is the modern manufacture of Lumbini within the last one hundred fifty years, it is important to situate these genealogical episodes within the broader historical, political, and economic transformations of the region. Attempts to locate Lumbini are embedded in colonialism, the rise of twentieth-century Buddhist revival and reform movements, and the invention and subsequent commodification of cultural heritage. European regimes of power-knowledge (Foucault and Gordon 1980) frame the manufacture of Lumbini as a site of Buddhist "origins" underpinning the broader discovery of 'Buddhism' under colonialism (Almond 1988) and its construction as a world religion (Masuzawa 2005). The biographical sites also functioned as prominent elements in the formation and maintenance of a global Buddhist consciousness in the twentieth century (McMahan 2008; Huber 2008; Ray 2014; Jaffe 2019) and aided in the domestication of modernist forms of Theravāda Buddhism in Nepal (Lewis 1989; 2016; LeVine and Gellner 2005; Emmrich 2017; Gellner 2018). Within this matrix common themes emerge, such as a reverence for the "sacred" biographical genre (Schober 1997) and the paradigmatic role of Aśoka as patron and sponsor of Buddhist monumentality (Strong 1983; Gombrich 1994; Deeg 2009; Blackburn 2010; Cottingham et al. 2013).

In tracing imaginations about the Buddha's birthplace, we are confronted with a fragmented and discontinuous history of patronage and visitation. Despite an incomplete historical record, renderings of Lumbini are pervasive in the Buddhist biographical genre depicting a preeminent soteriological moment in which "the bodhisattva's turn toward enlightenment [is] made most clear" (Strong 2004, 61). John Strong notes that the "Aśoka tree at Lumbini, under which the Buddha was born" is one of only two pre-enlightenment sites ritually marked and consecrated with the building of a shrine (Skt. *caitya*), as recounted in the Sanskrit *Aśokāvadāna* (c. 2nd-century CE) (2004, 61). Here an encounter with the Sacred Garden at Lumbini constitutes a moment in which the totality of the Buddha's dispensation is reflected and monumentalized by Aśoka. The circuitous and mutually constitutive relationship between place and biography animates Lumbini's enduring significance as mediator of public memory (Peleggi 2012; Blair et al. 2014). The soteriological significance and didactic function of the biographical episodes have fundamentally shaped the development and dynamics of Buddhism's diaspora. The predominance of the Buddha's nativity across sectarian and cultural divides attests to the function of the biographical genre as a salient mediator of religious belief and practice oriented around the tradition's founder. Textual narratives and their attendant material legacies depicting the nativity scene have engendered diverse practices across the Buddhist world (Snodgrass 2009; Bühnemann 2011; Jaffe 2019) and continue to fuel the "co-construction" of new temple spaces, monasteries, and monuments at Lumbini today (Shinde 2021).

The Buddhist biographical genre is a repository of knowledge that presents a countervailing position to a Western historicist epistemology that defines biography as

"the unique events and circumstances of a single life span of an individual actor captured in unilinear history" (Schober 1997, 12). In Buddhism, the cyclical nature of existence (Skt. *saṃsāra*) animates the "interpretative plasticity" of the biographical genre, allowing biographical episodes to "function as frames of reference that map thematic configurations onto divergent time and space" (Schober 1997, 12). The projection of the Buddha's biography forward and backward in time, across great geographical distances, and beyond cultural boundaries suggests that concerns for the "original" or "authentic" are, at minimum, secondary to the didactic power of the biographical episodes in the transmission of Buddhism and the formation of Buddhist cultural memory (Peleggi 2012, 56). As Juliane Schober suggests, "projecting the Buddha's biography onto other times and places legitimizes the universal efficacy of his dispensation and provides a model for its continuation in specific, local contexts" (Schober 1997, 12).

This epistemological stance opens to an ontological one that emphasizes the impermanence (Skt. *anitya*) of all material and non-material existence (Edelglass and Garfield 2009, 4-8; Peleggi 2012, 56; Chapagain 2013, 49-50). The transient nature of the conditioned world informs the Buddhist concept of insubstantiality (Skt. *anātman*), which rejects any eternal essence or inherent value in material forms (Edelglass and Garfield 2009, 4-8; Peleggi 2012, 56; Chapagain 2013, 49-50). Thus, traditional conceptions of Buddhist material culture and heritage are framed by a nonsubstantive ontology of impermanence that understands both flourishing and decline to be cyclical, and inevitable, processes (Edelglass and Garfield 2009, 4-8; Peleggi 2012, 57; Chapagain 2013, 49-50). From this perspective, the construction of Buddhist reliquaries and

monuments is transitory process in the web of co-dependently originated phenomena (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*).

Just as materiality is recognized to persist through periods of decay and rebirth, the social formations and networks of power that circumscribe them are also subject to the laws of impermanence and cyclical existence. Conceived of in this way, the prestige ascribed to Buddhist pilgrimage centers rises and falls within the shifting contexts of culture, society, and history. Despite long periods of disuse or even disregard, the biographical sites have often reemerged in particular cultural and historical contexts to legitimate just rule, propagate internal reform movements, and assert lineal superiority. As repositories of Buddhist cultural memory (Halbwachs 1980; 1992; Assmann 2006; Peleggi 2012) the biographical sites are immersed in religio-political negotiations over power. Patronage and custodianship are two defining relationships within attempts to locate Lumbini at the intersections of religion and development; heritage and politics; identity and difference.

In this dissertation I highlight several conjunctures between the Buddhist biographical genre and modern forms of heritage and conservation that define value vis-à-vis historicity, authenticity, and financial investment. As several scholars (Karlström 2005; Peleggi 2012; Chapagain 2013; MacKee 2013; Geary 2017) have recently discussed, Buddhist conceptions of materiality and heritage are frequently in opposition to conventional conservation initiatives founded on linear conceptions of time and the epistemic value of historicity, authenticity, and origins. As Maurizio Peleggi contends, "the most significant change colonial archeology introduced in the social life of Buddhist monuments was the active deferral of their decay" (2012, 64). This assertion parallels the

claim made by Jacob Kinnard that despite the best efforts of orientalists, archeologists, and heritage agencies to "fix the identity" and "demonstrate the origins" of Buddhist sites, as singular and "fundamentally monosemic places," they remain polysemic in character (Kinnard 2014, 4).

Sources and Strategies

This project was initially envisaged as a historical ethnography bringing together archival documents (in Nepali and English), surveys of visitors to Lumbini (tourists and pilgrims), and first-hand ethnographic observations and interviews with members of the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) and UNESCO officials in Nepal. The main objective of this mixed-methods approach was to grapple with the myriad of "stakeholders" invested in the development of the Buddha's birthplace and speak to the site's contemporary significance for Nepal and the global Buddhist community. To some extent, I have sought to incorporate these contemporary encounters in Chapter 6, but the project has taken an alternate trajectory due to the Covid-19 global pandemic that prevented me from returning to Nepal to conduct sustained ethnographic fieldwork. Considering these unforeseen challenges, I have narrowed the data set to primary historical documents, limited ethnographic observations and interviews in Nepal between June-August 2019, and remote interviews conducted via Zoom, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger between September 2020 and March 2023.

As such this dissertation is more historical than ethnographic. It is also historical in a decidedly divergent fashion as it does not follow standard periodization conventions. Rather, the diverse sources used throughout this study endeavor to bring into light the

rapid modernization of, what is most accurately described as the Asian global south, and the production of transnational Buddhism amidst various communities within this geographically expansive, and culturally diverse, region. Most of the primary South Asian source material for this study is derived from Nepali and English, but it also draws upon sources originally composed in Burmese, Newar, Pali, and Sanskrit. While Nepali and Newar source material is essential to telling the story of Buddhism in Nepal in the 20th century, such materials only narrate half of Lumbini's manufacture as a global destination. Investment in Lumbini has always been, and remains, a predominantly outward facing endeavor. That is to say that part of the site's legibility to the outside world, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, has been its translatability through key ideologies, concepts, and practices, written and voiced predominantly in English. These discourses helped shape a cosmopolitan network of modernist Buddhists and their non-Buddhist interlocutors (Lopez 2002, xxxix; McMahan 2008, 8). English language sources have been collected from physical and digital archives of the Maha Bodhi Society, the World Fellowship of Buddhists, the United Nations, and UNESCO. Nepali language sources have been compiled from the Dharmodaya Sabha, Nepalese news outlets, and the LDT. These sources are exceedingly diverse, comprising a collection of over three hundred documents (Buddhist periodicals; governmental and extra-governmental pamphlets, reports, and internal communications; declassified UN reports, aide memoires, surveys, and personal correspondences; newspaper articles, magazines, and other visual media).

In the pages that follow, I have sought to be clear about the limitations of this study and the need for future research. Where necessary I have indicated the need for more sources to further pursue certain lines of inquiry. My main hypothesis nevertheless

remains, that thinking through Lumbini as a central object of discourse and practice in the twentieth century contributes to our understanding of the construction of Buddhism as a world religion and humanistic philosophy in modernity (Masuzawa 2005; McMahan 2008). It also opens up new avenues for critiquing the epistemological and ontological assumptions that underpin modern regimes of development and heritage (Byrne 2019).

CHAPTER 2

LUMBINI IN BUDDHIST TEXTS, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND FORMATIONS OF POLITY

> He has found the Lumbini garden, the spot where the founder of Buddhism was born…Dr. Führer's discoveries are the most important which have been made for many years. They will be hailed with enthusiasm by the Buddhists of India, Ceylon, and the Far East.[8]

This chapter wrestles with several of the "punctuated lives" of Lumbini in premodern sources. I demonstrate that the project of locating Lumbini is an imaginative and practical endeavor that relies on shifting conceptions of the Buddhist world (Skt. *śāsana*), its political and doctrinal history (Skt. *vaṃsa*), and its soteriological practices of merit-making (Skt. *puṇya*) through generous giving (Skt. *dāna*), the veneration of relics (Skt. *śarīra*), and the practice of pilgrimage (Skt. *tīrthayātrā*). In the transmission of Buddhism, these meritorious activities are modeled in the biographical episodes of the Buddha Śākyamuni's life and in the lives of prominent figures that have followed his "middle way" (Skt. *madhyamapratipadā*) toward liberation. Juliane Schober argues that the biographical genre operates as a cross-cultural repertoire of "narrative patterns and indexical symbols" informing unique ritual and devotional practices "in the dialectical encounter of Buddhism and the cultures that participate in the development of the tradition" (1997, 12). In this sense, the biographical genre is a powerful didactic tool that elucidates the central soteriological aims of the tradition—liberation (Skt. *mokṣa*) from the cycle of birth-death-rebirth (Skt. *saṃsāra*) and the cessation of suffering (Skt.

[8] G. Bühler, "The Discovery of Buddha's Birthplace," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1897): 429-431.

nirvāṇa; Pali *nibbāna*)—through the life-stories of the Buddha and other important personages.

The production and circulation of texts and their attendant material legacies have shaped the contours of the Buddhist biographical genre for nearly two millennia. While the biography of the Buddha has been disseminated in elite and vernacular textual canons it also exists in various aesthetic forms in civilizations across Asia. As John Strong articulates, "written or oral texts were not the only ways in which the story was told. Early on, art and architecture became important mediums in which the whole of his life or episodes from it were recalled" (1998, 2). In many Buddhist contexts, the biography of the Buddha is understood to model the entirety of his teachings (Skt. *Dharma*).[9] Temple spaces across the Buddhist world are frequently adorned by "bioramas" depicting soteriologically significant episodes in the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni or episodes from his previous incarnations along the path toward enlightenment. Beyond artistic representations, the biographical genre informs practices of pilgrimage and the construction of relic monuments in Buddhist polities beyond the Middle Ganges (Huber 2008, 18-23; Blackburn 2010). These popular practices affirm the "ongoing presence of the Buddha" in the lives of his followers, despite his "extinguishment" (Skt. *parinirvāṇa*) from the cycle of suffering and rebirth (Strong 2015, 87).

I begin this chapter by locating Lumbini in the premodern transmission of Buddhism as an important element within the biographical imagination. The biographical

[9] *Dharma* is capitalized throughout this text to express the entirety of the Buddha Śākyamuni's teachings as the third of the "three jewels" (Skt. *ratnatraya*) in which all Buddhists seek refuge. Modern Buddhist activists and reformists frequently capitalized the term to clearly distinguish the Buddha's message from other religious "teachings," and to emphasize its universality. My grammatical choice reflects this historical contingency.

literary genre, and its attendant material legacies, functions as a cross-cultural repertoire for instantiating the Buddha's dispensation in disparate locales. As Jacob Kinnard contends, "[T]he Buddha's life story is really at the very heart of Buddhism. Indeed, the story of the Buddha *is* the story of Buddhism. It is the orienting narrative for all Buddhists" (2006, 1). The saliency of Śākyamuni's biography across the Buddhist world has ensured the persistence of the nativity scene at Lumbini and its soteriological significance in multiple cultural, political, and social contexts. I take a brief inventory of some of these narrative and visual representations demonstrating that Lumbini's resonance transcends analytical frameworks that have sought to parcel South and Southeast Asia into discrete *epistemes* based on elite textualities—Pali and Sanskrit.

I hope to open up space for locating Lumbini in the material realities of aesthetic production (Gail 1992; Quagliotti 1999), relic veneration (Strong 2004) and "monumentalization" (Blackburn 2010) as well as practices of pilgrimage (Huber 2008; Asher 2009) that accompany the long history of textual production. These enterprises have been mutually constitutive, carried out in service of promulgating the *Dharma*. The biography of the Buddha, as we know it today, is intimately linked to characterizations of the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka and his paradigmatic role as a "righteous ruler" (Skt. *dharmarājan*; Pali *dharmarājā*) and a "wheel-turning king" (Skt. *cakravartin;* Pali *cakkavattin*). Aśoka's patronage of the biographical sites, relics of the Buddha, and the monastic community is a benchmark that remains pervasive even today. Aśoka is also understood to be a model of piety through his pilgrimage to the revered sites of the Buddha's biography. Tracing Lumbini's centrality in precolonial constructions of patronage and practices of piety contributes to a growing body of scholarship that has

recognized the potency of material objects and aesthetic forms in the propagation of the Buddha's *śāsana* (Schober 1997; Strong 2004; Blackburn 2010).

My challenge to normative assumptions about the primacy of elite textualities (Pali and Sanskrit) in the transmission of various forms of Buddhist belief and practice is intended to contribute to a line of critique that was initiated by Gregory Schopen (1991) and that has continued on in the works of John Kieschnick (2003), John Strong (2004), Toni Huber (2008), and Anne Blackburn (2010). As Schopen famously contended, the study of Buddhist history has too often been framed by certain presuppositions stemming from the hegemonic cultural lens of Protestant Christianity developed in the Euro-American West. Here I discuss the ways in which the Buddha's birthplace operated in premodern Buddhist imaginations through its production and re-presentation in both elite language texts *and* their attendant material embodiments in visual and ritual forms. The emphasis here is intended to signal a broadening of our understanding regarding Buddhism's propagation in disparate locales. It is this saliency, I argue, that has contributed to the ecumenical investment in the Buddha's birthplace in modernity. Lumbini exists in multiple semiotic registers indexing religious and political power through the shifting dynamics of patronage that are inflected by their unique cultural and historical contexts. As Kieschnick contends:

> Religion, like all forms of communication, is intimately linked to the material world. Not only do objects play important roles in all forms of religious activity, but people who engage in religious activities in general recognize the importance of things and comment on them at length, leaving behind a wealth of material for historians willing to explore the place of material culture in religion (2003, 21).

Following Kieschnick's charge, I trace a history of the Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini across great geographical and cultural expanses through the polysemous

Buddhist biographical genre and its attendant material manifestations in relics; art and architecture; ritual devotion and veneration; and practices of pilgrimage. Juliane Schober contends that the biographical genre functions to legitimize the universal dispensation of Buddha's teachings providing "a model for its continuation in specific, local contexts" (1997, 12). By extension, scenes of the Buddha's nativity accentuate a significant soteriological moment in the bodhisattva's journey toward his future enlightenment. Birthed from his mother's side, the baby Buddha takes seven steps and declares this to be his final life, and that "he himself is the foremost being in the world" (Strong 2004, 61). As Strong suggests, the Buddha's birth at Lumbini is one episode in which the bodhisattva's possession of the physical signs of Buddhahood is most emphasized and his commitment to attaining *nirvāṇa* is most clear (2004, 61).

From Biography to Pilgrimage: Lumbini in Text and Practice

Locating Lumbini in the textual transmission of Buddhism is a difficult process given the overwhelmingly large corpus of Pali, Sanskrit, and vernacular literatures. I do not attempt a comprehensive catalog here. Even a limited engagement with the Pali and Sanskrit sources demonstrates that Lumbini persists as a central element in cross-cultural imaginations about the figure of the Buddha and his biographical process. Reflecting on some of these textual iterations supplements the limited archeological records at Lumbini, providing a more comprehensive perspective on the role of the biographical genre in shaping the various cultural practices and doctrinal commitments across the expanse of the Buddhist world.

Within the biographical genre, a detailed account of the Buddha's nativity appears in the Pali *Nidānakathā* as section two of the introduction to the *Jātakaṭṭhakathā* (c. 4th century BCE – 4th century CE), recounting the various births of the bodhisattva on his path to enlightenment (trans. Rhys Davids 1880, 153-55). In his translation of the *Nidānakathā* T.W. Rhys Davids names the "Lumbini grove" as the site of Siddhartha's birth; the final in a long succession of miraculous births (1880, 86). The text describes the nativity in the resplendent garden:

> Now between the two towns [Kapilavastu and Devadaha] there is a pleasure-grove of sāla trees belonging to the people of both cities and called Lumbini grove. At that time, from the roots to the topmost branches, it was one mass of fruits and flowers; and amidst the blossoms and branches swarms of various-coloured bees, and flocks of birds of different kinds roamed, warbling sweetly. The whole of the Lumbini grove was like a wood of variegated creepers, or the well-decorated banqueting hall of some mighty king. The queen beholding it was filled with the desire of besporting herself in the sal-tree grove; and the attendants, carrying the queen, entered the wood. When she came to the monarch sal-tree of the glade, she wanted to take hold of a branch of it, and the branch bending down, like a reed heated by steam, approached within reach of her hand. Stretching out her hand she took hold of the branch, and then her pains came upon her. The people drawing a curtain round her, retired. Standing, and holding the branch of the sal-tree, she was delivered (trans. Rhys Davids 1880, 66).

A more detailed account of the birth story is depicted in chapter seven of the Sanskrit *Lalitavistara sūtra* (c. 3rd-century CE). In the *Lalitavistara sūtra* the future Buddha's impending birth is more ceremonious, as his father, King Śuddhodana, instructs the "precious Lumbini garden" to be decorated to receive his pregnant wife Māyādevī:

> "Decorate the Lumbini garden which, in its wealth of flowers, is like the Nandana Garden of the Sūras, with jewels and gold in profusion; with precious stuffs of various kinds set off all the trees; and having done so report to me." These commands having been heard, the Lumbini garden was immediately decorated (trans. Mitra 1882, 120).

The text continues with the procession of Māyādevī to the Lumbini grove reiterating the resplendent nature of the garden oasis:

> The whole of the Lumbini garden was redolent with scented waters and besprinkled with choice flowers. All the trees in that noble park were clad with leaves, flowers and fruits out of season…[N]ow, Mayadevi, having entered the park and descended from her chariot, sauntered about in the company of human and heavenly damsels. Rambling from

> tree to tree, strolling from one parterre to another, now looking at this tree, then at another, she came near the waved-leaved fig tree. It was the noblest of many noble trees…[I]t was auspicious, stainless, and pure. This Plaksha tree did the lady approach. Now, that Plaksha tree, feeling the glory of the Bodhisattva, lowered its head and saluted her. Now, Mayadevi, extending her right hand, resplendent as the lightening on the sky, held a branch of the Plaksha tree, and, looking playfully towards the sky, stood there yawning…[T]hus did the Bodhisattva remain thriving in the womb of his mother. And when ten full months had passed, forth from the right side of his mother, he issued, with full memory, knowing everything, and undefiled by any uterine dirt such as usually attaches to others (trans. Mitra 1882, 122-123).

These depictions of the Lumbini garden link the physical landscape to the bodhisattva's vow to overcome suffering, accentuating the bodhisattva's final rebirth and foreshadowing his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya. Aśvaghoṣa's epic poem, the *Buddhacarita* or "Acts of the Buddha" (c. 2nd century CE) and briefly narrates Siddhartha's birth:

> 23. Then one day by the king's permission the queen, having a great longing in her mind, went with the inmates of the gynaeceum into the garden Lumbini.
>
> 24. As the queen supported herself by a bough which hung laden with a weight of flowers, the Bodhisattva suddenly came forth, cleaving open her womb (trans. E.B. Cowell 1894, 5).

The *Buddhacarita* continues with a description of the baby Buddha's eminent wisdom:

> 30. Having thus in due time issued from the womb, he shone as if he had come down from heaven, he who had not been born in the natural way,—he who was born full of wisdom, not foolish, as if his mind had been purified by countless aeons of contemplation.
>
> 31. With glory, fortitude, and beauty he shone like the young sun descended upon the earth ; when he was gazed at, though of such surpassing bright- ness, he attracted all eyes like the moon.
>
> 32. With the radiant splendour of his limbs he extinguished like the sun the splendour of the lamps; with his beautiful hue as of precious gold he illuminated all the quarters of space.
>
> 33. Unflurried, with the lotus-sign in high relief, far-striding, set down with a stamp,—seven such firm footsteps did he then take,—he who was like the constellation of the seven *rishis*.
>
> 34. ' I am born for supreme knowledge, for the welfare of the world,—thus this is my last birth,' thus did he of lion gait, gazing at the four quarters, utter in a voice full of auspicious meaning. (trans. E.B. Cowell 1894, 6-7).

Siddhartha's birth is a particularly poignant episode as it depicts a moment in which the bodhisattva's commitment to attaining *nirvāṇa* is made most clear (Strong 2004, 61). At the time of his birth, the bodhisattva's physical body (Skt. *rūpakāya*) exhibits the thirty-two marks of a "great man" (Skt. *mahāpuruṣa*) making clear his elevated status as a the foremost being in the world (Strong 2004, 60). The nativity is one of three biographical episodes in which the bodhisattva's future enlightenment is foreshadowed through his bodily demonstration of the auspicious marks. (Strong 2004, 60-61). Strong, identifies the sal tree at Lumbini as a "relic of use" (Skt. *pāribhogika*) like the bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya because it is a "pre-presentation of the Buddha" that glorifies the bodhisattva's future enlightenment (Strong 2004, 61-62). In his exegesis of the *Aśokāvadāna*'s narrative depicting king Aśoka's encounter with the Lumbini grove, Strong contends that the tree indexes, not the infant, but "his status as a great being and the certainty of his achievement" (2004, 62).

The confluence of biography and pilgrimage is further illustrated in the canonical Pali text the *Mahāparinibbāna suttanta* of the Pali Dīgha Nikāya (c. 4th-century BCE). Extent in Pali and Sanskrit (*Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*), the text recounts the last days of the Buddha's life including his deathbed instructions for his followers to partake in pilgrimage to the sites associate with the prominent events of his life:

> 16. 'There are these four places, Ānanda, which the believing man should visit with feelings of reverence and aw Which are the four?
> 17. 'The place, Ānanda, at which the believing man can say, "Here the Tathāgatha was born!" is a spot to be visited with reverence and awe.
> 18. 'The place, Ānanda, at which the believing man can say, "Here the Tathāgatha attained to the supreme and perfect insight!" is a spot to be visited with reverence and awe.
> 19. 'The place, Ānanda, at which the believing man can say, "Here was the kingdom of righteousness set on foot by the Tathāgatha!" is a spot to be visited with reverence and awe.

> 20. 'The place, Ānanda, at which the believing man can say, "Here the Tathāgatha passed finally away in that utter passing away which leaves nothing whatever to remain behind!" is a spot to be visited with reverence and awe. [10]

The Buddha's Presence and Absence at Lumbini

Gregory Schopen contends that the nature of the pilgrim's encounter with these places was framed in terms of direct and intimate experience of the Buddha's "living presence" (1997, 116-117). He goes on to note that the Buddha's mandate—in the Pali version of the text—to "do *darśan* and powerfully experience" the biographical locations "makes it clear that there must be direct contact with these places" (1997, 116-17). Here the Sanskrit *darśana*, from the root *dṛś* 'to see' or 'to view', connotes "gazing upon" the physical Buddha, elevating the biographical locations on par with relics as potent repositories of presence.

There remains an ongoing scholarly debate about the ontological nature of the Buddha, which has sought to make sense of the cult of relics and practices of pilgrimage, considering perceived doctrinal and philosophical commitments to impermanence (Skt. *anitya*) and the Buddha's complete extinguishment in *parinirvāṇa* (Bentor 1995; 2003; Sharf 1999; Strong 2004; Kinnard 2004; Geronimo and Trainor 2004). Jacob Kinnard contends that the "talk of presence" among scholars and practitioners of Buddhism is often muddled and inconsistent, yielding a problematic flattening of ontological presence, commemorative presence, and symbolic presence into a singular, but no less vague, concept (2004, 117). This critique can be similarly leveled against the notion of "absence" (Eckel 1990).

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[10] For the full English translation of the Buddha's commandment to partake in pilgrimage see T.W. Rhys Davids trans. *Buddhist Suttas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881): 90-91.

Traditional Buddhist sources, primarily from the Pali Nikāyas, identify three categories of relics: corporeal relics (Pali *sārīrakadhātu*), relics of use or contact (Pali *pāribhogikadhātu*), and relics of commemoration (Pali *uddesikadhātu*) (Kinnard 2002, 39; Strong 2004, 8).[11] *Sārīraka* relics include remnants of the once living Buddha i.e. bones, teeth, and hair; included among the *pāribhogika* relics are material objects that the Buddha, or another revered master, came into contact with during his life i.e. alms bowls, robes, and walking staffs, as well as the Bodhi tree and other *in situ* materials; *uddesika* relics are those objects which commemorate the Buddha, including *sūtras*, *dhāraṇī*, or any object conveying the teachings of the Buddha (Bentor 2003, 24-26; Strong 2004, 8). The boundaries between these conventional categories are not as firm as they appear—the footprints of the Buddha are one such ambiguous case (Kinnard 2000). For many Theravāda Buddhists, the Buddhist world is circumscribed by the corporeal relics of the Buddha Śākyamuni that will be reassembled at the end of the present epoch and undergo a final dissolution of their own, ushering in a new age (Geronimo and Trainor 2004; Strong 2004).

Other venerated objects include *stūpas*, images, and icons, many of which have been variously categorized as *uddesika* relics. Sharf attempts to dissolve the conflation between venerated objects, parceling out "relics proper," i.e., corporeal relics, from "Buddha images and *stūpas* that are unambiguously representational" (1999, 81). He makes this hardline distinction on the basis that "corporeal relics are procured or

[11] This taxonomy is not without ambiguity but does represent the most consistently cited classification. For a detailed discussion see Helmer Smith, ed., *The "Khuddhaka-Pāṭha" Together with Its Commentary, "Paramatthajotikā I"* (London: Pali Text Society, 1978): 222 and E. B. Cowell, ed., *The Jataka, Together with Its Commentaries* (London: Pali Text Society, 1957): 229- 30.

'discovered,' images and *stūpas* are manufactured—modeled by human hands after established prototypes" (1999, 81). This distinction is problematic because it ignores a whole swath of textual and epigraphical evidence concerning images and other relics of commemoration (Bentor 1995, 2003; Kinnard 2004).

The conflation of *presences* is evident in renderings of the Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini. The Buddha's birthplace indexes the soteriologically significant event of his miraculous birth and the bodhisattva's commitment to achieving full enlightenment, thus functioning as a commemorative site. The sal tree at Lumbini is also considered to be an *in-situ* relic of use or contact (*pāribhogika*) that instantiates the Buddha through his contact over two millennia ago. In the process of re-patronizing Lumbini over the course of the twentieth century, relics of various kinds have been ensconced into the landscape of the Buddha's birthplace through the construction of *stūpas* and *caitya,* and consecrated images adorn modern temple spaces.

Strong contends that the sheer profusion of relics—of various kinds and classifications—across the dispensation of Buddhism points to their general function as *expressions* and *extensions* of the "Buddha's biographical process" (2004, 5). In this assertion he navigates away from scholarly debates about the transcendence and imminence of *presences*, instead proposing a continuum on which relics operate to instantiate biography, and by extension fundamental Buddhist teachings. Paralleling this argument, Kinnard (2004, 119), following Collins (1992, 241), makes the case for *narrative presence*, whereby encountering an image (or venerating a relic) engenders the entire story of Buddhism—a *presence* that is as much embodied as it is intellectual and as much socio-cultural as it is historical. For Kinnard (following Bourdieu 1977, 1990), the

narrative presence of the Buddha's biography is constrained by the layered system of beliefs and practices that makes the recognition of the image—or relic—possible, what he terms the "field of the Buddha's presence" that operates within the *habitus*. According to Kinnard, *darśana* is not a practice that brings the Buddha's *presence* into the present moment; rather, encountering an image—or venerating a relic—transports the observer back into the past, into an ideal time when the Buddha was still living and teaching, a time when "these places were not merely shrines and the Buddha was not merely a presence but a living being" (2004, 134).

Aśoka, Pious Pilgrim and Patron

In his previous study and translation of the *Aśokāvadāna*, Strong notes the affinity between the biographical genre and the practice of pilgrimage, particularly around the figure of Aśoka:

> The close connection between Buddhist pilgrimage and the sacred biography of the Buddha is, of course, well known…[I]n the *Aśokāvadāna*, however, Asoka's pilgrimage goes beyond a simple retracing of the Buddha's career; it is, like the building of the eighty-four thousand stūpas, the establishment of a mesocosm where Aśoka himself can experience the presence of the Buddha… [A]t each of the major sites of the pilgrimage, Aśoka builds a *caitya*, a commemorative monument, for himself and posterity to worship (1983, 120).

Here we can see a connection between Strong's characterization of Aśoka's commemorative monumentalization of Lumbini and the practice of *darśana* described by Kinnard. Pilgrimage to the biographical sites functions as a step back into a time when the Buddha was alive, inviting a renewed attention to the teachings. The act of monumentalizing these sites also epitomizes a conscious effort to preserve this active encounter with the Buddha's presence for posterity, ensuring the survival and expansion of the *śāsana*.

While many Nepalis today (Bidari 2009; Rai 2010) claim that the Lumbini "sacred garden" has been a central pilgrimage destination since the time of the Buddha's death— sometime between the 6th and 5th-centuries BCE—it is difficult to corroborate such claims given the dearth of archeological, epigraphical, and textual evidence prior to the third century BCE. The earliest epigraphical evidence of visitation to the site is a Pali inscription, in the Brahmi script, which catalogues the patronage of Lumbini by Aśoka in 249 BCE. The inscription is engraved on a sandstone pillar erected to memorialize his visit to the Terai site—it was this pillar that became the basis for the site's identification with the birthplace of the Buddha Śākyamuni in 1896 by German Indologist Anton Führer. Aśoka's visit to the four revered biographical sites functions as the most renowned fulfillment of the Buddha's prediction in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*. Aśoka embodies the model of a pious pilgrim who journeys to the four sites of the Buddha's life-story and "looks upon them with reverence."

Recent archeological excavations of the Maya Devi Temple, which stands adjacent to the Aśoka pillar, have identified evidence of pre-Mauryan use, "suggesting extremely early delineation of sacred space within this locality, and pushing activity at Lumbini far before the reign of Asoka" (Conningham et al. 2013, 1109). These recent discoveries provide evidence of the site's use dating, perhaps, back to the passing of the Buddha himself. However, pinpointing the exact function of Lumbini prior to the Mauryan period is largely speculative. It is logical to presume that Lumbini, like many other Buddhist ritual locales, became subsumed under the geo-political investment of the Mauryan emperor, who sought to unify a large swath of territory that included extant pilgrimage networks. Recent scholarship has suggested that the grand narrative of

Aśoka's universal control of the Indian Subcontinent is overstated (Sugandhi 2003; Smith 2005). Monica Smith argues that the Aśokan pillars and edicts are, perhaps, better characterized as "investment loci," linked together through a "parsimonious series of connections" rather than having direct point-to-point interaction (2005, 843). She asserts that the "Mauryan polity's construction of control was relatively ephemeral," and that the rapid decline of the dynasty after Aśoka attests to the lack of a universal and highly centralized political structure (Smith 2005, 843).

Aśoka's interventions at Lumbini represent an early (perhaps the earliest) inclusion of the biographical sites within the Buddhist polity. Aśoka has come to represent the paradigmatic figure of patronage and just rule in all Buddhist traditions, in part, because of his reverence for the biographical sites where the Buddha's presence is thought to be exceptionally compelling (Strong 2003). As Frederick Asher has remarked:

> Aśoka's role—or, more properly, the role of his time—may have been the introduction of more permanent construction materials, which give a sense of material establishment, one that allows the present-day visitor to *feel a connection with the Buddha* through the intermediary of ruins dating not to the Master's time but rather to the time of Aśoka, commonly conceived of as one of the greatest promulgators of the faith (2009, 245, with added emphasis).

Although Aśoka's patronage of the Buddhist biographical sites may not, as often claimed, represent the earliest form of material intervention at those locales, it is, however, the first recorded display of Buddhist monumentality providing a model of investment that gave rise to a vast network of disparate sites through the process of "relic monumentalization" (Blackburn 2010, 318). In this mode, Aśoka serves as a paradigmatic custodian of the expanse of the *śāsana,* including Buddhist teachings, lineages of monastic teachers, and institutions (Blackburn 2010, 318). Blackburn argues that "relic monuments were at the heart of local moves to emplot centers of ritual and

remembrance within a highly charged regional map of foundational paradigmatic Buddhist activity" (2010, 318). In regions far afield from the Gangetic Plain, relic monuments "copied elements from exemplary temple centers in the Indic Buddhist heartland" and constituted "visual arguments that linked newer local places and events to highly valued earlier moments in Buddhist history" (Blackburn 2010, 318). Idealized spaces associated with the biography of the Buddha in India and Nepal, as well as those connected to the life story of Aśoka, were "copied onto Buddhist landscapes in a growing southern Asian Buddhist *ecumene* that encompassed much of what we now know as Southeast Asia" (Blackburn 2010, 319).

The construction of relic monuments in South and Southeast Asia, modeled on the monumental landscape of Aśoka, was bolstered by a rich genre of mythological narrative that presents him as "righteous ruler" and a "wheel-turning king" who has dominion over the world (Strong 1983, 44-56). John Strong points out that the elevation of Aśoka to the paradigmatic role of *cakravartin* relies on a broader "Buddhist mythological tradition about kingship" reflected, in its earliest iteration, in the *Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Sutta* of the Pali Dīgha Nikāya (1983, 44). Aśoka's patronage of the biographical sites sets him apart in a certain respect from other rulers identified as *cakravartin*s or *dharmarāja*s. Anne Blackburn notes that new Buddhist landscapes "gained a cosmic pedigree" through both the act of physical construction and the narration of such acts in elite royal and monastic lineage texts (2010, 322). These locales became extensions of the Buddha's dispensation perpetuating his presence in time and space. In the Buddhist polities of South and Southeast Asia, the relics of the Buddha were distributed in a fairly systematic process aimed at providing a "balanced pattern throughout the kingdom," what Strong has

described as "mandalaic" (2004b, 42). This process of *mandalaization* reflects broader imaginations about the proper configuration of society as expressed in the "galactic polity" (see Tambiah 1973), whereby power was distributed through the "arrangement of a center and its surrounding satellites" (Tambiah 2013, 508). This model is paradigmatic in multiple contexts in premodern South and Southeast Asia:

> Employed in multiple contexts to describe, for example: the structure of a pantheon of gods; the deployment spatially of a capital region and its provinces; the arrangement socially of a ruler, princes, nobles, and their respective retinues; and the devolution of graduated power on a scale of decreasing autonomies (Tambiah 2013, 508).

The mandalaic arrangement is pervasive; however, its function is much more practical than strictly cosmological as some scholars (see Eliade 1953) have insisted. As Tambiah notes:

> The so-called cosmological schemes can be seen dynamically as serving as frames for political processes and outcomes of a pulsating kind…the cosmological idiom together with its grandeur and imagery, if read correctly, can be shown to be a realistic reflection of the political pulls and pushes of these center-oriented but centrifugally fragmenting polities. In this instance myth and reality are closer than we think (2013, 509).

Relics, and the locales of their enshrinement, were thus grafted into regional mandalaic configurations of the polity through acts of royal patronage, some even becoming palladiums of religio-political power themselves.[12] Aśoka and his emissaries were central actors in the transmission of the Buddha's teachings to Sri Lanka as catalogued in the *Mahāvaṃsa,* a historical narrative composed in Pali in the sixth century CE (see Ray 2014, 48). The *Mahāvaṃsa* details the process of establishing the *śāsana* in

[12] For a discussion of the tooth relic in Sri Lanka as a palladium of royal power see H.L. Seneviratne, *Rituals of the Kandyan State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978): 17-20; John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004): 193-99; and John Strong, *The Buddha's Tooth: Western Tales of a Sri Lankan Relic* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2022). For a modern example see Juliane Schober, "Buddhist Just Rule and Burmese National Culture: State Patronage of the Chinese Tooth Relic in Myanma," *History of Religions* 36, No. 3, (1997): 218-243.

the royal city of Anuradhapura, which could not have been accomplished without relics of Śākyamuni Buddha (Blackburn 2010, 321). Due to the generosity of Aśoka, relics—parts of the Buddha's corporeal body, his alms bowl, and later a clipping of the Bodhi tree—were installed in monuments across Lanka, extending the biographical landscape of India's Gangetic Plain to a new Buddhist polity far to the south (Blackburn 2010, 321).

Up until the rise of British monumental archeology in the nineteenth century, Aśoka had been understood, almost exclusively, as a righteous patron and pious pilgrim who propagated the Buddha's dispensation in ancient India (Strong 1983; Deeg 2009, 5). The *Aśokāvadāna's* translation into Chinese and its persistence in multiple iterations across the Buddhist world attest to the prestige of Aśoka as the ideal pilgrim and royal patron (Strong 1983; Gombrich 1994). Buddhist pilgrims to the biographical sites across India understood Aśoka's monuments to be much more than markers of political territory. In the travelogues of Chinese pilgrims Faxian (c. 5th century CE) and Xuanzang (c. 7th century CE), the "pillars were not edicts at all…they were ancient signposts piously erected by Aśoka for the benefit of travelers and pilgrims" to commemorate an event in the life of the Buddha or in the history of Buddhism (Strong 1983, 8). The Mauryan emperor's pilgrimage to the biographical sites, his patronage of the monastic community, and his propagation of the *śāsana* are paradigmatic in the formation of premodern Buddhist polities.

Transcending Pali and Sanskrit Epistemes

Steven Collins poses the theoretical lens of the "Pali imaginaire" to describe the influence of Pali Buddhist textuality in the formation of polity and piety in precolonial

South and Southeast Asia (1998; 2008). An enduring repository of Buddhist cultural knowledge and prestige, the Pali imaginaire induces a "double-vision," describing the hegemonic epistemological framework of Theravāda Buddhist ideology and situating that "imagined world in the real world of South and Southeast Asian history and historiography" (Collins 1998, 1). Collins argues that the Theravāda form of Buddhism, in its production of texts, its institutionalized ideologies—the pursuit of a final cessation of suffering (Pali *nibbāna*; Skt. *nirvāṇa*) by the monkhood and laity—and its ability to claim an ontological certainty about the passage of time and the expanse of geo-political space, contributed substantially to the structure and texture of premodern "Southern Asian" civilizations (1999, 19). Central to the Pali imaginaire was the "symbiotic" relationship between the monastic institution, embodied in the figure of the pious monk, and the idealized political ruler, the Wheel-turning King:

> In the Buddhist case, military-political universality and unity was achieved, ideologically, in [the] figure of the Wheel-turning King, conquering the four islands around Mt. Meru…Cultural-religious universality and unity was achieved in the religious ordering of the universe, in explanatory and descriptive schemata of unlimited applicability, such as the fundamental explanatory language of *karma*; the subsumption of all ills in the category of *dukkha*, suffering or unsatisfactoriness; and the central conceptual category of *sankhārā,*, conditioned things/events, along with it negation or contradictory—the unconditioned, i.e. *nirvana*—as a necessary corollary, which together represent and account for everything that exists…Military-political and cultural-political universalism sought to conceive the time-space continuum as an ordered totality (Collins 1998, 28-29).

In Collins' analysis, Pali texts, with their "extensive orientation to the passage of time," were operationalized by elites—virtuoso monks and Wheel-turning kings—as "ancestral heritages," which in the framework of social memory (following Halbwachs 1992), "have value for the society as a whole" (Collins 1998, 23). The Pali imaginaire, then, constitutes a totalizing religio-political system that orients society around Theravāda Buddhist conceptions of time and the soteriological aspirations of liberation

from *saṃsāra*. These aspirations are made manifest in the economy of merit (Pali *puñña*; Skt. *puṇya*) linking worldly activity to the promise of future rebirths.

Elsewhere, Sheldon Pollock deploys the term "Sanskrit cosmopolis" to describe "how Sanskrit traveled the vast distance it did and came to be used for literary and political texts, and what such texts meant to the worlds of power in which they were produced" (2006, 11). The cosmopolis arose at the turn of the Common Era and eventually gave way to various dynastic regional politico-cultural vernaculars, each defined, in some way, by its relation to Sanskrit. In contrast to prevailing assumptions about the degradation of elite "sacred languages" into vernacular forms, Pollock argues that across the cosmopolis Sanskrit retained a culturally salient prestige and power, framing many legal codes, political structures, and religious institutions (Pollock 2006, 15). In addition to relying on the strict grammatical structure of Sanskrit, members of the cosmopolis, which at one point stretched from present-day Afghanistan to Java, reproduced Indic conceptions of geography:

> In their own geographical imagination, the imperial polities of Southeast Asia made themselves part of the cosmopolitan order by a wholesale appropriation of its toponymy. With Mount Meru and the Gaṅga River locatable everywhere, there was no spatial center from which one could be excluded; the Sanskrit cosmopolis was wherever home was (Pollock 2006, 16).

Akin to practices of relic monumentalization, which plotted the biography of the Buddha in regional locales far afield from his life-story in the Gangetic Plain, dynastic polities across the Sanskrit cosmopolis replicated potent places from Indian cosmology—most prominently Mount Meru and the Ganges River. A striking example of Buddhist transmission across the Sanskrit cosmopolis is Borobudur, the world's largest Buddhist monument, located in central Java, Indonesia. Constructed in the eighth century CE,

Borobudur is thought to replicate Mount Meru as the spiritual center of not only Java, but also the entire the world (Sodieman 1973, 102). In addition to operating as a palladium of political power in the region, Borobudur attests to the transmission of the Buddha's biography through the reproduction of Sanskrit texts and the construction of "bioramas" (Strong 2004, 6). Reliefs adorning the temple complex depict the Buddha's biography from the Sanskrit *Lalitavistara sūtra* (Huntington 1994; Quagliotti 1998; 1999). Scholars continue to investigate the aesthetic value and ritual function of the bioramas at Borobudur, including scenes of the Buddha's birth in the Lumbini garden (Quagliotti 1998; 1999).

Pollock's analysis of this replicability as a "function of a different, plural, premodern logic of space" (2006, 16) begs the question, in what ways do the Pali imaginaire and the Sanskrit cosmopolis overlap? Was there a decisively "premodern" logic of space operating at the heart of these transregional imaginations? Similarly, how did the transmission of Buddhism in Pali and Sanskrit engender certain attitudes towards, and reflections on, the geography of the corporeal Buddha in the Gangetic Plain? The Pali imaginaire and the Sanskrit cosmopolis appear to share an attention to the spatial configuration of polity modeled on the prestige of Indic geography or prototypical figures such as Aśoka, expressed in the unity of cosmological and political power. Operating as prestige languages, Pali and Sanskrit were used across South and Southeast Asia to help instantiate the Indian subcontinent as a locus of cosmological origins and cultural heritage. In this sense, Stanley Tambiah's use of the term "indexical symbols" (1984, 4-5) provides insight into the semantic and practical meanings of Buddhism's diasporic linkages to the biographical sites in the subcontinent. At once indexing local and regional

authority, mastery of the natural world, and cosmological order, Borobudur is a symbolic expression of the Buddha's life-story and the entirety of the *śāsana*.

Toni Huber's exploration of Tibetan conceptions of "India as the anchor of cultural legitimacy" draws attention to the ways in which Buddhist communities imagined themselves in a larger geographic and spatial arena dominated by narratives of the Buddha's life and teachings (2008, 63). Huber asserts that, "in traditional Tibetan thinking, the prevailing maxim concerning authority and legitimacy was simple: If it cannot be traced back to India, the holy land of Buddhist origins, and to the Indian Buddha himself, it is not authentic" (2008, 63). Huber's analysis takes pilgrimage as a powerful, if not the most powerful, mediator of ancient India to Tibet, and demonstrates that prestige languages, such as Sanskrit, helped transmit the notion of a Buddhist Holy Land in Buddhism's premodern diaspora. Broadening Huber's notion of the "shifting terrain of the Buddha" to include instances of relic monumentalization and the reproduction of "bioramas" at sites like Borobudur, it becomes clear that the biography of the Buddha was a prominent component of both the Pali imaginaire and the Sanskrit cosmopolis. The fact that these linkages predominately functioned in more popular registers—the practice of pilgrimage and the veneration of relics—suggests that the supremacy of prestige languages in premodern South and Southeast Asia is, potentially, overstated in contemporary scholarship.

The reduplication of the Buddha's biography in texts and their attendant material legacies ensured the saliency of the nativity of the Buddha and the soteriological significance of the Lumbini garden in the geo-spatial and ritual imaginations of Buddhist communities, even when pilgrimage to the site itself was untenable. While imaginations

about the figure of the Buddha and his life and teachings were instantiated in diverse ways within various cultural and historical contexts, they were also circumscribed by a broader understanding of geography linked to the Indian subcontinent. This allowed Sanskrit and Pali to persist as prestige languages of the Buddhist homeland well beyond the classical periods in which they flourished. These connections also contributed to conceptions of a cosmo-political polity as evidenced by the elevation of Aśoka to the paradigmatic role of *cakravartin*. Revered as a great political leader, Buddhist patron, and pious pilgrim the Mauryan emperor is perceived in pervasive ways across both the Pali imaginaire and the Sanskrit cosmopolis.

Returning to the archeological record at Lumbini, the uppermost portion of the Aśoka pillar also contains an engraving commemorating the patronage of Ripu Malla, Prince of the Nagaraja dynasty of western Nepal, in the fourteenth century CE (Weise 2013, 54). This artefact is often taken to be the last identifiable evidence of formal patronage of the site prior to its rediscovery in 1896. Apart from a handful of degraded remnants, there is a surprising lack of specific archeological and epigraphic materials to document the history of this site during the intervening 1600 years. Structures unearthed near the extant Maya Devi Temple have been identified as the foundations of monasteries and stupa bases dating to the first century CE and later, but no clear indication as to their origin or use has yet been established (Asher 2009; Weise 2013).

Pilgrimage is a potent way in which Buddhist communities have embodied the teachings of the tradition's founder and have conceptualized their relationship to the greater Buddhist world. These practices find authority in elite and popular biographical narratives of the Buddha, the paradigm of Aśoka's pilgrimage and distribution of the

Buddha's relics, and the production of *stūpas*, monuments, and art and architecture in Buddhist polities across South, Southeast, and East Asia. Despite this lack of archaeological or epigraphical evidence showing sustained pilgrimage to Lumbini, scholars can draw on legends, narratives, and visual depictions of the Buddha's nativity to understand Lumbini's cross-cultural resonance in the premodern Buddhist world.

Lumbini and the Nepal Mandala

Home to some of the last remaining vestiges of Indic Mahāyāna, the Kathmandu Valley region is an interstitial space on the northern periphery of the Indian subcontinent. It has long stood as a stopover on trade routes between traditional Indian dynastic regimes and the Tibetan plateau (Lewis 1989, 7; 2000,13). The practice of Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley dates back some two thousand years. The Kathmandu Valley was, until conquered by the Gorkha Empire in the eighteenth century, the traditional territorial boundary of Nepal. The region is populated by the indigenous Newars, who speak a Tibeto-Burmese language, Newar—or as it is referred to colloquially *nevāḥ bhāy*—which is highly Sanskritized. Epigraphical evidence from the Kathmandu Valley—more than two hundred Sanskrit inscriptions dating to the 5th-century CE—indicates that the Himalayan territory was a heterogenous religious landscape:

> [These] inscriptions indicate that Hindu temple institutions existed alongside Buddhist monastic traditions in a harmonious relationship confirmed by the Chinese pilgrim Xuan-Zang around 640 C.E. This relationship has endured up to the present day. The Licchavi inscriptions reveal connections between the Nepal valley and the traditions of monasticism and patronage that originated across the Gangetic plain from the time of the Buddha. There are references in the inscriptions to monks and nuns from over a dozen discrete *saṅghas* residing in land-owning *vihāras* (monasteries) and enjoying the support of prominent local merchants and caravan leaders...[T]hese early monasteries were centers of a predominantly Mahāyāna culture, with the inscriptions providing only a few hints of Vajrayāna practice…Nepal's earliest monasteries charged monks with maintaining law and civic order in settlements built on lands donated to them, a custom

> that is unattested in Indian sources. Examples of similar duties are also found in the records of the residents (*mandalis*) of contemporaneous Hindu temples (Lewis 2004, 588).

Often termed the "Nepal Mandala," (Slusser 1982; Bajracharya 1999) historical Nepal consisted of a confederation of neighboring city-states—Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, and Kathmandu—ruled by the Malla Dynasty (c. 1201-1779). Preceded by the Licchavis (c. 5th-9th-centures CE) and the Thankuris (c. 9th-12th-centuries CE), the Malla Dynasty consolidated political authority in the Kathmandu Valley beginning in the 13th century—ushering in what is often termed the "Medieval history of Nepal," characterized by a "great efflorescence in the Valley that gave it most of the impressive religious monuments, and much of the architecture, that attract tourists today" (Gellner 1986, 119).

Conceptions of Nepal as ritual territory and a "sacred land" (Skt./Nep. *puṇyabhūmi*) are maintained in the rich manuscript culture of the Newars and attest to the Kathmandu Valley's unique ability to "support a level of religiosity and a quantity of temples and priests characteristic of urban centres in the Indian plains" (Gellner 1986, 123). The Newars "are the last surviving South Asians who practice Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, whose sacred and liturgical language is Sanskrit, and whose rituals are directly descended from those evolved in North India" (Gellner 1999, 7). Newar manuscript culture presents a counternarrative to grand theories about the spread and decline of Buddhism in South Asia as well as the dominant scholastic focus on Buddhist majority countries, including their fabled histories as "galactic polities" (see Tambiah 1973; 2013), as well as their messy relationship with varying degrees of "Buddhist nationalism" in modernity (Tambiah 1976, 446).

Although some form of Newar linguistic and cultural heritage dates to at least the 6th century CE, [13] most of the archeological and textual evidence points to the Malla period as a watershed moment in the formation of Newar cultural identity (Malla 1982, 1; Gellner 1986, 103; Shrestha 1999, 83). The cultural currency of Sanskrit in medieval Nepal is indicative of the structuring capacities of the Sanskrit cosmopolis (Pollock 2006, 293). Under the "high-caste Hindu Mallas," society in Nepal was restructured on caste distinctions, referred to as *jāt*, with five broad categories roughly corresponding to the *varṇas* of classical Sanskrit texts (Allen 1973, 165).[14] Following Gorkha conquest, Newar caste hierarchy took on increased rigidity, subordinated to the caste divisions of the *Parbatiyā*, "hill people," a term that collectively labeled Newars as a singular *jāt* (Gellner 1986, 104; Shrestha 1999, 86). Among Newars today, the Malla-era caste distinctions largely hold; however, increased social mobility continues to blur their boundaries (Gellner 1986, 106). The modern nation-state of Nepal has maintained the Parbatiyā caste distinctions codified in the 1854 legal code introduced by Rana Prime Minister Janga Bahadur (Shrestha 1999, 86). As Todd Lewis notes:

> Buddhism has survived in Nepal by adapting to the logic of caste society, by incorporating the pollution/purity ethos of Brahmanical *dharmashastra* law codes, and by supporting Hindu kingship while continuing to articulate an alternative counter-(Hindu)-culture where Mahāyāna practices, deities, and tantric initiations were considered superior (2000, 13).

These adaptations have contributed to the blurred lines between ethnic and caste identities amongst Newars in the Kathmandu Valley and across more rural areas in

[13] An inscription of Vasantadev of Tistung, dating to 512 CE, is the oldest recorded use of the word Nepāl to describe the people of the Kathmandu Valley. See K.P. Malla. "Nepal Archeology of the Word," in *Nepal Heritage Society Souvenir*. 1983, pp. 63-69.
[14] See David Gellner, "Language, Caste, Religion and Territory: Newar identity ancient and modern," *European Journal of Sociology* 27, Vol. 1 (1986): 105 for a table outlining Newar caste distinctions.

Nepal, where they are an even greater minority. As a key stopover on trade routes between the Gangetic Plain and the Himalayan plateau, the Kathmandu Valley is also home to various communities practicing Tibetan forms of Buddhism, including the Tamangs, Sherpas, and expatriated Tibetans (Moran 2004; Gellner 2018). In Nepal, peoples of Indian and Himalayan origins have historically assimilated into the polity and prevailing culture at varying speeds, and battles for tribal and ethnic recognition under the Nepalese government are ongoing (Gellner 2007; Toffin 2009). Like many Tibetan Buddhist traditions, variously described as "tantric" or "esoteric" (Allen 1973,161-63), the Newar tradition relies on a Sanskrit corpus of Mahāyāna, "greater vehicle," and Vajrayāna, "diamond vehicle," texts, largely formulated in medieval India (Allen 1973, 162; Lewis 1989, 109-10).

Todd Lewis characterizes Newar manuscript culture, particularly its inheritance of "pan-Buddhist stories"—found in the Sanskrit corpus—as a function of "literary domestication" whereby narratives, legends, and myths of the Buddha and other revered figures became localized in Nepal, providing a foundation for ethnic identity and cultural inheritance (2000, 5). Christoph Emmrich emphasizes the plurality of Buddhist and Hindu influence on the manuscript culture and ritual practices of the Newars:

> When we talk about Newar Buddhist manuscript culture, we have to keep in mind the breadth implied in the transfers of this kind, the heterogeneity of diverse traditions in intense exchange within a small place, and the power that local claims acquire under conditions of economic and intellectual wealth. Thus, it is necessary to try to and isolate certain partial traditions when dealing with manuscript culture, which mainly implies abstracting from the rich osmosis of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhist and Śaiva-Vaiṣṇava manuscript practice, particularly in the fields of poetry and ritual. If one were to outline a Newar Buddhist manuscript culture, one would have to differentiate genres of literature, their manuscripts, the ways of their production and maintenance, and the cultures, they thus produce and in which they are embedded (2009, 140).

In Nepal, the care and ritual presentation of Sanskrit "Perfection of Wisdom" (*Prajñāpāramitā) sūtras* in 8,000, 25,000, and 100,000 verses, attest to the existence of a rich Buddhist manuscript culture (Emmrich 2009). In 2019 I had the privilege of viewing several *Prajñāpāramitā* texts at Vikramshila Mahāvihar, variously called "Bhagwan Bahal," at the historical heart of Thamel in northwest Kathmandu, which claims to be founded by Atisha Dipamkara Shrijnana (982-1054 CE) in 1042 CE. These manuscripts were routinely referenced by members of the resident guild (Nep. *guṭhi*) as the inheritance of the resident patrilineal Newar householder saṅgha. Several even cited the famed Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna (c. 150-250 CE) as the patriarch of their community. A manuscript cover of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* in 8,000 lines from Nepal dating to the 10th or 11th century is currently part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection (fig. 2). Scenes on the cover contain depictions of the Buddha's biography, including his miraculous birth at Lumbini. This document and its attendant pictography testify to the import of the biographical genre in the expansion of texts beyond India, as well as the enduring imagination of the Buddha's nativity as a preeminent soteriological moment in the dispensation of his teachings.

Figure 2. "Book Cover from a Manuscript of the Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra," at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/37975).

The Newar householder saṅgha, comprised of members from the Śākyabhikṣu (commonly "Shakya") and Vajrācārya (commonly "Vajracharya" or "Bajracharya") castes, has continued to maintain public expressions of Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley region through the maintenance of temples (Skt. *vihāra*; New. *bāhāḥ* or *bahī*) and *stūpas* such as Swayambhunath—now inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. As the priestly elite, the Vajracharyas "serve the community's ritual needs" and some specialize in "textual study, medicine, astrology, and meditation" (Lewis 1989, 111). Initiation rites (Skt. *abhiṣeka*; Newar *dekhā*) for Vajracharyas are patrilineal, passed down through guru-chela "teaching-disciple" relationships (Lewis 1989, 111). Śākyas and Urāys (commonly "Uray"), common merchant castes, are the major patrons of Buddhist shrines (*caitya*) across the Kathmandu Valley. These communities "participate in exoteric level of Mahāyāna devotionals" by making regular offerings at shrines dedicated the celestial bodhisattvas and other salvific figures such as Tārā (Lewis 1989, 111). As Michael Allen notes:

> The Newars spend a great deal of time, energy and resources making offerings at temples and shrines, performing sacrifices and other elaborate rituals, attending numerous and popular festivals and fairs, and participating in processions and pilgrimages...because the divine is scattered around the landscape in a great variety of physical forms, so too is there a corresponding development of ritual procedures designed to bring the worshipper and deity into productive contact (Allen 1992, 130).

This material engagement with potent places in the Kathmandu Valley is characteristic of Newar culture dating at least to the Malla period, and possibly earlier. Pilgrimage activities are classified by the Sanskrit and Nepali designation *tīrthayātrā* and are regularly undertaken in accordance with the lunar calendar or to coincide with specific festival days. Depictions of these journeys are evident in Newar texts and are

common motifs represented in painting, metalwork, and woodcarving (see Bühnemann 2011).

Even when the Buddha's birthplace was not a prominent feature of Newar *yātrā* practices, it remained a powerful theme in cultural imaginations about the Buddha's biography. In the early nineteenth century, following the Gorkha conquest, Lumbini came to occupy a focal point in conceptualizing the relationship between Buddhism and Hinduism among Newars in the much larger Nepalese territory. This historical moment popularized narratives and iconography of the *Lumbinīyātrā*—the Buddha Śākyamuni's return journey to Lumbini following his enlightenment. This strand of legends about the Buddha is indigenous to Newar Buddhism and is the subject of a Newar song[15] composed in the mid-19th century, remaining popular amongst *bhajan* groups—Newar ritual musical worshipers—in Nepal today (Bühnemann 2011, 122). The earliest textual reference to the *Lumbinīyātrā* comes from Pandit Amṛtānanda's Sanskrit *Dharmakośasaṃgraha* written in 1826 (Bühnemann 2011, 123). Narratives and iconography of the Buddha's return journey to his birthplace commonly depict a procession of Hindu and Buddhist deities—usually Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśvara, and Indra—as well as other monks and citizens accompanied by musical instruments (Bühnemann 2011). While Amṛtānanda's supplemental chapter to Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita*, titled "Lumbinīyātrika," does not describe the services that the Hindu deities and directional guardians provide to the Buddha, it does, however, note that the

[15] An English translation of the song can be found in full in Gudrun Bühnemann, "The Buddha's (Return) Journey to Lumbinī *(lumbinīyātrā),*" *Vienna Journal of South Asian Studies* 54 (2011-2012): 121-150.

Buddha "visited sites such as the *plakṣa* tree under which he was born and gave religious teachings" (Bühnemann 2011, 123).

In the motif of the *Lumbinīyātrā* we see the Buddha's birthplace emerge as a central destination in the Newar cultural imagination, one that appears a century later in Nisthananda Bajracharya's version of the *Lalitavistara sūtra*, published in Newar in 1914 (Bühnemann 2011, 123). Both presentations by Pandit Amṛtānanda, as well as the later depiction by Nisthananda Bajracharya, "specify that after visiting Lumbini the Buddha proceeded to Svayambhū (*caitya*) in the Kathmandu Valley" (Bühnemann 2011, 125). This is significant as it connects the seat of Newar cultural life in Kathmandu to the significant life event of the Buddha's birthplace. Gudrun Bühnemann suggests that artistic depictions of the *Lumbinīyātrā* date possibly as far back as the seventeenth century CE and are prominent features in Newar *bāhāḥ*s throughout the Valley (2011, 136). Most notably, a copper relief depicting the event adorns the main shrine of Śākyamuni Buddha in Patan's Golden Temple, accompanied by more traditional scenes of his biography (Bühnemann 2011, 127). Laying claim to the Buddha's birthplace in these narrative and iconographic forms suggests that the Buddhist biographical genre functioned as a prominent modality for legitimating Newar Buddhist lineage even when the practice of pilgrimage to the Buddha's homeland in the Terai region was untenable.

Through various retellings, re-imaginations, and re-presentations in Buddhist texts and their attendant material legacies, such as art and architecture, the Buddha's nativity at Lumbini emerged as powerful mediator of Buddhism at the intersections of polity and piety. The saliency of the biography allowed for the reduplication of Lumbini within the pan-Buddhist social imaginary spanning both the Pali imaginaire and the Sanskrit

cosmopolis. In the following chapter I trace Lumbini's "rebirth" as the origins of Buddhism, localized to the Nepal Terai.

CHAPTER 3

MANUFACTURING BUDDHIST ORIGINS: ORIENTALISM AND MONUMENTAL ARCHEOLOGY

> He has found the Lumbini garden, the spot where the founder of Buddhism was born…Dr. Führer's discoveries are the most important which have been made for many years. They will be hailed with enthusiasm by the Buddhists of India, Ceylon, and the Far East.[16]

In 1896 German Indologist and archeologist Anton Alois Führer, with the aid of Nepalese General Khadga Shamsheer Rana, located the ruins of the Maya Devi Temple and unearthed a portion of an Aśokan pillar dating to the third century BCE, identifying the presumed birthplace of Śākyamuni Buddha in the southern foothills of what is now Nepal (fig. 2). The (re)discovery of the pillar, in Nepal's rural Terai region, was the result of nearly a century of orientalist concerns with locating the "authentic" origins of the religious tradition now recognized as 'Buddhism' (Almond 1988; King 2003). In this chapter I advance a discussion of the discursive and archeological "rebirths" of Lumbini, taking my cue from recent scholarship on Bodh Gaya, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment in Bihar, India (Huber 2008; Geary 2017).

I build on the previous chapter by extending a discussion of colonial and orientalist encounters with the Buddhist biographical genre and its attendant material legacies. In the late-nineteenth century the biographical genre was used by orientalists and colonial archeologists as a repository of Buddhist history in efforts to definitively locate the figure of the Buddha in time and space (Drewes 2017). In his seminal work *The British Discovery of Buddhism*, Philip Almond argues that Buddhism was "created"

[16] G. Bühler, "The Discovery of Buddha's Birthplace," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1897): 429-431.

in the Victorian period, first as a "taxonomical object" to organize, classify, and manage the West's encounter with the "otherness" of the Asian frontier, and second as a "textual object" through the successive collection, translation, and interpretation of Buddhism's various elite and vernacular textualities (1988, 13). Almond's characterization of Buddhism, as principally a textual object, is a bit overstated and fails to give an account of the mutually reinforcing technologies of philology and archeology under British colonialism.

Similarly, in his introduction to the edited volume *Curators of the Buddha*, Donald Lopez Jr. discusses Buddhism as a product of European scholastic engagement with "master texts" collected from the Orient (1995, 7). Following Edward Said (1985), Lopez signals the various ways in which the European "curation" of texts produced a reified entity called 'Buddhism' and a unilinear biography of the Buddha "who would come to be both exalted and condemned as the paradigm of an Oriental mentality" (1995, 12). While Lopez gestures to several colonial legacies at the heart of contemporary Buddhist Studies—an overreliance on texts, "Romanticized Orientalism," and a general inattention to the lived practices of Buddhists—he nevertheless omits the role of materiality and geography in the production of this "hypostatized object" of 'Buddhism' (1995, 7). The figure of the Buddha, the writing of Buddhist history, and the geographical expanse of the Buddhist world were also delimited, bounded, hemmed in, and "curated" by other "institutions of power" dominated by Europe, namely the map and the museum (Anderson 1991, 163-185; Cohn 1996, 76-105).

Benedict Anderson (1991) and Bernard Cohn (1996) have identified the entanglement of historicization, monumental archeology, and museology in the

maintenance of colonial rule in South and Southeast Asia. Anderson argues that the excavation and reconstruction of monuments by colonial governments manufactured a hierarchy in which "contemporary natives were no longer capable of their putative ancestors' achievements" indexing a demonstrable decline that only colonial governance could ameliorate (Anderson 1991, 181). Likewise, Cohn argues that colonial museology reconfigured an ever-growing network of archeological excavations into a curatorial state in which the British colonial regime could display their command over the history of India (1996, 9). This command was intimately linked to the notion that, for the British, history has "an ontological power in providing the assumptions about how the real social and natural worlds are constituted" (Cohn 1996, 5). As Cohn argues, "[T]he power to define the nature of the past and establish priorities in the creation of a monumental record of a civilization, and propound canons of taste, are among the most significant instrumentalities of rulership" (1996, 10). These technologies, although crafted and wielded by the colonial state, birthed many unintended consequences, including the return of Buddhists to the biographical sites in India and Nepal. As Toni Huber reminds us, archeological excavation, and subsequent museumification, rendered these ancient locales open to encounter once again (2008, 253). These modern encounters, re-articulations, and re-presentations will be discussed in the following chapters.

As the epigraph above conveys, at the turn of the twentieth century, the (re)discovery of the Buddha's birthplace was heralded as a triumph, not just for colonial archeologists. Definitively localizing Lumbini to the Nepal Terai was a substantial moment in the manufacture of Buddhist history and the figure of the Buddha. In addition to texts, the material legacies of past Buddhist civilizations—monuments, ruins, and

reliquaries—contributed significantly to the construction of 'Buddhism' as an object of inquiry and scholastic discourse in modernity. I argue that the archeological excavation of Lumbini and the orientalist discourse of Buddhist antiquity framed the emergence of Buddhist heritage as a conceptual category in the advancement of Buddhist revival and reform in twentieth century Nepal (Chapter 4). Moreover, these colonial era historicizations of the Buddha's biography have given way to calls for the site's conservation and development under the United Nations (Chapter 5) and have informed renderings of Nepal as a "dharma destination" in the contemporary world (Chapter 7).

Searching for the Buddha of History

The 19th century witnessed the collection, translation, and exegesis of massive collections of Buddhist texts as well as the excavation of Buddhist monumental history at places like Bodh Gaya, Kushinagar, Sarnath, Nalanda, and Sanchi in India, Bagan in Myanmar, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, and Borobudur in Indonesia. Under British and French colonialism in South, Southeast, and East Asia, the Western world quickly became infatuated with the religious tradition of 'Buddhism' and its founder, the Buddha (Almond 1988; Lopez ed. 1995; Anderson 1991). As Almond (1988) argues, the "creation" of Buddhism in the Western imagination was accomplished in two phases. In the first four decades of the nineteenth century, Buddhism was located "out there" in the Orient (Almond 1988, 12-13). Early renderings of Buddhism in the West—in travelogues, missionary reports, and trade ledgers—were principally taxonomic: concerned with making manageable the geographically, culturally, and imaginatively "other" (Almond 1988, 12-13). In the Victorian period (c. 1837-1901) that followed,

Buddhism came to be located in the libraries and institutions of the West through the progressive collection, translation, and publication of its textual *past* (Almond 1988, 13). By 1860 Buddhism "had become a textual object, defined, classified, and interpreted through its own textuality" at the hands of Western philologists (Almond 1988, 13). The West's production and control of knowledge about the Orient and its past, fueled by evolutionary models of civilizational progress (Tylor 1871; Frazer 1890), allowed Buddhism to "be construed as a transhistorical and self-identical essence that had benevolently descended on various cultures over the course of history" (Lopez 1995, 7). In the Western imagination, "the invention of an *authentic* Buddhism in Europe was then naturalized into a temporal element of a historical progression by the designation 'classical'" (Lopez 1995, 7).

Throughout the nineteenth century the dating of Buddhism's 'classical' textual period was contested as texts were collected in the Orient and ushered back to Europe for translation. By 1850, however, orientalist scholars generally acknowledged that the essence of Buddhism was to be found in its Sanskrit and Pali texts, which had subsequently been translated into vernacular languages—resulting in the decayed or degraded forms active in the colonial Orient (Almond 1988; Lopez 1995). Debates concerning the comparative antiquity of Pali and Sanskrit continued to swirl well beyond the turn of the twentieth century; however, the Pali canon—recovered from Sri Lanka and translated by T.W. Rhys Davids and the Pali text society—was widely recognized as containing the original teachings of Buddhism's founder.[17] Asserting a "classical period"

[17] For a detailed discussion of the textualization of Buddhism and the 19th century debates concerning the comparative antiquity of Pali, Sanskrit, and other Buddhist sources see Philip Almond, *The British Discovery of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1988).

in Buddhism was a function of the characteristically Victorian "obsession throughout the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century with the quest for origins - biologically, geologically, and historically" (Almond 1988, 95). Underlying this search for historical origins was the assumption that the original was the essential. By the waning years of the 19th century the "chronological priority of the Pali texts, and hence that of the priority of Pali or Hinayana Buddhism" was a staple of the Western discourse about Buddhism and its historical comparisons to the other great world religions (Almond 1988, 95). The model of progress and degradation, in vogue in Victorian Europe, also aided the objectives of the colonial regime in its interactions with Buddhists "out there" in the Orient—casting certain populations as degenerate or in dire need of intervention. As Almond continues:

> Thus, Pali Buddhism, its priority having been established, came to be seen as containing the essence of Buddhism… Corresponding to the historiographical assumption of the essentiality of the earlier Buddhism was that of the degeneracy of later Mahāyāna Buddhism. A discourse of 'pure' versus 'corrupt' Buddhism was developed on the foundation of the historical priority of Pali Buddhism and the posteriority of Mahāyāna Buddhism (1988, 95).

The obsession with the origins of Buddhism's textual past (principally concerning doctrine and philosophy) and its degradation in its vernacular forms developed concurrently with the search for the "historical Buddha" and his homeland. Brian Houghton Hodgson's discovery of Sanskrit manuscripts in Nepal in 1822 was a watershed moment, both in the formation of Buddhism as a discrete religious tradition and in the search for the Buddha of history (Lopez 1995, 2). The 147 Sanskrit and Tibetan texts that Hodgson collected from monastic residences in the Kathmandu Valley provided the material for Eugène Burnouf's *Introduction à l'histoire du bouddhisme indien*, published in 1844—a text that was hugely influential in shaping the discourse of

Buddhism in the West. It was also Hodgson who first postulated, based on lengthy discussions with his Buddhist informant Pandit Amṛtānanda (died 1835), that, although there were believed to be multiple Buddhas—seven to be exact—the teachings contained in the Buddhist texts he collected were credited to a singular founder, the most recent Buddha, Śākyamuni (Hodgson 1874; Drewes 2017). In his comprehensive account of Indian Buddhism, Burnouf acknowledges that, in presenting the Buddha as a historical figure, he "reproduced the opinion of the Nepalese," alluding to the idea that Buddhists recognized a historical founder in the personage of Śākyamuni—later identified as Siddhartha Gautama (Burnouf 1844, 43-44, cited in Drewes 2017, 7).

Although the debate about the Buddha's historicity continued among philologists and other orientalists throughout most of the nineteenth century, the driving impulse behind it was the shared recognition that Buddhism had its origins in ancient India and that its ideas, doctrines, and practices had disseminated from there to nearly all parts of Asia. The project of locating the figure of Śākyamuni in time and space quickly became a central aim of early Buddhist Studies scholars, orientalists, and colonial archeologists. As Donald Lopez points out, Hodgson's contributions helped shape the "creation of a reified entity called 'Buddhism' and the writing of its history, as well as the creation of a biography of the Buddha" (1995, 12). Here Lopez signals the construction of a biographical sketch in a historicist mode that "presumes biography to be defined by the unique events and circumstances of a single life span of an individual actor captured in unilinear history" (Schober 1997, 12). These orientalist constructions focused on the personage of Siddhartha Gautama, his journey to uncover deeper truths about the nature of existence, and his proclamation of a unified rational philosophy premised on those

truths. As we have seen, the Buddhist biographical genre far predates orientalist intervention; however, from the nineteenth century onward the biographical genre was subsumed under a Western historicist episteme which sought to periodize and localize past events. It is this mode of reading the biographical sources that ultimately led to the search for, and eventual (re)discovery of, the Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini.

The pursuit of the Buddha of history was a wide-ranging project that drew upon multiple sources considered to be "historical." T.W. Rhys Davids wrote in the late 19th century:

> There was certainly an historical basis for the Buddhist legend; and if it be asked whether it is at all possible to separate the true from the false, I would reply, that the difficulty, though great, is apt to be exaggerated. The retailers of these legends are not cunning forgers, but simple-minded men, with whose modes of thought we can put ourselves more or less *en rapport*; we are getting to know what kind of things to expect from their hero-worship, and religious reverence, and delight in the physically marvelous; and we are not without information as to what was, and what was not, historically possible in the fifth century B.C. in the eastern valley of the Ganges. Scholars will never become unanimously agreed on all points; but they will agree in rejecting many things, and after allowing for all reasonable doubts they will agree that there still remain small portions of the narrative whose existence can only be explained on the hypothesis that they relate to actual events. I would maintain, therefore, that some parts of the story—few indeed, but very important, and sufficient to throw great light on the origin of Buddhism—may already be regarded as historical; other parts may be as certainly rejected; and many episodes remain, which may be altogether or partly fictitious (1877, 16-17).

While much of the performative rituals and practices of Buddhism "in the Orient" were dismissed as degraded or misinterpretations of Buddhism's original essence contained within its great textual corpus, certain elements of the biographical genre were also dismissed as similarly fanciful. What remained was, at least in Rhys Davids' estimation, a historical set of events carried out by an original founder that was possible to pinpoint in time and space. It was the orientalist, now in control of Buddhism's textual past, who had the ability to discern the tradition's authentic origins. The pursuit of the historical personage of Śākyamuni by Rhys Davids and his contemporaries is

characteristic of the historicism that permeated Western scholarship in the nineteenth century. This mode of scholarship sought to "rescue texts from the conditions of misunderstanding and reveal their objective meaning for the first time by applying the critical methods of 'scientific history' which could disclose the intentions of their author. Thus, knowing the biography of the Buddha was an essential part of any attempt to understand Buddhist texts which were attributed to him" (Hallisey 1995, 36). In rescuing Buddhist texts from their illegitimate caretakers, i.e., the natives, orientalists and early Buddhologists also laid claim to the Buddha of history. Charles Hallisey notes:

> Buddhist biographies of the Buddha were never taken as examples of common interests between Buddhists and European scholars. Instead, they were always distinguished from European biographies and turned into evidence of the inability of later Buddhist communities to know the facts of their own origins…Europeans were thus able to lay claim to the life of "the founder," and hence, in their eyes, to the very origins of the religion. Their apparent success in this task reinforced their impression that the Buddhism they saw around them was the result of a long process of decay (1995, 37-38).

As orientalists like Max Müller (1857), T.W. Rhys Davids (1877, 1902), Monier Monier-Williams (1889), and Edward Thomas (1927) sought to discern fact from fiction regarding the personage of the historical Buddha Siddhartha Gautama, others such as Alexander Cunningham, Vincent Smith, L.A. Waddell, and Anton Führer frantically searched for archeological evidence of his existence. The archeological project of unearthing Buddhist monumental material culture was equally ensconced in claiming authority and exercising power through "scientific" historicism.

Colonial Monumental Archeology and the (re)Discovery of Lumbini

By the waning years of the nineteenth century, Buddhism had become an eminent object of scholarly discourse. With recently translated manuscripts depicting the ancient world of Indian Buddhism in hand, archaeologists began the project of locating and

uncovering ancient temple spaces, monasteries, *stūpas*, and Aśoka era monuments across the Indian subcontinent. In the years leading up to Führer's excavation of the Lumbini pillar in Nepal's Terai, Alexander Cunningham (1814-1893) and other agents of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) were actively involved in the excavation and preservation of sites tied to the Buddha's biography in the Gangetic Plain. The natural progression of the Asiatic Society (established 1784) and its curiosity about Indian antiquities, the ASI was founded as a formal governmental agency tasked with surveying the Indian subcontinent and preserving its ancient monuments (Imam 1966; Chakrabarti 1988; Singh 2004). Assuming the directorship of the ASI in 1861, Cunningham went on to oversee extensive surveys of the region. Utilizing Stanislas Julien's French translation, *Voyages du pèlerin Hiouen-tsang* (1853), of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang's journey across ancient India in the seventh century CE, Cunningham successfully identified the Buddhist sites of Rajgir, Shravasti, and Sanchi, and excavated areas surrounding Bodh Gaya (Cunningham 1871). Cunningham's assistant, Archibald Carlyle, continued the ASI's surveying and excavation of Buddhist monuments, famously identifying the site of the Buddha's passing away at Kushinagar—in modern day Uttar Pradesh—in 1876. Cunningham, a former officer in the British military, envisaged the ASI as a critical extension of colonial rule in India, advocating to Colonel William Sykes decades earlier:

> It would be an undertaking of vast importance to the Indian Government politically, and to the British public religiously. To the first body it would show that India had generally been divided into numerous petty chiefships, which had invariably been the case upon every successful invasion; while, whenever she had been under one ruler, she had always repelled foreign conquest with determined resolution. To the other body it would show that Brahmanism, instead of being an unchanged and unchangeable religion which had subsisted for ages, was of comparatively modern origin, and had been constantly receiving additions and alterations; facts which prove that the establishment of the Christian religion in India must ultimately succeed (1843, 246-47).

From its inception, then, the ASI operated as a prominent component of the colonial regime, one which, quite successfully, endeavored to collect, catalogue, and mobilize remnants of the ‘”historical” past in service of contemporary political and economic concerns. It also had a missionizing component that worked to characterize India as a land open for conversion to Christianity. While the project of locating the Buddha’s homeland in the subcontinent was not overtly a project of Christian missionizing, it did, however, make use of certain affinities between the two traditions, including their “rational” philosophical stances, their comparative antiquity, and their civilizing tendencies. These same affinities also aroused anxieties amongst many Victorian Christians as they wrestled with the figure of the Buddha as having preceded Christ in history (Tweed 1992).

More than anything else, the ASI functioned to situate Indian Buddhism—that is the ‘original’ tradition—in time and space and to trace the steps of its founder, now recognized as a historical personage. This historiographic project was one that began in the offices of philologists as they painstakingly reconstructed Pali and Sanskrit grammars and traced the proliferation of Buddhist texts across Asia. As Dilip Chakrabarti reminds us, “the theoretical basis of the study of ancient India was formulated not by archeologists but rather by 19th-century Western linguistic, racial, and historical scholarship” (2010, 75). However, the archeological investment in solidifying the physical landscape of ancient India cannot be overstated, for, among other effects, it was through this process that the birthplace of the Buddha was located and came to mark an indelible place in the modern Buddhist landscape.

The search for Lumbini makes evident the degree to which orientalist scholarship and archeology were interwoven in the late 19th century. Following Cunningham's attempts to locate Buddhist monuments using translations of the Chinese travelogues, prominent orientalists—and would-be archeologists—Vincent Smith, L.A. Waddell, and Anton Führer each sought to unearth evidence of the Buddha's birth and early life, with credit for Lumbini's (re)discovery ultimately falling to Führer. It was Smith, however, who first suggested that the actual locations of Kapilavastu, Lumbini and Remagrama described in the Chinese accounts were still undiscovered north of the Indian border in the Nepal Terai. Building on initial surveys done by Francis Buchanan (c. 1810-1830) in the Nepal-India borderlands around Gorakhpur, the trio of Smith, Waddell, and Führer scoured the border region for archeological evidence marking the birthplace (Lumbini) and the childhood residence (Kapilavastu) of the Buddha. The location of Kapilavastu is still hotly contested between the Tilaurakot location in the Nepal Terai and Piprahwa in present day Uttar Pradesh, India (Srivastava 1979; Badiner 2005; Allen 2011).

In their, often overlapping, pursuits to locate the figure of the historical Buddha in the Nepal Terai, Smith, Waddell and Führer were functionaries of British monumental archeology, which sought, in no uncertain terms, to collect and display the material remnants of India's ancient past. Führer, initially tasked as the Curator of the Lucknow Museum and Assistant Architectural Surveyor to the Government of the North-Western Provinces (NWP&O), was elevated to being the province's Archeological Surveyor in 1877. Indebted to the instruction of his mentor, the renown Sanskritist and epigraphist Georg Bühler, Anton Führer was an Orientalist and Indologist emersed in the ASI and its collection and display of Indian antiquities. The "historiographic modality" characteristic

of the British colonial regime influenced several other modes of governance, including what Cohn (1996) terms the "museological." Under the aegis of the ASI, ancient India emerged as an object to be dominated by European savants, who alone were capable of decoding and mastering its mysteries. It also became a tool of governance that could be wielded to claim territory and assert judiciary authority such as in the legal battle over Bodh Gaya (Kinnard 1998; 2003).

In the late nineteenth century, the museum emerged as a formative institution of colonial governance. Newly excavated sites across the subcontinent came to house their own on-site-museums, designed to showcase the antiquities of India's long-lost civilizations, recently recovered (Singh 2004). Through the archeological work of Cunningham, Carlyle, Waddell, and Führer (to name only a few), the Buddha's homeland emerged as a shadow of India's civilizational heights under the Buddhist convert, the Mauryan emperor Aśoka. The modern Indian nation-state's use of Buddhist sites and other Aśokan monuments to present a non-violent past of great antiquity and learning attests to the pervasiveness of the "museological modality." These forms of civilizational representation were developed by 19th-century archeologists and orientalists and are emblematic of the larger colonial political agenda that sought to curate and control ancient sites in the Indian subcontinent and across greater Asia (Anderson 1991; Lopez 1995; Cohn 1996; Huber 2008). Benedict Anderson includes the museum as one of the dominating technologies of the late colonial state:

> Interlinked with one another, then, the census, the map, and the museum illuminate the late colonial state's style of thinking about its domain…this thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state's real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth. The effect of this grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; belonged here, not there. It was bounded, determinate, and therefore—in principle—countable (1991, 184).

Showcasing recently excavated epigraphy and other material objects in on-site, regional, and national museums was an intentional mode of demonstrating colonial authority and technological superiority—techniques that would be adopted post-independence in national heritage regimes. While the work of the ASI retained a degree of scientific impetus, the entire project of unearthing the Buddha's biographical sites was part-and-parcel of the "corporate institution of dealing with the Orient," a technique employed in the fundamentally "Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority" over it (Said 1978, 3). The archeological projects of the late-nineteenth century went hand-in-hand with the project of situating the Orient, and its inhabitants, in a hierarchy of historical and religious significance—a telos most notably articulated in the works of social-anthropologists Sir E.B. Tylor (1871) and Sir James George Frazer (1890), both of whom developed models of social progress inspired by Darwinian evolutionism. Anderson states:

> Monumental archeology, increasingly linked to tourism, allowed the state to appear as the guardian of a generalized, but also local, Tradition. The old sacred sites were to be incorporated into the map of the colony, and their ancient prestige draped around the mappers…Museumized this way they were repositioned as regalia for a *secular* colonial state (1991, 181-82).

The orientalist impulse to locate the ancient sites of the Buddha's biography was employed, with varying degrees of success, as a secularizing technique for the colonial state. The (re)discovery of the Buddha's birthplace was conceived of in a similar manner. However, unlike projects underway in India—at Sarnath, Bodh Gaya, and Kushinagar—the excavation of Lumbini rested on more precarious footing, as archeological expeditions into the Terai had to gain consent from the autonomous Nepalese monarchy seated in Kathmandu. Vincent Smith, in a poignant plea to the colonial authorities in

Calcutta—published in full in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*—highlights the complicated relationship between Britain and the Nepalese Durbar (palace court) in Kathmandu:

> The intense jealousy with which the Nepalese Government has always guarded its territory against explorations by Europeans is well known. This jealousy, based on political considerations, is alone enough to cause the greatest difficulty in procuring genuine assistance from the Nepalese Darbār in unearthing the buried secrets of Kapilavastu…it is most unfortunate that Kapilavastu, Kuśanagara, and all the intermediate sites so important for the history of Buddhism, should be in the territory of so jealous a government as that of Nepāl…I warn all who are interested in the great discovery of Buddha's birthplace that every obstacle to exploration may very likely be raised, both by the Darbār at Kathmāndū and by the local Nepalese officials (1897, 620).

While further excavation of the Kapilavastu region was a priority for colonial archeologists and orientalists, it was not a pressing matter for the Nepalese state. In this way, the overt political motives of the ASI were less authoritative, but not inconsequential. Führer's initial excavation of the Aśoka pillar at Lumbini was a testament to the colonizer's command of history, for it was through the technological advancements of the colonial regime that the clues to locating the Buddha's long-lost birthplace were deciphered. However, Lumbini's subsequent excavation and development illustrate the lack of interest on the part of the Nepalese Hindu monarchy to mobilize the site as a political mechanism of governance. As a result, Lumbini was never fully "museumized" in the colonial era like the other sites tied to the biography of the Buddha that lay within the boundaries of India or other regions of the British Empire. Much of the project of transforming Lumbini into a display of ancient Buddhism, and a tourist destination, occurred in the middle twentieth century with the intervention of the United Nations and later UNESCO (Chapters 5 and 7).

While Smith and Waddell had petitioned the Rana regime for permission to enter the Terai to conduct their survey and excavations, it was ultimately Führer who was

assigned to lead the expedition. Slighted in his efforts to uncover the Buddha's birthplace Waddell bitterly wrote, "using the machinery which I had set in motion, he proceeded to the spots which I had indicated, and there found the ruined monuments of Kapilavastu city and the Lumbini grove" (1897, 650). Despite his claim to identifying the two prominent monuments, Waddell's estimations were done in error. Assuming that the recently discovered Aśokan pillar at Nigali Sagar (fig. 3) marked the birthplace of the previous Buddha Koṇāgamana—following Führer's false reports of a *stūpa* found there—Waddell inaccurately placed Kapilavastu farther north-west, near the town of Bhagvanpur, based on the descriptions from Xuanzang's travelogue (Führer 1897; Falk 1998). Führer, following Waddell's estimations, had sought to search between Nigliva and Bhagvanpur, but under the conditions of his admittance into the Terai, he had agreed to meet General Khadga Shamsheer Rana, who had been tasked with overseeing his survey. Khadga Shamsheer Rana, younger brother to Prime Minister (and *de facto* ruler of Nepal) Bhir Shamsheer Rana, served as the Governor of the Western Terai in Palpa (Falk 1998, 13; Allen 2011, 107-143; Weise 2013, 53-54).

In what Führer describes as "lucky chance" he discovered "close to the General's camp, near the debris of four stupas," a slightly mutilated monolith that was "covered with many records of pilgrims' visits" (Führer 1897, 27) (fig. 4). As Führer goes on to claim, "the inscription fixes with absolute certainty the situation of the garden of Lumbini, where according to Buddhist belief Prince Siddhārtha was born" (1897, 27). Vincent Smith later contended that the pillar had been catalogued prior to Führer's expedition, himself having heard of its location in the 1880's while serving as a regional magistrate (Smith 1897; Falk 1998, 14; Jackson 2013, 295). Moreover, from Smith's

account a group of Nepalese, at the behest of General Khadga Shamsheer Rana, had already begun to dig up the Lumbini pillar prior to Führer's arrival on the scene (Falk 1998, 14; Jackson 2013, 295).

Figure 3. Photograph of Aśokan pillar at Nigālī Sāgar from Anton Führer, Monograph on the Buddha Sakyamuni's Birth-Place in the Nepalese Tarai.(Allahabad, 1897).

Figure 4. Photograph of the Aśoka pillar at Lumbini from Anton Führer, Monograph on the Buddha Sakyamuni's Birth-Place in the Nepalese Tarai. (Allahabad, 1897).

Führer's initial excavation of the Aśoka pillar at Lumbini prompted continued interest on the part of archeologists and orientalists, most notably by Purna Chandra Mukherji and L.A. Waddell, who were commissioned in 1899 to corroborate Führer's findings (Weise 2013, 65-67). P.C. Mukherji oversaw the excavation of the southern side

of the Maya Devi Temple, further uncovered the base of the Aśoka pillar, and correctly identified a nativity scene depicting Māyādevī clutching a Sal tree as she gives birth to the baby Bodhisattva (Weise 2013, 65-67). Mukherji's survey provided the earliest catalogued rendering of Lumbini's layout at the turn of the century. Mukherji also went on to conduct a survey and excavation at Tilaurakot, which he later identified as Kapilavastu (Mukherji 1969). As for General Khadga Shamsheer Rana, his role in the continued exploration of the Buddha's homeland was minimal. Following an attempted coup to oust his younger brother, Chandra Shamsheer Rana, as Prime Minister in 1903, the elder Rana was exiled from Nepal for life, settling in Sagar, in what is now Madhya Pradesh, India. However, even after his exile the General remained interested in the archeological significance of the Terai, writing several articles for the Indian based English-language newspaper the *Pioneer* in 1904, where he expressed his belief that significant discoveries were yet to be made in Nepal (Allen 2011).

For three decades following Lumbini's (re)discovery, little effort was paid to continued excavations nor development initiatives under Rana rule. Between 1933 and 1939 Khadga Shamsheer Rana's nephew Kesher Shamsheer Rana carried out a series of excavations, and reconstructions, at Lumbini (Mukherji 1969, 34-39). His crude attempts to clear the area resulted in the destruction of several stupas, as well as the Gupta era plinth and brick platform of the extant Maya Devi Temple ruins (Weise 2013, 68-69). The Hindu temple built in the 1890's was replaced with another set on a modern brick platform, and the existent bathing pool, in which Māyādevī is believed to have soaked before giving birth to Siddhārtha, was also dug away and fashioned into a rectangular Hindu bathing ghat (Weise 2013, 68-69). These interventions demonstrate that, in the

process of (re)discovering Lumbini, excavation, curation, and destruction were inseparable from one another.

Isolated under Rana rule, Nepal was hardly accessible to foreign visitors; however, in 1933 German Indologist Ernst Waldschmidt (1897-1985) managed to reach the site (Jackson 2013, 296-297). His account notes that the border was "not closely guarded" and that "with the help of some Buddhists" he was able to cross secretly on foot and venture the six miles into the Terai to visit the "Bethlehem of the Buddhists" (Waldschmidt 1970, 13). Waldschmidt describes the prominent display of "a sandstone relief depicting the birth of the Buddha" as well as the nearby bathing pool which he, somewhat romantically, characterizes as the same one seen by Xuanzang on his travels in the 7th-century, with clear water and flowers floating on its surface (Waldschmidt 1970, 13).

These accounts, although limited in number, demonstrate that imaginations about the Buddha's homeland were mobilized in the curative processes of (re)discovery and excavation. Interventions at Lumbini at the turn of the twentieth century drastically altered its topography, making space for imaginative reconstructions. The boom of interest in the Buddha's homeland from orientalists and archeologists that characterized the nineteenth century pursuit of the historical Buddha and initial excavations at Lumbini between 1896 and 1933 quickly faded, leaving the site remote and largely unexcavated up through the 1950s, when Buddhist communities in Nepal were able to finally advocate for its restoration (Chapter 4).

Contesting Dr. Führer

The debate surrounding the "origins" of Buddhism, the validity of Führer's discovery, and the proper translation of the Aśoka edict was catalogued in a series of publications in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* in the summer of 1897 (Bühler 1897; Waddell et al. 1897; Smith 1897). By the late nineteenth century Buddhist communities were aware of the Asiatic Society, and they paid particular attention to its publications on all matters concerning Buddhism across the empire. Therefore, the debate was largely worked out in the public view of Buddhists who had already taken an interest in reclaiming the Buddhist Holy Land beginning with Anagarika Dharmapala's crusade to free Bodh Gaya from Hindu control decades earlier. Bühler's report heralds Führer's discoveries as "the most important which have been made for many years. They will be hailed with enthusiasm by the Buddhists of India, Ceylon, and the Far East. For the student of Indian history, they yield already some valuable results, and they are rich in promise" (1897, 431). Word of Lumbini's discovery spread quickly to the U.S., as the New York Times published an article "Birthplace of the Buddha" on July 31, 1897. The author of that New York Times article echoes Bühler's enthusiasm, calling the discovery "one of the most important of the present century" and touts the West's command over the history of the world, stating, "for we may reach by our explorations even further back than the fifth century before the Christian era" (NYT 1897).

Despite Führer's heralded triumph in definitively locating the Buddha's birthplace, Waddell's admonitions of the German's repeated plagiarism and fallacious reports ultimately resulted in the ASI cutting ties with the controversial Führer in 1898

(Falk 1998; Allen 2011). In addition to accusations of plagiarism in his discovery of Kapilavastu and his false report about a stupa marking the Buddha Koṇāgamana's birthplace near the Aśokan pillar at Nigali Sagar, Führer was also caught delivering fake relics, including a tooth, to the Burmese monk Shin U Ma which he claimed were recovered from—the yet to be located—Kapilavastu (Huxley 2010; Allen 2011). The correspondences between Führer and the monk Shin U Ma are preserved in the National Archives of India and are discussed at great length by Andrew Huxley (2011). Of import is Führer's claim to the rightful discovery of Lumbini and its contents: "Perhaps you have seen from the papers that I succeeded in discovering the Lumbini grove where Lord Buddha was born" (quoted in Huxley 2011, 75). Having briefly met U Ma while touring Burma in 1893-94, Führer was quite familiar with the Burmese Buddhist piety and devotion to relics and antiquities.

Lauding his archeological fame, Führer went on to draft his *Monograph on the Buddha Sakyamuni's Birth-Place in the Nepalese Tarai*, which was withdrawn from circulation by the Archeological Survey and the Asiatic Society in 1898, shortly after its initial publication.[18] Führer's monograph, although disparaged as fanciful or outright fallacious, is paradigmatic of the overlap between orientalist scholarship and the Buddhist biographical genre at the turn of the twentieth century. Führer blends Buddhist narratives of Śākyamuni's life story with snapshots of his expeditions into the Nepal Terai and the border region. For Führer the biographical genre, and by extension the pilgrimage of

[18] Führer's monograph was later reprinted as *Antiquities of Buddha Sakyamuni's Birth-Place in the Nepalese Tarai* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1972) and again in Kathmandu in 1996 with edits by Joshi and Joshi.

Xuanzang, were intimately connected to the archeological project he had undertaken. The Buddhist Holy Land was emerging before his eyes.

Fancying themselves purveyors of “Ancient India,” archaeologists, colonial administrators, and other bureaucrats routinely plundered excavation sites for priceless antiquities. Führer’s deceit was not limited to the distribution of faked relics, he was also accused of forging inscriptions and/or providing false reports of his discoveries. His identification of Gupta era inscriptions at Pagan were likewise proven erroneous by French archeologists in the 1920’s, having been "invented in *toto* by Führer during a tour he made in Burma" (quoted in Huxley 2010, 501). Other claims have been made that Führer faked Brahmi inscriptions in the Lucknow Museum (Lüders 1912, 157-79).

Publicly discredited by Waddell and ousted from the ASI, Führer appealed to the exiled Khadga Shamsheer Rana to confirm his role in the Lumbini discovery. Their correspondences are now catalogued as part of the Harihararaja Joshi and Indu Joshi edited version of Führer’s *Antiquities of Buddha Sakyamuni's Birth-Place in the Nepalese Tarai*, published in Kathmandu in 1996. In his reply to Führer, Khadga Shamsheer Rana attests that it was not a “chance” meeting, but rather that he had the idea to meet the archeological expedition near Padariya, recognizing that the pillar there “struck me very much for its unique shape and surroundings characteristic of Asoka-pillars” (Joshi and Joshi 1996, 59). He went on to note his intention of getting Führer, the “trained antiquary,” to confirm his initial conclusions. Although he did not fully corroborate Führer’s account, the Khadga Shamsheer Rana did recognize that the disgraced archeologist “certainly had a good share in identifying the birthplace of Buddha” (Joshi and Joshi 1996, 59). Although Führer’s reputation has largely been discredited, he is

publicly and acknowledged as the man responsible for uncovering the authentic birthplace of the Buddha, including in official UNESCO sources (Weise 2013).

While the accuracy of Anton Führer's archeological contributions has been highly scrutinized (see Allen 2011), his contributions to the modern formation of the Buddhist Holy Land are significant. Führer was put in a precarious situation as the excavator of the Buddha's birthplace, which had as much historical consequence as Buddhalogical. At a time when modernist Buddhist voices were emerging to confront the Christian missionizing and colonial governance, ancient India became a battleground of the political and religious imagination. Führer was entangled in the rapidly converging Buddhist biographical and historiographic epistemes. Perhaps it is the messiness of this convergence that bent Führer to concoct a larger role for himself in the Buddhist world, as custodian of the would-be-relics he hoped to find while tracing the footsteps of Xuanzang. In fact, it was Führer, prior to his disgraced exit from British civil service, who was tasked with overseeing the transition of Buddha relics from the Piprahwa reliquary on the Birdpore Estate to the Thai royal government in 1898 (Allen 2011).

As Toni Huber points out, Tibetan monks on pilgrimage to the recently unearthed sites of Sarnath and Bodh Gaya often returned with relics of their own, many of which are merely "cast offs," or tiny fragments, left after the excavation process (2008, 282-90). It is reasonable to conclude that Führer also sought some form of karmic merit through the process of unearthing the Buddhist Holy Land. Reports in the *Maha Bodhi Society and the United Buddhist World* from 1902 reference Führer taking refuge in the *dharma* and his attempt to join the Buddhist priesthood in Ceylon (Anonymous 1902; Joshi and Joshi 1996, 74).

Führer's legacy looms large in the ongoing construction of Lumbini as a pan-Buddhist pilgrimage destination and his contributions in surveying the entire Kapilavastu region are also equally significant. It is through Führer's work, or perhaps despite it, that interest in locating the Buddha's homeland in the Nepal Terai continued into the twentieth century. As Himanshu Prabha Ray notes, "in the past, expansion of monastic sites across South Asia was attributed to the efforts of the third-century-BCE king Aśoka, while in the nineteenth century it was the colonial search for the historical Buddha and the sacred landscape associated with his corporeal remains that initiated and sustained the practice" (2014, 130). The impulse to explore and uncover the lost secrets of India's religious past is a colonial enterprise, one that remains an undercurrent of national and international heritage regimes in the contemporary world.

However, once uncovered, the Buddha's birthplace did not simply remain a monument of history or a secular museum of the colonial state; rather, it was re-encountered and re-presented by Buddhist communities on pilgrimage in the early decades of the twentieth century. It was through the efforts of modernist Buddhist groups such as the Maha Bodhi Society that the Buddha's birthplace was reconstituted as part of a utopian Buddhist Holy Land. In the years following Lumbini's (re)discovery, Newar Buddhists and other minority groups mobilized the Buddha's birthplace to situate themselves within pan-Buddhist organizations emerging in response to large-scale social, political, and religious transformations in modernity. These communities also sought to carve out a space for Buddhist heritage in the rapidly modernizing Hindu monarchy of Nepal. I outline this process in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

BUDDHIST MODERNISM ON THE NEPAL FRONTIER

> Buddhism in Nepal is as ancient as Nepal herself.[19]
>
> The Dharmodaya Sabha has its roots in the hearts of the people of Nepal rather than in one place…Members of the Dharmodaya Sabha have represented Nepal in Buddhist conferences all over the world for the last 35 years.[20]

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Buddha's birthplace emerged as a centrally visible topic of discourse, not only among colonial archeologists, philologists, and other orientalists (Chapter 2), but also among diverse Buddhist revival and reform movements that were gaining prominence across South and Southeast Asia. Made accessible once again following the initial excavation of the Aśoka pillar in 1896, Lumbini became part of the growing phenomenon of international Buddhism and its attempts to reclaim the Buddhist Holy Land (Huber 2008, 258). Modern formations of Buddhism's ancient homeland harnessed the Buddhist biographical genre to assert shared connections across Asia and contributed to the establishment of Buddhism as a 'world religion' (Masuzawa 2005). Under various forms of revival and reform, the biographical sites became centrally visible in the assertion of Buddhism's antiquity and cultural significance. The emergence of Lumbini in multiple arenas of discourse and practice in the early twentieth century attests to the "deliberate choices and strategies pursued by a range of Asian actors who maintained their own complex interests and motivations" (2008, 9). This chapter attempts to trace some of those interests.

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[19] Kuladharma Ratna, *Buddhism in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Dharmodaya Sabha, 1956): 1.
[20] Kesar Lall, *A Brief Biography of Ven. Bhikkhu Amritananda* (Kathmandu: Ananda Kuti Vihara Trust, 1986): 34-35.

Building on the archeological projects of the ASI and orientalist scholarship Lumbini emerged as an international Buddhist destination within a matrix of intersecting interventions and rearticulations. While Buddhist revival and reform movements were largely domestic processes, the project of international Buddhism was a "new form of missionary religion which was to become global in scope, albeit based on the Indian subcontinent" (Huber 2008, 258). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Buddhist biographical genre, and the sites associated with it, were used by modernist Buddhists to link disparate locales to a common origin in the Indian subcontinent. Indigenous Buddhists from Nepal were drawn into the discourse of international Buddhism through their associations with the Buddha's birthplace. Some of these associations were consciously crafted on the part of Buddhist reformers in Nepal, while others were initiated by foreign Buddhists seeking to legitimate their own projects of asserting a shared Buddhist heritage (Snodgrass 2009; Jaffe 2019). In both cases, modern encounters with Lumbini were not merely derivative of colonialism, even when they relied on shared knowledge and rhetoric.

The founding of the Maha Bodhi Society in 1891 marks one of the most publicly visible expressions of this modern Buddhist revivalism and its concern for biographical sites. Anagarika Dharmapala (Anagārika Dharmapāla, 1864-1933), a Sinhalese layman-turned-monk, and his associates established the Maha Bodhi Society with the aim of gaining legal control over the Maha Bodhi Temple complex at Bodh Gaya—the site where the Buddha Śākyamuni is believed to have attained enlightenment (Kinnard 2003; Strong 2004; Huber 2008; Kemper 2015; Geary 2017). The initial membership of the Maha Bodhi Society was diverse, including a handful of prominent Western orientalists

and wealthy lay donors, as well as monks and nuns from Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, and Japan.

The Maha Bodhi Society's reach quickly extended to incorporate the canonical biographical sites (Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar), as well as others linked to profound Buddhist historical and cultural moments in the distant past such as Nalanda (circa 5th-13th century CE), the famed monastery (Skt. *mahāvihāra*) and Buddhist university. This renewed focus on Buddhist heritage was a principal tenet of the Maha Bodhi Society, one that was promulgated by the printing and distribution of periodicals and journals. In addition to developing a network for shared Buddhist discourse, the Maha Bodhi Society also actively encouraged pilgrimage to the Buddhist biographical sites in India. Dharmapala and other prominent members of the Maha Bodhi Society made successive pilgrimages to the biographical sites, including a visit to Lumbini in 1898 accompanied by the Prince of Thailand, P.C. Jinavaravamsa (Weise 2013, 55). In this period, the project of locating Lumbini took on new material consequences as Buddhist communities—domestic and foreign—sought to assert lineal connections to the biographical sites through renewed practices of pilgrimage.

This chapter explores those Asian actors and institutions that contributed to the manufacture of the Buddha's birthplace following its rediscovery in 1896. Localizing the discourse of Buddhist modernism at Lumbini helps shed light on the historical configuration of ethnic Buddhist minorities in Nepal, but it also, potentially, opens up alternate perspectives on the dynamics of Buddhist encounters with modernity in South and Southeast Asia broadly. While scholars (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; Seneviratne 1999) have repeatedly linked Buddhist revival and reform movements to the

burgeoning of Buddhist nationalism in the previously colonized territories of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Burma (Myanmar), the international reach of those movements initiated a variety of social and cultural transformations beyond the regions of Buddhist majority. The project of locating Lumbini in the early twentieth century attests to the existence of multiple genealogies of "Buddhist modernism," and demonstrates a lacuna in the scholarship regarding the transmission and germination of modernist Buddhist ideas on new frontiers, such as Nepal.

In the introduction to their edited volume *Theravāda Buddhist Encounters with Modernity*, Juliane Schober and Steven Collins emphasize that the Pali imaginaire was, and continues to be, a potent cultural repertoire shaping Buddhist encounters with modernity (2017, 5-6). Focusing on "conceptions of the Buddhist world (Pali *sāsana*)" and "history (Pali *vaṃsa*)," Schober and Collins attempt to outline some of the complex ways in which Buddhists make sense of their social reality considering tidal transformations brought about by colonialism and modernization (2017, 6). My focus here is on Lumbini's emergence within this transnational discourse of Buddhist modernity—largely dominated by Theravāda. While reformers from the Theravāda tradition do not represent the entirety of Buddhist interventions at Lumbini in the early twentieth century, the institutional reach of the Maha Bodhi Society operated as the conduit through which foreign Buddhists came to understand and encounter the Holy Land.

In the formation of a pan-Asian Buddhist consciousness among the members and readership of the Maha Bodhi Society, the biographical sites, such as Lumbini, were resources for asserting Buddhism's antiquity and engendering modern interventions in a

shared homeland. These imaginations also provided currency for local practices in regions far afield from the Gangetic Plain, such as the public celebrations of the Lumbini Festival in parts of Japan in the 1920's (Snodgrass 2009). Commemorating the birth of the Buddha, the Lumbini Festival asserted the supreme importance of the Buddha's nativity among the global Buddhist community:

> Although performed in Tokyo by Japanese citizens, it was promoted to them as an Asia-wide celebration, with its visions of people across Asia performing the same acts of devotion and singing the same hymns, contributing to a sense of emotional connection between the Japanese and their Asian neighbors (Snodgrass 2009, 143).

The Lumbini Festival was a public spectacle that also helped formulate an "indigenous modernity based in Japanese cultural tradition, a confidently Asian modernity" that "positioned Japan as leader of Asia" (Snodgrass 2009, 136). The celebration of the Lumbini Festival in Tokyo in the 1920's is just one example of how the Buddha's birthplace emerged as a centrally visible indexical symbol which helped frame Buddhist encounters with modernity (Tambiah1984, 81-191; Schober 1997, 12). These novel forms of veneration, focused on the birth of the Buddha, were certainly influenced by Lumbini's rediscovery and excavation in Nepal.

Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) are correct in connecting Buddhist modernism to the rise of Buddhist nationalism; however, the same convictions and imaginations also produced emergent conceptions of the Buddhist world which stretched far beyond the territorial bounds of the nation-state. Additionally, Buddhist histories (*vaṃsa*), largely derived from the biographical genre, were instantiated and legitimized as authentic national narratives in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar.[21] These narrative connections

[21] For a detailed discussion of the Mahāvaṃsa see Kristin Scheible, *Reading the Mahāvaṃsa: The Literary Aims of a Theravāda History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

to the biographical sites in India and Nepal were not merely rhetorical, they also generated renewed material connections to the places associated with the Buddha Śākyamuni in the form of financial investment and the construction of pilgrim's rest houses, monasteries, and grand temple complexes.

As Buddhist revivalist and reform movements gained popularity in Sri Lanka and Myanmar in response to shifting configurations of political and religious authority, and an influx of Christian missionization under colonial rule, Newar Buddhists in Nepal's Kathmandu Valley were struggling with their own political uncertainties and anxieties stemming from the erosion of traditional patronage structures under the Hindu Brahmanical orthodoxy of the Rana maharajas and prime ministers (LeVine 2004, 52). Material interventions at Lumbini coincided with the rise of minority Buddhist identity formation in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Nepal. Amongst the indigenous Newar community of the Kathmandu Valley middle-caste Buddhists, subjected to the decline of traditional institutions under the autocratic Rana regime, began to look elsewhere for "purer" forms of Buddhism (LeVine 2004, 52).

Although Nepal was never formally colonized, British imperialism nevertheless played a significant role in shaping the landscape of religious identity politics under Rana rule (1846-1951), as the autocratic rulers adopted a strict isolationist policy in response to British imperialism in the region. The Rana prime ministers took a similarly strict approach to relegating the activities of their own subjects. Under Rana rule, Buddhism was largely stripped of its public expression and relegated to particular caste ascriptions under a national hierarchy established on the basis of Hindu Brahmanical orthodoxy (LeVine 2004, 52). This shift introduced a period in which minority Buddhist identity

was largely repressed in fear of political persecution. While orientalist influence was minimal in Nepal in the nineteenth century, proclamations of Nepal's Buddhist past were gaining momentum. The historicizing techniques of colonial monumental archeology and philology helped formulate Buddhism as a discrete "world religion" with its historical origins in ancient India (see Almond 1988; Masuzawa 2005). The excavation of Lumbini marks a turning point as Buddhism's "origins" became concretely tied to Nepal.

Despite the best efforts of the Ranas to keep the Himalayan kingdom isolated, this modern paradigm began to creep into Nepal around the turn of the century. Lumbini's (re)discovery, and the initial excavation of the Aśoka pillar, in the southern Terai region was a formidable moment for the Rana regime's mastery of Nepal's historical import. Attention, or lack thereof, to the Buddha's birthplace in the Terai region became a powerful rhetorical tool and spatial strategy for asserting an authoritative Buddhist voice amid shifting political turmoil. In what follows I outline several contingent conjunctures centered around the emergence of Lumbini as an accessible destination in the early twentieth century, and its symbolic power in the making of Buddhist modernism.[22]

Buddhist Modernism and "Protestant" Buddhism

Concomitant with the archeological rediscovery of monuments and the philological excavation of Buddhist texts in Pali and Sanskrit, another complex cultural phenomenon emerged, also kindled by colonialism in South and Southeast Asia. This was

[22] I use the phrasing "contingent conjunctures" to reference Ananda Abeysekara's notion of a relatively isolated set of events or period of time in which "competing narratives and debates conjoin (and converge) to make centrally visible particular authoritative knowledges about what can and cannot count as Buddhism" see Ananda Abeysekara, *Colors of the Robe* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002): 4 (footnote 10).

the formation of a series of Buddhist revival and reform movements originating in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and Myanmar (Burma). In part, these movements were responses to the systematic and sustained disembedding of political power from its traditional religious foundations (Schober 2011, 4). As Juliane Schober notes, in Myanmar colonial interventions in the nineteenth century "constituted grave affronts to the cultural and religious sensibilities of the Burmese," undermining the traditional Theravāda Buddhist polity (2011, 4). In Burma as well as Ceylon, centuries-old linkages between political and religious power were eroded, and new forms of religious authority were introduced. Spurred by Christian missionizing in the region and the rise of European orientalist academic scholarship on Buddhism, revivalist and reform movements in the late colonial period quickly became global in scope. As Donald Lopez argues, one of the key features of these movements was the "representation of Buddhism as a 'world religion' fully the equal of Christianity in antiquity, geographical expanse, membership, and philosophical profundity, with its founder, sacred scriptures, and fixed body of doctrines" (1998, 185). The interrelation of new conceptions of Buddhist doctrine and practice amongst colonialists, orientalists, and Buddhist activists characterized the international project of universalizing Buddhism as a "system of thought" or a "philosophy" in accordance with rationalism, positivist science, and a telos of human progress (McMahan 2008).

In colonial Ceylon, encounters between Buddhists and Christian missionaries opened up new venues for articulating Buddhist identity and history. Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere (1988) have labeled this movement "Protestant Buddhism," dually signaling the Reformation-like individualism associated with it and its emergence within a Protestant Christian missionary milieu. Colonel Henry Steel Olcott was a central

figure in the burgeoning "Protestant-like" form of Buddhist revivalism in Ceylon. An American presbyterian who converted first to spiritualism and later to Buddhism, Olcott co-founded the Theosophical Society in 1874 with occultist Helena P. Blavatsky. The two publicly converted to Buddhism in Sri Lanka in 1880, becoming the first two Americans to do so. As Stephen Prothero notes, "Olcott acted, perhaps more than anyone else, as a culture broker facilitating the interaction between Buddhism and Protestantism in the late-nineteenth-century" (1995, 285-86). While Olcott—frequently called the "White Buddhist"—certainly had an impact on the revival and reform of Buddhism within the cultural context of Ceylon, his interpretation of Buddhism as a "scientific religion" and the best representative of the "primordial esoteric tradition" underlying all the world's religions, characterized a shift toward universalism (Prothero 1995, 286; McMahan 2004, 908).

This universalist approach was coupled with a decidedly orientalist rejection of cultural forms of Buddhist practice, save for their attempt to initiate reform. As David McMahan articulates, "Olcott was careful in his writings to distinguish 'true Buddhism' from the supposed degenerate Buddhism of the masses" (2004, 909). Relying heavily on the recent translation of Pali texts by the Rhys Davids, Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism*, published in 1881, articulated a condensed and uniform articulation of the key tenets of Buddhism (McMahan 2004, 909). Immensely popular, Olcott's *Catechism* became a model for the production of modern Buddhist exegesis under the Maha Bodhi Society which he helped establish in 1891 with Sinhala Buddhist activist Anagarika Dharmapala. Olcott's reinterpretation of Buddhism as a 'world religion' premised on humanistic rationality rather than faith, dogma, and ritualism significantly shaped the discourse of

Buddhist revival and reform. Positioning Buddhism as a socially enlightened system of philosophy, psychology, and meditation, Olcott, Dharmapala, and others also advocated a return to the "pure" and "original" Buddhism extent in the Pali textual canon. This focus on texts—as the sources of "authentic" Buddhism—and the distribution of modern Buddhist exegesis in pamphlets, newspapers, and periodicals was a powerful force in the growth and popularity of Buddhist revival and reform in the late colonial period (Huber 2008; McMahan 2008; Kemper 2015).

In addition to the textualization and rationalization of Buddhism, Olcott, along with his compatriot Blavatsky, inspired a renewed interest in the "sacred" sites of India's spiritual traditions. Toni Huber notes, "Olcott and Blavatsky were the forerunners of an ongoing flow of Western pilgrims, travelers, and tourists to 'sacred,' 'holy,' or 'spiritual' India which has continued up to the present day" (2008, 262). Highly influential among Victorian orientalists, the Theosophical Society's reinterpretations of Buddhism as a "spiritual tradition" tied to an imagined Ancient India also significantly shaped the tone and rhetoric of Dharmapala's international Buddhism. In connection with Sir Edwin Arnold and Olcott, Anagarika Dharmapala founded the Maha Bodhi Society with the chief aim of reclaiming the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya (Kinnard 2003; Huber 2008; Kemper 2015). International in scope, the Maha Bodhi Society established a "movement to restore the *sāsana* to India" –the ancient origins of Buddhism—and to unite the world's Buddhists in this aim (Kemper 2015, 7). This attempt to revive Buddhism in India came to dominate much of the Maha Bodhi Society's ethos, both as a legal endeavour and a pan-Buddhist moral imperative.

While Theravāda reform and revival movements originated in Sri Lanka and across mainland Southeast Asia, they gradually found root in nearly all parts of South and Southeast Asia, largely due to the transnational flow of Buddhist activists and their orientalist associates. Although Dharmapala openly advocated for a pan-Asian coalition of Buddhists, particularly with regard to reclaiming Bodh Gaya, he was simultaneously the face, and voice, of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka (Kemper 2015). Stephen Kemper notes the complex social and political landscapes that Dharmapala traversed: "to make a united Buddhist world Dharmapala had to engage with the British Imperium, Theosophy, Christianity, and Western civilization" (2015, 9). Kemper also points out that Dharmapala's aspirations for a universalized and depoliticized 'Buddhism' were often in tension with his anticolonial sentiments about his homeland:

> When he approached the Buddhism of his own people, he took it as anything but timeless. In the nineteenth century it had been driven to ruin by Christian missionaries and colonial domination, and the religion he struggled for in Lanka was a Buddhism remade politically and economically (Kemper 2015, 12).

In this moment we can see the interlocking affinities and tensions between nationalist and universalist modes of Buddhist revivalism and reform. Working to reform and revitalize Buddhism in his homeland of Sri Lanka lead Dharmapala and his compatriots to expand the semiotic register of the biographical genre to a global concern. In his efforts to place Buddhism on equal footing with Christianity, Dharmapala's modernist Theravāda was rearticulated as the original, and therefore universal, *harma*. Similar tensions between nationalistic and universalistic aims characterized the modern Although Dharmapala and his associates did not operate within the territorial bounds of Nepal, the legacies of his articulations of Buddhism and the central aims of the Maha Bodhi Society played a sizeable role in shaping the contours of the Theravāda movement

among Nepal's Buddhist communities. Dharmapala's influence also contributed to the tone and rhetoric of Lumbini's reclamation, preservation, and development.

Heinz Bechert was the first to coin the term "Buddhist modernism" to describe the wide range of pan-Buddhist renewal, revival, and reform movements that pervaded the late colonial period, characterizing them as having "trends towards reinterpretation of Buddhism as a system of thought" and an "interrelation" between the resurgence of Buddhism in the East and its spread in the West (1984, 275). Similarly, David McMahan argues that Buddhist modernism is characterized by the "complex ways in which various forms of Buddhism have encountered, incorporated, or been incorporated by narratives of modernity," that is, "narratives emphasizing the autonomy of individual reason, the scientific method, the inevitable progress of humanity, the suspicion of tradition and traditional authority, and the reformist impulses of the Enlightenment and Protestantism" (2004, 898-899). These forms of expression represent global flows of ideas, persons, and commodities which cannot be reduced to singular causalities.

Whether we choose to characterize Buddhist revival and reform in this era as "Protestant Buddhism" or "Buddhist modernism," we must be attentive to the ways in which an expanse of interrelated agendas came to shape Buddhism as a 'world religion' and a politicized identity marker in Nepal. These movements were certainly "modern" in the sense that they responded to unprecedented social, political, and cultural forces, but "modern" here does not entail an outright extinction of "traditional" practices and institutions (Baumann 2001, 4; McMahan 2008, 5). There is a foundational tension at play in the use of the term "Buddhist modernism" that underlies my discussion of Lumbini's manufacture. Within these movements Buddhism was frequently touted as a

rationalist philosophy, decidedly disembodied from its material legacies, and yet, the twentieth century saw those same movements champion the repatriation of Buddhism's long-lost material heritages. Here the force of Lumbini as a cross-cultural symbol helped to frame a burgeoning imagination of a shared Buddhist world (*śāsana*).

While I will refer to the Maha Bodhi Society and other Buddhist revival and reform movements in the broader sense as expressions and extensions of "Buddhist modernism," it is also important to keep in mind the various ways in which Protestant influences such as Olcott's helped shape discourses about the Buddhist Holy Land in India and Nepal. The nomenclature of "Holy Land," as I have commented on at length (Chapter 1), betrays the overt Christianization of Buddhist efforts to re-present a global Buddhism through the medium of the biographical sites. Moreover, as Tomoko Masuzawa (2005) and Catherine Bell (2006) have pointed out, Christianity (most commonly in its Protestant forms) functioned as the prototype for all the world's 'religions,' and this paradigm was certainly adopted by Buddhist modernist activists in their efforts to establish Buddhism on the world stage. In the late colonial period, Buddhism became widely trafficked as a philosophy, a spiritual tradition, and a world religion with a history on par with Christianity (Almond 1988; Lopez 1998; Tweed 2003; Masuzawa 2005). While the Maha Bodhi Society did not operate directly within the territory of Nepal, it did frame the discourse of 'Buddhism' which rapidly became a subversive social and political enterprise due to its pernicious ideas undercutting established caste hierarchies and promoting social activism.

Locating Lumbini by Way of the Maha Bodhi Society

Established in 1891, the Maha Bodhi Society operated as the preeminent voice of Buddhist modernism in the late colonial period and continues to function as a repository of Buddhist revivalism in South Asia today. Dharmapala's legacy as a modern Buddhist activist includes "the driving force behind the early establishment of Buddhism as a missionary religion in the modern world system, the raising of a new pan-Buddhist consciousness, and the revival of Buddhist religious and historical sentiments about India as a holy land" (Huber 2008, 259). His contributions to the development of modern Buddhism span decades of publications, public addresses, and international inter-religious diplomacy. As the editor of the *Journal of the Mahabodhi Society* (1892-1900) and its successors *The Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World* (1901-1924) and *The Maha Bodhi* (1924-1933), Dharmapala was a powerful figure in the international discourse of Buddhism—bringing together colonial monumental archeology, orientalist romanticism, Theosophy, Occultism, and Psychology, with various types of Buddhist philosophical and theological exegesis.

The Maha Bodhi Society's publications quickly became a catch-all for a general religio-scientific discourse in South and Southeast Asia, with particular affinity toward Buddhism as a rational, empirical, and ancient tradition set over and against its Christian, Muslim, and Hindu contemporaries. While the work of Dharmapala and his associates was multi-faceted and multivocal, much of the thrust behind the Maha Bodhi Society's activities centered around the reclamation of the Maha Bodhi Temple complex at Bodh Gaya. The "emerging modern Buddhist milieu," epitomized by the Maha Bodhi Society, "became increasingly focused upon the revived sites of the Buddha and, already by the early twentieth century, began to strongly redefine Buddhist attitudes about the practices

at these sites" (Huber 2008, 267). The Maha Bodhi Society was certainly not the only collection of Buddhist actors interested in repatriating Buddhism's ancient homeland. As Douglas Ober (2023, 121-128) has recently elucidated, an affinity for Buddhist sites across the Indian subcontinent certainly predated the formation of the Maha Bodhi Society. Likewise, Alan Trevithick (1999) has shown that Burmese attempts to "restore" Bodh Gaya preceded Dharmapala's interventions by over a decade.

Here I want to extend Fredrick Asher's argument that the Buddhist biographical sites are a fabrication of the imaginations of multiple actors and institutions (2009). Likewise, as Toni Huber (2008) articulates, the construction of India as a "Buddhist Holy Land" predates colonial intervention, but these presentations were nevertheless revitalized through the active excavation and display of Buddhist material legacies. While Huber (2008) and Geary (2017) signal the intersection of multiple imaginations—Buddhist and non-Buddhist—that characterizes the turn of the century "rebirth" of Bodh Gaya, Lumbini has often remained absent in these scholarly discussions of Buddhist encounters with modernity.

In tracing the discursive formation of Lumbini within Maha Bodhi Society publications, we can glean a more nuanced perspective on how Buddhism became re-presented in the twentieth century, not just for a predominantly Western audience (McMahan 2008). Within the Maha Bodhi Society's repatriation campaigns, Lumbini emerges as a symbolic vestige of Buddhism in Nepal, and a place of origins in a burgeoning pan-Buddhist social imaginary. These re-presentations of Lumbini build upon the saliency of the nativity scene and its soteriological significance within the biographical genre discussed in the previous chapter. The Maha Bodhi Society both

adopted and extended the cross-cultural repertoire of the biographical genre, imbuing the sites with renewed prestige as expressions of Buddhist heritage and mobilizing them as locales for promulgating the revival of the *śāsana*.

This prestige was partly drawn from the Maha Bodhi Society's connections to the ASI (discovery notices and excavation reports were regularly included the Maha Bodhi's publications) and its renewed interest in uncovering Buddhist history. Where Buddhist pilgrimage had previously been conducted periodically, and with state sponsored patronage, by religious virtuosos from Tibet, Burma, Siam, and Ceylon, under the Maha Bodhi Society's guidance, international travel to the Buddhist Holy Land became an institutionalized practice of Buddhist modernism. Pilgrimage emerged as a popular medium for gaining lay involvement in the modernist revival movement and for promoting ecumenicism. This is the framework that Lumbini was drafted into following its (re)discovery. However, unlike sites in India, which were becoming increasingly accessible through the sophisticated British railway system, visitation to the Buddha's birthplace remained sporadic and limited through the 1920's due to its location in the isolated Terai.

Not all pilgrims were deterred by Lumbini's remoteness. As early as 1898, accounts of pilgrimage to Lumbini appeared in Dharmapala's edited *Journal of the Maha Bodhi* (Anonymous 1898). Dharmapala described the rough layout of the site, noting the recently excavated Aśoka pillar and its inscription during his visit in 1898 accompanied by the P.C. Jinavaravamsa, the Prince of Thailand (Weise 2013, 55). Discussions of pilgrimage to the Buddha's birthplace and the state of Buddhism in Nepal, although not central themes, were reprised repeatedly in the *Journal of the Maha Bodhi* (1892-1900)

and its successors; the earliest reference appearing in 1892 in an article titled, simply, "Nepal" (Anonymous 1892). While the rediscovery of the Lumbini garden was readily celebrated, the deteriorated state of Buddhism in Nepal, as a result of the despotic Rana Hindu monarchy, was often used as a foil to the ongoing reconstitution of Buddhism in India.

Due to the Rana's strict policies of isolationism, Christian missionizing was repeatedly presented as a limited threat to the Maha Bodhi Society's aims of reestablishing Buddhism in its homeland. However, Brahmanical Hindu theocratic rule in Nepal was a detriment to the entire project; as Nepal's government continually refused to acquiesce requests for the reconstitution of Lumbini as prominent Buddhist pilgrimage destination (Dharmapala 1917; O'Connor 1919; Bouddha 1922). Articles appearing in Maha Bodhi Society publications also routinely commented on the Nepalese Government's censorship of Buddhist voices. In a short article titled "The Propagation of Buddhism in India" from 1917, the author notes, "today in Nepal no Buddhist from any foreign country is allowed to preach Buddhism to the people there" (Anonymous 1917, 127). Censorship of prominent Theravāda monks and other Buddhist activists was characteristic of the Rana regime (LeVine 2004; LeVine and Gellner 2005).

An early account of "Buddhist Pilgrimage in India" from the 1908 edition of *The Maha Bodhi and the United Buddhist World* describes the pilgrimage circuit of W. Harisschandra (a prominent Sinhalese monk) and five companions from Sri Lanka (Anonymous 1908). Limited in details, the article does note Lumbini's location in Nepal, a "sacred spot marked with an Asoka pillar," as well as the distance, roughly 14 miles, from the site to the closest Bengal and North Western Railway in Nowgarh (Anonymous

1908, 61). If the account is to be believed, Lumbini at this time was "left unexcavated" and had "neither a shelter for visitors nor a Buddhist representative" (Anonymous 1908, 62). Another account in the *Maha Bodhi and the United Buddhist World* notes the desecration of the Buddha's birthplace by a Saivite who, "knowing not the sanctity of the consecrated spot desecrates it by slaughtering goats before the statue of Mayadevi which is confounded with the figure of Kali" (Anonymous 1924, 258). The author goes on to advocate for Buddhist intervention: "the Maharaja of Nepal should be approached by a deputation of Buddhists with a request to remove the disabilities therein found…it is hoped that the Maharaja of Nepal will be graciously pleased to remove the obstacles that the pilgrims meet with at Lumbini" (Anonymous 1924, 258). In both accounts the site of the Buddha's birth is left unexcavated and un-developed for the purposes of pilgrimage. Additionally, the discourse of Buddhist-Hindu conflict over monumental sites, perpetuated by Dharmapala's struggle over Bodh Gaya, is echoed in concerns over proper use of Lumbini (Kinnard 1998; 2003).

Despite limited evidence of pilgrimage to Lumbini in the early decades of the twentieth century, Dharmapala's attempts to establish a pilgrim's rest house and *vihāra* at the site were periodically recorded in the pages of the Maha Bodhi Society's publications. In a letter directed to the Nepal Durbar (palace) in December 1918, Dharmapala requested permission to construct a Maha Bodhi Society-sponsored pilgrim rest-house at Lumbini (O'Connor 1919; Bouddha 1922). He received a quick rejection from the British Resident in Nepal W.F. O'Connor on behalf of the Nepal Government:

> With reference to your letter dated 22nd December 1918, asking for a piece of land to build a Dharmasala [sic] at Lumbini for the comfort of Buddhist pilgrims, I write to say that the Nepal Government to whom I referred the matter has asked to inform you that no land can be given to your Society to build the Dharmasala [sic] and that the question of

> the construction of such a building by the Nepal Government itself is under consideration (O'Connor 1919, 29).

In a multi-volume article published in the *Maha Bodhi and the United Buddhist World* in 1922, titled "Lumbini Restoration Scheme," the author notes that such considerations never materialized and that the Gurkha Government of Nepal had little interest in completing any archeological research or restoration at the site (Bouddha 1922). The author goes on to cite Dharmapala's desire to see Lumbini restored to Buddhists and rebuilt as a pilgrimage destination:

> The place on which the Asoka pillar stands is holy ground. This is the only site which the Buddhists find difficult to visit…It is necessary to have the site cleared, a *dharmasala* [sic] or rest-house erected for pilgrims and a Bhikkhu placed there for the guidance of them. It will be necessary to erect a vihara with a Buddha image installed therein. The whole of the Lumbini site should be set apart for the Buddhists…The [Nepal] Durbar should allow the Buddhists to rebuild Lumbini. There were big buildings in the time of Lord Buddha. Jerusalem when under the Turks was free for Christians. They were allowed to build churches etc. Now that Buddhists have forgotten their holy sites, steps might be taken if necessary to educate the people who go by the name of Buddhists by the publication of a tract full of information on the sacred site. Every effort should be made to get permission to restore the Lumbini site (Bouddha 1922 (6), 229-230).

Dharmapala's initiatives, albeit limited, set the stage for future interventions at Lumbini and subsequently the emergence of Theravāda forms of Buddhist modernism in Nepal broadly. The above paraphrasing of Dharmapala's thoughts on Lumbini typifies the Maha Bodhi Society's advocacy for reclaiming the Buddhist Holy Land amidst ongoing efforts to "educate" the global Buddhist community about its shared ancient history. Through the Maha Bodhi Society's publications, this mission became a driving force in modernist reform and revivalist movements in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, India, Indonesia, and Japan, and was later adopted by the Dharmodaya Sabha in Nepal.

Summarizing excerpts from Anton Führer's *Monograph on Buddha Sakyamuni's birth-place in the Nepalese Tarai* and an 1899 report from Babu Purna Chandra Mukherji (the Bengali archeologist who continued Führer's search for Kapilavastu) Dharma Aditya

Bouddha's multi-volume article "Lumbini Restoration Scheme" provides the most complete rendering of Lumbini during the early twentieth century. The title of the article epitomizes the modernist project, appealing to "restoration" as the proper form of intervention and hinting at repatriation of the site to its proper Buddhist custodians. Dharma Aditya Bouddha, describing himself as "a Buddhist student of Nepalese Buddhism, Literature and Archeology," provided the readership of *The Maha Bodhi and United Buddhist World* with a Buddhistic narrative of origins at Lumbini, intimating that modern archeological evidence proved as much (1922 (3), 104). The "Lumbini Restoration Scheme" article is evidence that the biographical sites functioned in multiple registers within the Buddhist modernist milieu. It also demonstrates that the Maha Bodhi Society operated as a mediator between colonial monumental archeology and the Buddhist biographical genre in the early twentieth century.

Aditya Bouddha foregrounds his discussion with the assertion that Lumbini represents the "premier holy site in the history of Buddhism and the premier place of Holy pilgrimage for the whole Buddhist world"—a claim that would be reprised throughout the modern development of the Buddha's birthplace in the twentieth century (1922 (3), 104). Although there is little evidence to suggest that such plans were taken seriously by the Nepalese Government, Aditya Bouddha presents a seven-fold "scheme" for the restoration of Lumbini. The proposal includes several mundane requests for clearing "unnecessary hedges and ungraceful forest trees which prevent the exploration work," the upkeep of roads leading to the site, and the stricter regulations of the sentry guard to deter them from taking bribes and "wasting the time of pilgrims by presenting unnecessary hinderances" (Bouddha 1922 (6), 230-31). The author goes on to propose the

construction of a pilgrim's rest-house with "proper apartments for study, cooking, and rest, etc.," the complete and careful restoration of "8 chaityas referred to by Hiouen Tsang the Chinese pilgrim," and the expulsion of the resident Hindu pujari who "should not offer blood sacrifices any more to a Buddhist divinity" (Bouddha 1922 (6), 231). Although it is unclear if the Maha Bodhi Society officially advocated for such measures to the Nepalese Government, there is little evidence to suggest that any of these initiatives was seriously considered for over a decade until General Keshar (Kaiser) Shamsher Rana, field marshal in the Royal Nepalese Army and nephew to the Maharaja, carried out excavation work between 1933 and 1939 (Weise 2013, 56). Kaiser Shamsher Rana's "beautification" efforts were most likely the result of repeated requests to address the "grievances of the Buddhist pilgrims at Lumbini" by the Maha Bodhi Society leadership catalogued in volumes 40 and 41 of *The Maha Bodhi* (Anonymous 1932, 47, 133-35; Anonymous 1933, 126-29).

In another article, "Lumbini Restoration Work," the author informs *The Maha Bodhi* readership that the Government of Nepal has "sanctioned a sum of R. 20,000 for the purpose of improving the site of Rummin-dei, which is better known to the outside world as the Lumbini Garden" (Anonymous 1932, 133). The anonymous author goes on to state, "Thus after 33 years the Government of Nepal, independent of any outside help, has taken upon itself the task of restoring the place where the Buddha was born" (1932, 133). This appears to be the first charitable reference to the role of the Nepalese government in reestablishing Lumbini as a Buddhist pilgrimage destination. In a subsequent article published in 1933, the anonymous author recounts General Kaiser Shamsher Rana's visit to Sarnath accompanied by Gokal Chand Nagratha, the person in

charge of the excavation and building work at Lumbini (Anonymous 1933). The author praises the Nepalese government's efforts, stating:

> The fact that a member of the orthodox Hindu ruling family of Nepal has been deputed to supervise the excavation work at Lumbini shows the deep and abiding interest taken by His Highness Maharaja Joodha Shumshere Jun Bahadur Rana in the sacred place…before long we may see great things accomplished at the holy site. The grateful thanks of the entire Buddhist world is due to the present ruler during whose benevolent rule it will be possible to see Lumbini taking a fresh lease of life…With the august patronage of His Highness the Maharaja of Nepal and under the able and devoted care of our visitor [General Kaiser] we feel confident that Lumbini will regain its past glory…Nepal is blessed in having this site within its territory and it is our wish that when all that is contemplated at the site is accomplished, Buddhists will remember with unfailing gratitude the names of the present ruler of Nepal and our honoured visitor (Anonymous 1933, 128-29).

This effusive praise of the Rana regime stands in stark contrast to earlier depictions of their censorship of Buddhist missionaries and their general reluctance to provide access to Lumbini in the decades prior. The shifting political dynamics of Buddhist pilgrimage and monumental archeology during the early portion of the twentieth century are evident in the archives of the Maha Bodhi Society's publications. More than simply providing the space for international Buddhist discourse, the Maha Bodhi Society was active in brokering relationships at, and around, sites tied to the biography of the Buddha. Deploying the biographical genre as model of pan-Buddhist investment in the material edifices of Buddhism in ancient India (and Nepal) the Maha Bodhi Society solidified pilgrimage as a central aspect of Buddhist modernism, despite its overt criticisms of other ritualistic and superstitious practices.

The Maha Bodhi Society's central aim of recovering the ancient homeland of Buddhism in India (and Nepal) is evident in Dharmapala's lambasting of the global Buddhist community at the turn of the century:

> The last words of the Lord Buddha at Kusinara were that Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunis, Upāsakas and Upāsikas should visit the four Shrines sacred to His memory…The Muhammadans visit Mecca; the Christians visit Jerusalem; the Hindus visit the various

> Shrines at Ramesseram, Benares, Dwarka, Mathura, Brindaban, Vishnupad at Gaya, and Jaganath Puri at great sacrifice, but the Buddhists of Japan, Burma, Siam, Ceylon, China and Tibet have forgotten their Holyland! (Dharmapala 1900, quoted in Dharmapala 1965).

The rhetoric of the Buddhist Holy Land was a powerful tool of modern Buddhist missionization which sought to unite the global Buddhist community in efforts to bring recently excavated monuments under Buddhist control. What is often lost in this vocalization of modern Buddhism in the early twentieth century is that attention to the biographical sites was not a modern invention. Buddhists from Tibet, Ceylon, Siam, and Burma had long-standing pilgrimage and patronage relationships with the sites of the Buddha's biography in the Gangetic Plain (Trevithick 1999; Strong 2004; Huber 2008; Blackburn 2010). Archeological excavations of Buddhist sites and philological explorations of Buddhist texts produced a legitimizing discourse of Buddhist history; one that was easily, and abundantly, deployed in the service of international Buddhism. As Douglas Ober notes, "archeology and its underlying positivism brought the materiality of Buddhism to the fore," granting a level of unprecedented prestige wielded by Dharmapala and his contemporaries (2023, 80).

Dharmapala and other Buddhist activists worked to promulgate 'Buddhism' as a world religion vis-à-vis Christianity, which, by this point, had already been established as the paradigm, with its rational philosophy and "sacred" geography.[23] Dharmapala and his associates generated the content and platform for the legitimate and authentic discourse

[23] For a detailed discussion of the formation of Buddhism as a "world religion" see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), and for a discussion of the prevailing "paradigms" for studying and classifying world religions see Catherine Bell, "Paradigms behind (And before) the Modern Concept of Religion," *History and Theory* 45 (4): 27-46.

of Buddhism—its origins and its imagined futures—that was readily exportable on the frontiers of Buddhist missionization in the twentieth century.

Theravāda on the Nepal Frontier

Under the aegis of the Maha Bodhi Society, Lumbini was formulated as the site of origins in the modernist Buddhist *ecumene*. As foreign Buddhists began to undertake pilgrimage to the revered sites of Śākyamuni Buddha's life-story at the beginning of the twentieth century, Buddhist minority communities within Nepal were quickly confronted with the historical import of the newly discovered birthplace of the Buddha in the Terai. Lumbini's isolation from the other biographical sites in India contributed to its mystique, and that of Nepal as a whole, as a long-lost vestige of Buddhism. While pilgrimage to the site remained limited and sporadic through the 1920's imaginations about Lumbini's potential to revive Buddhism in Nepal began to circulate amongst expatriate Newar Buddhists living in Calcutta. During this time, the Buddha's birthplace became a potent gateway for introducing Theravāda forms of practice into Nepal and for cementing their lasting presence there. As Christoph Emmrich argues, "from the very beginning of their history in Nepal, Theravāda and modernity have been inextricably connected. To speak of Theravāda in Nepal is to speak of the modern, of the new, the interrupted, the deteriorated, or the improved" (2017, 78).

These novel forms of Buddhism were rooted in the modernist revival and reform traditions which emerged in the late colonial period and were vocalized in the Maha Bodhi Society propaganda. Uprooted from its cultural moorings in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar, Theravāda's introduction in Nepal also reflected anxieties about the

decline of the Buddhist *śāsana,* and its missionaries articulated their intentions through a renewed attention to history (*vaṃsa*). These concerns, although largely indicative of the colonial encounter in regions of Buddhist majority, were echoed in the political and socio-economic uncertainties among minority Buddhist communities in Nepal's Kathmandu Valley. Traditional Buddhist institutions in Nepal were gradually eroded due to shifting patronage relations and changes in land tenure laws under the Rana Maharajas and Prime Ministers (Lewis 2000, xvi). Newar Buddhists were confronted with discrimination and significant political and economic pressure to conform to a national caste hierarchy driven by a "policy of vigorous Hinduisation" (Tewari 1983, 72). Life became so difficult for non-Hindu Nepalis under the Rana regime that "tens of thousands" of Newars and other Tibeto-Burman peoples (also traditionally Buddhist) migrated to "British-held Sikkim, to Darjeeling and Arunachal Pradesh, to independent Bhutan, and even as far as Burma" (Lewis 2016, 110). By the late nineteenth century, many of the Newars left in the Kathmandu Valley declined to self-identify as Buddhist for fear of public persecution or discrimination (LeVine 2004, 52). Many of the remaining Buddhists "conformed in some ways to the norms of the Shah-Rana rulers, trying to manage the group's impression as being orthodox in key Hindu observances when under scrutiny by the Hindu state" (Lewis 2016, 111). The autocratic Rana regime frequently rebuffed the intervention of outside voices and their modernizing agendas. As Richard Burghart states:

> In interacting with the British, the Gorkha state achieved transcendence over its own society and entered the culture of modernity. Yet in defending itself against the unequal relations with the British Imperium, the Rana family had recourse to tradition to mark a fundamental difference…Rana identity became double talk…It declared its modernizing indentations to the agents of modernity and its traditionalizing intentions to the agents of tradition…[Nepal's] religious identity served to resist imperialism, but as a mode of resistance, religion became a counter for tradition (1996, 273).

By the mid-1920s, the state's policies of isolationism and seclusion began to erode as contact with British held India became increasingly necessary. Some upper and middle-caste Nepalis had been sent on scholarship to universities in India in hopes of their return to Kathmandu to serve as Western-trained bureaucrats and functionaries (LeVine 2004, 55). During their time in India, these expatriate students were exposed to the radical nationalist ideas of the Free India movement and the equally radical ideas of the Maha Bodhi Society (LeVine 2004, 55). Thus, the shifting social and political dynamics underway in British India came to dictate the Ranas' censorship and persecution of their own subjects. LeVine and Gellner note:

> As circumstances in India changed, the Ranas' isolationism gradually shifted from being a defense against British aggrandizement into a deliberate policy of preventing their own subjects from being affected by the pernicious democratic and nationalist ideas circulating in India (2005, 35).

Many of the early Theravāda reformers were oppressed and persecuted due to their advocacy of social reform, which often included the dissolution of caste hierarchies, the rejection of prescribed Hindu life-cycle rituals, and the ordination of women. These forms of social activism and religious reform induced anxieties on the part of the Rana regime, which are reflected in the repeated censorship of foreign Buddhist missionaries catalogued in the Maha Bodhi Society's publications. As Bechert and Hartmann discuss:

> The policy of the Rana regime in Nepal was naturally dismissive of any attempts to introduce the Buddhist reform movement into Nepal. The few Nepalis who, in the period before 1950, joined these attempts found this out. In the long run, however, the suppression was ineffective, and since the overthrow of the Ranas modernized forms of Buddhism have been able to develop relatively unobstructed. The suppression of Buddhist reform activity by the Rana regime and the repeated expulsion of monks had as a consequence that the first Nepalese Buddhist associations were formed in India (1988, 6).

The rise of Theravāda missionization in Nepal signals a significant shift in cultural consciousness, reflecting not only an attention to "purifying" Newar forms of

Buddhist practice but also altering the socio-political structures which contributed to the decline of Newar cultural import under the Rana autocracy.

Attempts to reassert Buddhism as a prominent cultural force were often promulgated through the instrumentalization of Lumbini, articulating "Nepal as the birthplace of the Buddha, and hence, in the modernist equation, of 'true' Buddhism, soon to be equated with Theravāda" (Emmrich 2017, 79). As Emmrich goes on to note, "this vision of Buddhism presented the narrative of a glorious past, breakdown, loss, and degradation, setting the stage for a glorious historical return from centuries of exile" (2017, 79). Here Emmrich signals the multivalent project of Theravāda's emergence in Nepal. On the one hand, Newars, who left Nepal to receive higher ordination in Ceylon and Burma, returned, espousing a "purer" form of Buddhism rooted in the superiority of the Pali canon, albeit ensconced in a distinctly modernist rhetoric of individualism and social reform. These appeals were bolstered by an attention to reclaiming the deteriorated origins of a universalized Buddhism at Lumbini and simultaneously to the ethnic heritage of the historical Buddha Siddhartha Gautama as the prince of the Śākya clan—noting an affinity to the traditional Newar caste of Śākyabhikṣus (Bechert and Hartmann 1988; Gellner 1986).

On the other hand, these Nepali Theravādins sought to reform the traditions of their ancestors by reintroducing monasticism and educating the laity. In this regard, the Theravāda reform movement in Nepal has been characterized as "modernist," insofar as it sought to monasticize the laity, elevating them to "a level of Buddhist virtue that had previously been thought possible and appropriate only for monks" (LeVine and Gellner 2005, 25). While relying on extent Newar Buddhist structures for legitimation, Nepali

Theravādin reformists articulated doctrinal convictions and religious practices which were cast as new or improved within Nepal's cultural and social milieu. As Gellner and LeVine note, "many Nepali Buddhists have come to learn and internalize" the tradition of Newar Buddhism "with its complex pantheon of divinities, its baroque rituals, and its ornate shrines as 'paradoxical Buddhism'" vis-à-vis modern forms of Theravāda (2005, 28). This has largely resulted in the hegemonic assertion of Theravāda's historical primacy and doctrinal superiority.

Modernist Buddhist attempts to reclaim Lumbini and revitalize the Nepal *śāsana*—as catalogued in the Maha Bodhi Society's publications—set the parameters by which Theravāda forms of Buddhism were encountered, distilled, and rearticulated in Nepal. Concerns for the reclamation and restoration of Buddhist sites, the education of Buddhist communities on their shared history, doctrines, and practices, and the publication of Buddhist literature also signal a significant historical moment in which the question of "who gets to speak for Buddhism in Nepal?" was first taken up as a one with any material and social significance (Gellner 2018). Gellner and LeVine argue, "Theravada Buddhists have succeeded in defining the terms and the discourse in which most Buddhists in Nepal define themselves today" (2005, 28).

Spurred by the erosion of traditional patronage structures under Rana autocratic rule, efforts to revitalize the Nepal *śāsana* began in earnest in the 1930's with a wave of expatriate Newars leaving to gain ordination in Theravāda monastic orders in Ceylon and Burma (LeVine 2004; LeVine and Gellner 2005; Emmrich 2017). Indebted to networks of Buddhist missionizing created through the Maha Bodhi Society's custodianship of the biographical sites in India, this first wave of Newar monks and nuns were aided in their

pursuits by Theravāda (Burmese and Sinhalese) missionary monks in Kushinagar, Calcutta, Sarnath, and Bodh Gaya. The Newar pupils and patrons of these missionaries formed the core of what would later become the Dharmodaya Sabha—founded in 1944, largely in accordance with the Maha Bodhi Society's program.

Efforts to "purify" Buddhism in Nepal were spurred by support from the Maha Bodhi Society, which not only aided in the ordination of monks and nuns but also produced and disseminated modernist Buddhist propaganda espousing the historical import of Nepal. However, Maha Bodhi Society missionaries were not the first Nepalis to encounter Theravāda forms of Buddhism in the modern era. As LeVine points out, "Newar Buddhist goldsmiths belonging to the priestly Shakya caste" followed Gurkha soldier deployments to Burma in the late nineteenth century establishing transnational flows between Nepal and the newly colonized British territory (2004, 55). By the early twentieth century a significant portion Newars had already been exposed to some form of Theravāda practice and general doctrine. Although it was not without its struggles, the Theravāda movement in Nepal was aided by these existent transnational cultural flows between Burma and Kathmandu.

The first Newar to officially embrace the modernist Buddhist movement was a young Shakya named Jagat Man Vaidya (1901-1978). While studying commerce on scholarship in Calcutta in the early 1920s, Jagat Man devoted most of his time to the revivalism of Buddhism and Newar culture. His enthusiasm for modernist Buddhism emerged after he met Anagarika Dharmapala, an event he likened to meeting Śākyamuni Buddha himself (LeVine and Gellner 2005, 37). Jagat Man soon changed his name to Dharmaditya Dharmacharyya and began to take up key elements of Theravāda-inspired

revivalism, including learning Pali and donning monastic robes, despite never having been formally ordained. Dharmacharyya's contributions to early Theravāda missionizing in Nepal also included publishing *Buddha Dharma* in 1925—the first ever magazine or newspaper to be written exclusively in Nepal Bhasha (Newar). His efforts also included organizing the first celebration of Buddha Jayanti in Kathmandu, commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha in 1926, and organizing the all-India Buddhist conference in Calcutta in 1928 which focused on Buddhism in Nepal (LeVine and Gellner 2005, 37-38). The young Buddhist's efforts were welcomed by Dharmapala, who eagerly acknowledged him as, "a messenger sent from heaven to propagate Theravāda Buddhism in Nepal, the land of the Buddha's birth" (LeVine and Gellner 2005, 37). Thus, although Dharmapala himself did not spend much time in Nepal, Newar converts to modernist Buddhism operated in close connection to the Maha Bodhi Society and its founder.

In these early activities of Dharmacharyya and his compatriots, Nepal became a frontier for modernist Theravāda missionizing; with Lumbini's position in the Terai as the most desirable location for re-asserting the prestigious position of Nepal in the history of Buddhism. While Dharmacharyya certainly set the stage for an increased attention to Lumbini and the status of Buddhism in Nepal, it wasn't until 1944 that Theravāda's presence in Nepal was formally institutionalized with the founding of the Dharmodaya Sabha.

Early Custodians of the Buddha's Birthplace

While the Maha Bodhi Society sought to reclaim Lumbini as part of the Buddhist Holy Land in the first several decades of the twentieth century, the 1920's and 30's saw Nepali Buddhists leaving the Kathmandu Valley in search of "purer" forms of Buddhism. At Kushinagar—the site of the Buddha's passing away—in what is now the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, young Newars encountered the venerable Chandramani Mahasthavir (Candramaṇi Mahāsthavir, 1876-1972), Burmese Nayakathera, "head elder," of Kushinagar, and member of the Maha Bodhi Society leadership committee (Shakya 1989). The venerable monk was born in 1876 in Arkan province of Burma and entered the monastic order in 1888. Chandramani arrived at Bodh Gaya in 1891 as part of a contingent of novices (Pali *sāmaṇera*; Skt. *śrāmaṇera*) from Burma (Shakya 1989, 4). The young monk developed a strong connection to Kushinagar after his first visit there:

> On reaching Kushinagar, Shramaner Chanda [Chandramani] had deep faith in his heart. When he entered the parinirvāṇa temple there and saw the parinirvāṇa statue of the Tathagatha, he remembered the past and became sad. He returned to Buddh Gaya [sic] with many things in his mind (Shakya 1989, 5-6).

The young Chandramani's passion for the "Holy Land" endeared him to Dharmapala. When Dharmapala left to attend the Parliament of World's Religions in 1893, it was Chandramani who he tasked with running the Maha Bodhi Society from its Calcutta headquarters (Shakya 1989, 7). For several years Chandramani traveled back and forth between Calcutta and Burma continuing his studies and aiding the missionary activities of the Maha Bodhi Society. He received higher ordination rites in 1903 and returned to Kushinagar in 1905 where he remained an abbot of the Maha Bodhi Society-sponsored monastery and pilgrims rest house until his death in 1972 (1989, 10)

In conjunction with the Maha Bodhi Society, Chandramani established a strong Buddhist presence in Kushinagar advocating for custodianship of the Mahaparinirvana

Temple complex and translating Buddhist texts into Hindi (Shakya 1989, 11). He also worked to improve the socio-economic conditions for residents, raising funds to build primary and secondary schools and dig wells (Shakya 1989, 12-13). Under Chandramani, Kushinagar became a hub of modernist Buddhist activity and social activism. He formed the Kushinagar Bhikshu Sangha in 1952 and presided as abbot of the Myanmar Buddhist Temple (https://www.kushinagarbhikshusangha.in/about). Chandramani's travel back and forth between Burma and Kushinagar as a novice informed emergent networks of monastic education linking the subcontinent to centers of formal Theravāda education in Arakan, Mawlamyine (Moulmein), Yangon (Rangoon), and Mandalay. As expatriate Nepalis encountered the Maha Bodhi Society, they were conscripted into these networks of monastic education linking Burma and Kushinagar. By the 1940's nearly all of the Theravāda modernist activists in Nepal had received initial ordination under Bhikkhu Chandramani or had been facilitated in their pursuits by his tutelage (Kloppenborg 1977; Shakya 1989; LeVine 2004; Piyadassi 2012). As Ratna Sundara Shakya describes in his biography of Chandramani, "He is the father of most of Nepal's monks and nuns…one if the foremost foreign scholars who contributed to the spread of Theravāda Buddhism in Nepal" (1989, 1).

Mahapragya (Mahāprajñā, 1901-1979), who received novice ordination (Skt. *pravrajya*; Pali *pabbajjā*) in Kushinagar in 1928, is often referenced as the first Theravāda monk from Nepal (Kloppenborg 1977; Bechert and Hartmann 1988; LeVine 2004; LeVine and Gellner 2005; Bajracharya 2011). Mahapragya, like many of his fellow Newar converts, had first studied under a Tibetan teacher before pursuing Theravāda. At the counsel of Chandramani, Mahapragya traveled to Rangoon in 1929 to receive full

ordination (Pali *upasampadā*). Pragyananda (Prajñānanda, 1900-1993) was another early convert who, after taking initial ordination in the Tibetan tradition, was re-ordained under Chandramani at Kushinagar in 1930, later taking full ordination rites in Arakan in 1932. Pragyananda became the head of the Theravāda monastic community in Nepal in the mid-1930s (Bechert and Hartmann 1988).

Another early convert to Theravāda, Dharmaloka (Dharmāloka, 1890-1966)—commonly referred to in Nepal as Bhikkhu Dhammalok—was initiated under Chandramani in 1931 and received his higher ordination rites at the Burmese temple at Sarnath (Bechert and Hartmann 1988, 9; Shakya 1992). Dharmaloka later traveled to China and Tibet, publishing an autobiographical account of his pilgrimages under the title *Mahāchin yātrā* (Dharmaloka 1999 [1950]). As Heinz Bechert and Jens-Uwe Hartmann point out, all three of these early figures are regarded, in their biographies, as the "first yellow-robed monk to visit Nepal" (1988, 9). All three were prominent in propagating modernist Theravāda forms of Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley, paving the way for a second wave of converts, including the Ven. Bhikkhu Aniruddha Mahathera (1915-2003), who later became the abbot of the Lumbini *vihāra*—a post he held for forty-six years.

Several Newar women, drawn primarily from the Uray merchant caste, also converted to Theravāda in the 1920's and 30s, the most notable being the widow Laxmi Nani (Lakṣmī Nānī, 1898-1978), who later took the name Dharmachari (Dharmācārī)(LeVine 2004; LeVine and Gellner 2005; Emmrich 2017). In 1934 Laxmi Nani and five of her followers left Kathmandu for Arakan, where they "took the Precepts and received Dharma names" (LeVine 2004, 60). Although the Theravāda nun's (Pali

bhikkhunī) ordination lineage had died out, their preceptor bestowed upon them the title of "*anāgārikā"* meaning "female homeless one" (LeVine 2004, 60). All of them eventually returned to Kathmandu, where they faced "not only enormous state repression, but also gender discrimination within the struggling Theravāda community" (Emmrich 2017, 79).

In the early 1940s Theravādin activists were expelled from the country on account of their teachings, which were viewed by the Rana regime as subversive (Bechert and Hartmann 1988, 9). Persecuted, these monks were exiled to India and Bangladesh, where their aims of cultivating a reformed Buddhist saṅgha in Nepal were supported by other modernist Buddhists. As Sarah LeVine notes, the Theravāda nuns, unlike their male contemporaries, "had no foreign networks to cultivate," and, when exiled from the Kathmandu Valley, were "dispatched to a provincial Nepalese town" (2001, 226). Thus, "aside from Dharmacari and her group who had spent a few months in Burma, the only foreign exposure the first generation of nuns had had was on brief pilgrimages to the sacred Buddhist sites of north India" (LeVine 2001, 226).

Ven. U Chandramani's role in facilitating the diffusion of Theravāda forms of modernist Buddhism into Nepal is significant. When, following exile in the 1940s, Nepali Theravādins in Kalimpong sought to formulate their own Buddhist organization, Chandramani was tapped as its first president (a position he held until his death in 1972). In 1944 the Dharmodaya Sabha, the Buddhist Society of Nepal, was founded with Amritananda (1918-1990), a Shakya from Tansen, as secretary and Maniharsha Jyoti, a wealthy lay donor, as treasurer (LeVine and Gellner 2005, 53). In 1946, Amritananda persuaded prominent Sinhalese monk and scholar Narada Mahathera (1898-1983), abbot

of the Vajirarayama Vihara in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to request entrance into Nepal for the purposes of pilgrimage (LeVine and Gellner 2005, 53). Arriving in Kathmandu, Narada convinced the new prime minister, Padma Shamsheer, to allow the exiled Theravādins to return (LeVine and Gellner 2005, 53). On a successive visit in 1947 the Sinhalese monk brought with him a relic, later enshrined in the Lanka Chaitya, and a Bodhi tree sapling from Anuradhapura, "formally establishing ritual and institutional ties" at Ananda Kuti Vihara on the northwestern slope of Swayambhunath (Emmrich 2017, 80). This moment constitutes a formative date in the institutionalization of Theravāda in Nepal: "with these symbols of 'authentic' Buddhism and international recognition in place, Ananda Kuti was recognized as the new headquarters of the Theravāda mission in Nepal" (LeVine and Gellner 2005, 54).

Although the Rana prime minister had allowed many of the Theravāda monks to return to Kathmandu, the government did not permit the Dharmodaya Sabha to establish a formal headquarters in the capital. In 1947 the Dharmodaya Sabha moved its headquarters from Sarnath to Kalimpong and, borrowing from the Maha Bodhi Society's paradigm, began publication of the monthly journal *Dharmodaya* (1947-1959) with Aniruddha as its first editor. Due to continued government censorship *Dharmodaya* was published in Kalimpong from 1947-1949 and in Calcutta for another decade. In addition to being a powerful channel for the Theravāda mission, *Dharmodaya* also functioned to raise Newar cultural awareness as one of the periodicals published in Nepal Bhasha (Newar).

The leadership of the Theravāda saṅgha in Nepal formally listed their key objectives in the 1950 issue of *Dharmodaya*:

> 1) to open Buddhist schools all over Nepal;
> 2) to build a vihara in every city or village where the majority of people are Buddhist and to have one or two monks live there to give religious instruction and free medical services;
> 3) to publish translations of Canonical texts as well as other books on Buddhism in Nepali and Newari;
> 4) to educate Nepalese to propagate Buddhism;
> 5) to publish two journals, one in English and one in Nepali;
> 6) to persuade the Nepalese authorities to take necessary steps to preserve ancient Buddhist monuments (Lumbini. Kapilavastu);
> 7) to encourage Buddhists of other countries to visit Nepal and to offer facilities to Buddhist scholars;
> 8) to guard against the institutions active in converting people of other faiths (mainly meant against the Christian mission). For the realization of this programme they asked the assistance of other Buddhist nations, especially in providing scholarships to Nepalese students and in giving more material support (Kloppenborg 1977, 307-308; citing *Dharmodaya 35* [1950]).

These resolutions were previously presented at the first World Fellowship of Buddhists Conference in Sri Lanka the same year. The tenets of the Dharmodaya Sabha's program for the rejuvenation of "authentic" Buddhism in Nepal were largely modeled after the Maha Bodhi Society. Included was a serious concern for the restitution and development of Lumbini. Following the fall of the Rana regime in 1951 and the return of the monarchy, the Dharmodaya Sabha was allowed to move its headquarters from Kalimpong to Kathmandu, where it functioned as a regional center for the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) (Bechert and Hartmann 1988, 12). Newly reinstated, King Tribhuvan (1906-1955) attempted to rebuild relations with Nepal's Buddhist community.

In 1951 Tribhuvan participated in the *Buddha-pūjā* at the celebration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing away, "thereby abandoning a tradition which forbade Gurkha rulers to worship the Buddha," simultaneously declaring Vesak Day a national holiday in Nepal (Kloppenborg 1977, 308). Tribhuvan's willingness to build good-faith relations with the Buddhist community in Kathmandu was further evident in

his reception of a Sinhalese delegation who brought with them relics of Śākyamuni's first disciples Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, the following year. Receiving the delegation, the King carried the relics to the palace prior to their procession to various places of worship in the valley (Ratna 1956; Kloppenborg 1977 citing the *Maha Bodhi* 60, 1952). Khuladarma Ratna in his 1956 publication for the Fourth World Buddhist Conference, *Buddhism and Nepal*, states:

> The late King Tribhuvan personally went to the airfield and received the relics and brought them to his palace where they were kept overnight before handing over to the Sabha for worship at various places…a mammoth meeting was held in Kathmandu to welcome the relics. It was an international event unparalleled in the history of Nepal (1956, 16-17).

King Tribhuvan's veneration of Buddhist relics and his patronage of the greater Buddhist saṅgha in Nepal stands in stark contrast to the Brahmanical orthodoxy of his Rana predecessors. Tribhuvan, along with son Crown Prince Mahendra, attended the Buddha Jayanti (Vesak Day) festivities at Ananda Kuti Vihara in 1952, and the following year Amritananda and a delegation of monks were invited to the palace on the King's birthday, where they "performed the nightlong protective ritual of *mahaparitrana*, in which sutras were chanted by successive teams of monks" (LeVine and Gellner 2005, 62). As LeVine and Gellner note, the recitation of the *mahāparitrāṇa* was shifted to Ananda Kuti Vihara in 1954, where it has "been performed each year ever since on the birthday of the reigning king" (2005, 62). These ritual acts link the institution of the monarchy to the propagation of the *śāsana* in Nepal, establishing a powerful patronage relationship. By the mid-1950s long-awaited governmental support signaled hope for the Theravāda mission and its aims of developing Lumbini as an international pilgrimage destination.

Backed by renewed support from the monarchy, the Dharmodaya Sabha quickly took up the mantle of the official mouthpiece of Nepal's minority Buddhist population at the third WFB Conference held in Rangoon, Burma in 1954, and organized the fourth WFB Conference—commemorating the 2500th birthday of the Buddha—in Kathmandu two years later. The Dharmodaya Sabha-published memorandum, *Nepal: the Birth-Place of Buddha*, lists the development of Lumbini as a central talking point during the Third WFB Conference. On the inside cover page is a standalone profile rendering of the proposed *vihāra* at Lumbini, with a single reference note citing its estimated cost. The pamphlet concludes with a blueprint of the proposed *vihāra* signaling the Dharmodaya Sabha's intentions to develop the site as a place of monastic education and a pilgrimage destination.

In addition to outlining the present state of Buddhism in Nepal, the short pamphlet catalogues the joint efforts between the Dharmodaya Sabha and the Union of Burma Buddha Sāsana Council in rejuvenating pilgrimage to the Buddha's birthplace. Nhuche Bahadur Vajracharya, author of the pamphlet and delegate to the council, notes that at the time of publication "contributions from Burma, Ceylon, Japan, Penang and Thailand" had already been received for the maintenance and "beautification" of Lumbini (1954, 3). In addition, Nhuche Bahadur Vajracharya credits Führer with rescuing the birthplace of the Buddha "from oblivion" at the end of the nineteenth century, claiming that the excavation of the Aśoka inscription "aroused great interest throughout the entire Buddhist world," for it "established beyond all doubt the exact location of the Lumbini grove, where, under a Sal tree, Siddhartha was born to Mahamaya" (1954, 5-6). By the mid-1950s Lumbini's location in the Terai was cemented as the definitive birthplace of Śākyamuni Buddha and

a formative site in the reconstitution of Nepal as a Buddhist territory. Nhuche Bahadur Vajracharya goes on to credit the introduction of Theravāda in Nepal with the "awakening of the people" and the "rescue of and restoration" of Buddhism to "its original purity" (1954, 2). Central to the Theravāda reform movement in Nepal was an "awakening" to Nepal's place in the history of Buddhism; rhetoric that was undeniably tethered to the birthplace of the Buddha. The Dharmodaya Sabha clearly envisaged itself as *the* mouthpiece of Buddhism in Nepal and utilized its unofficial custodianship of Lumbini as a means of legitimation. Under Tribhuvan's rule, the Dharmodaya Sabha established itself as the rightful caretaker of Lumbini, petitioning the government for land rights to build a monastery and construct roads.

Under the Dharmodaya Sabha, "pure" Buddhism, that is Theravāda, was interlinked with custodial rights to Nepal's Buddhist monuments. Restoration and development initiatives at Lumbini fell under the purview of the newly formed Lumbini Dharmodaya Committee, which consisted of the two adjoining district magistrates, one local non-official representative, and three nominees of the Dharmodaya Sabha—the most influential member being the venerable Aniruddha Mahathera (Ratna 1956, 17). The Buddha's birthplace was under their joint care until the formation of the monarchy's Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) in 1985. By 1954 the Nepalese monarchy recognized the Dharmodaya Sabha's ongoing efforts, granting 25 bighas (roughly 42 acres) of land for the construction of a temple near the Lumbini grove (Vajracharya 1954, 3).

In addition to reinvigorating interest in Nepal's monumental history, the Dharmodaya Sabha also likened their newfound relationship with the Tribhuvan monarchy to traditional Buddhist patronage structures. As Kloppenborg notes, "the ideal

of Nepal as a Buddhist country and the comparison of its King with Aśoka" was a recycled rhetoric at the 1956 World Fellowship of Buddhists Conference (1977, 309). This connection was operationalized in calls for the preservation and development of Lumbini and Kapilavastu. Recognized as potent "symbols of Nepal's Buddhist past" and "future 'centres of the faith and devotion of all Buddhists of the world,'" the Terai monumental sites have remained prominent fixtures amid the discourse of Buddhism in Nepal over the last seventy years (Kloppenborg 1977, 309, citing *Dharmodaya 135* [1958]). As Khuladarma Ratna articulates, comparisons of the Nepalese monarchy to Aśoka—however short lived—extended to the Crown Prince following his father's death in 1955:

> The present King His Majesty Mahendra Bir Bikram Sha Dev, also, like Emperor Asoka visited the sacred site of Lumbini and celebrated the National Day of Nepal on 7th Falgun 2012 (1956 A.D.) and gave Abhayadan to the mute animals by forbidding the slaughter of animals un the whole kingdom of Nepal on every Vaisakh Poornima [Vesak Day] (1956, 17).

Raising international support for the development of Lumbini became a central function of the Theravāda mission in Nepal under the governance of the Dharmodaya Sabha. Nhuche Bahadur Vajracharya's ending to the memorandum is telling, as he draws the attention of the global Buddhist community to the revitalization efforts underway in Nepal:

> Once more Nepal is moving among other Buddhist nations, and in concluding this brief memorandum let us humbly appeal to our brethren in dhamma to help, by all means at their disposal, in restoring to Nepal its ancient heritage—Buddhism (1954, 17).

This call was bolstered by the delegation's unanimous decision to hold the fourth WFB Conference, scheduled for 1956, in Kathmandu in commemoration of the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's *mahāparinirvāṇa*. With delegates from over forty countries in attendance, the newly crowned King Mahendra (although less inclined to Buddhism

than his father) opened the conference in Kathmandu in November 1956 (Ratna 1956; LeVine and Gellner 2005). This event marks a landmark moment in Nepal's Buddhist heritage, as, for the first time in modern history, the eyes of the world's Buddhist population centered on Kathmandu. Enthused by their new-found place in the global pan-Buddhist movement and rejuvenated support from the Nepalese government, the Dharmodaya Sabha was convinced that a new day of democracy and religious freedom had emerged in Nepal. As Kuladharma Ratna proclaims:

> Though Buddhism received a little setback for some time, with the dawn of independence in India and of democracy in Nepal, Buddhism is flourishing again not only in these countries but in other distant corners of the globe also. Truly, Buddhism is now experiencing a glorious renaissance as a democratic religion transcending the materialistic ideologies of this age (1956, 19-20).

The rise of a global pan-Buddhist consciousness was propelled by the discourse of the Buddhist Holy Land and the practices of pilgrimage it engendered. Lumbini, like Bodh Gaya before it, functioned as a powerful symbol for harnessing the modernist Buddhist agenda and directing its activities to the material realities associated with restitution, restoration, and preservation. While the Fourth World Fellowship of Buddhists Conference was not the watershed moment that the Dharmodaya Sabha had hoped for, it was, nevertheless, a pivotal moment in which Lumbini emerged as the central figure of Buddhist legitimation in Nepal. Repeated references to the Buddha's "homeland" and "birthplace," as well as the articulation of traditional patronage models are evidence of the internalization of the idea of Nepal as Buddhist territory. Under the governance of the Dharmodaya Sabha, the modernist Theravāda mission manufactured a lineage tied to the Buddha's birthplace.

In response to letters of support for developing the Buddha's birthplace from India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1955, newly-crowned King Mahendra devoted over one hundred thousand rupees of his own funds to improving Lumbini (Jackson 2013, 299-300). Mahendra visited Lumbini in February 1956, where he advocated for the celebration of Buddha Jayanti across Nepal and emphasized to the crowd that it was the duty of Nepalis to "immortalize the Lord Buddha and materialize His ideas" (Vaidya 1999, 6). Despite these early commitments to develop Lumbini and to preserve Buddhist teachings under his rule as the new king, Mahendra's policies came to reinforce Hindu hegemony in Nepal. In the years following the WFB Conference, Mahendra's support for the Dharmodaya Sabha waned as he ushered in the era of "Panchayat democracy" beginning in 1959 (LeVine and Gellner 2005, 64). As LeVine and Gellner articulate, "with the dismissal of the elected Prime Minister B.P. Koirala"—friendly to the Dharmodaya Sabha—and the "banning of political parties" the Mahendra regime "looked to Hinduism for its main legitimation" (200, 64). Although Buddhism was tolerated under the Panchayat government, it was subordinated as a "branch" of Hinduism based on the modern Vaishnava interpretation that the Buddha was the ninth incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu.[24]

With China's annexation of Tibet in 1959, Tibetan refugees flowed into the Kathmandu Valley and other hill regions providing a competing Buddhist voice in Nepalese political and social arenas (Lewis 1989; Lewis 2016, 112). The Dharmodaya

[24] See John Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu: Religious Transformation, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) for a discussion of how the Buddha has been conflated and/or subsumed into the cult of Viṣṇu.

Sabha's legitimacy as the prevailing Buddhist movement amongst Nepal's minority communities was further challenged by the rise of more traditional Newar reform amongst the Vajracharya priestly caste (Bajracharya 2013; Lewis 2000; Lewis 2016, 117). While these two competing Buddhist movements challenged the Dharmodaya Sabha's claim to speak for all Buddhists in Nepal, neither had much of an impact on the development initiatives at Lumbini until much later. By the 1960s the state sponsored patronage of Buddhism had evaporated and the Dharmodaya Sabha was left clinging to its limited, and unofficial, governance of Lumbini as its dominant form of legitimation.

Through the 1970s Theravādin converts operated as the sole custodians of the Buddha's birthplace, and it was under their leadership that the United Nations development initiatives were organized. The central figure in this formative process of Lumbini's international development was the venerable Aniruddha Mahathera. Born Gaja Ratna Tuladhar, Aniruddha came from a merchant Newar caste. His father, Das Ratna—who himself later converted to Buddhism, taking the name Dharmaloka—operated a business house in Lhasa, Tibet. It was there, as a young boy of eight, that he first encountered the teachings of Buddhism (Dharmaloka 1999 [1950]; Piyadassi 2012). Gaja Ratna attended the Central Hindu Boarding School in Varanasi for a time before a sojourn with his maternal uncle in Calcutta, where he attended Pali classes run by Dharmaditya Dharmacharyya at Dharmajika Vihara (Dharmaloka 1999 [1950]). As Aniruddha notes in his appendix, "Recollections and Anecdotes," to Dharmaloka's *Pilgrimage in China*:

> I went daily to Dharmarajika Vihara in College Square and pleaded with Dharmaditya Dharmacharyya to find someone who would take me to Ceylon. Within a fortnight, to my good fortune he introduced me to Venerable Sharanankara, who was studying in Calcutta

> and was about to return home to Ceylon. For his kindness, I am much indebted to Dharmaditya Dharmacharyya. But for him, I would not have reached Ceylon.

In 1930 Gaja Ratna arrived in Sri Lanka, where he was ordained as novice. As his father recollects:

> I received the news that Gajaratna had left Calcutta for Ceylon. However, I did not know his whereabouts for nearly seven months. Finally, I received a letter in which he enclosed his photograph in the monk's robe. The monk Sharanankar had taken Gajaratna to his own vihara in Colombo and taught him the Sinhali language. Six months later, Ananda Kausalyayana saw Gajaratna in the vihara and asked him, "Who are you?" "My name is Gajaratna, and I have come from Nepal," he replied. "Oh! So, you are here!" exclaimed Anandaji, "Rahulji has written to me about you. I did not know where you were, and this is not the place for you. You are to stay with us at Vidyalankara Pirivena." Accordingly, Gajaratna went to Vidyalankara Pirivena [a prominent monastic college] and devoted himself to his study. Soon he became a *sramanera* and was given the name Aniruddha (Dharmaloka 1999 [1950], 9).

Aniruddha remained in Sri Lanka for several years before returning to India, at which point he was informed that his father (Dharmaloka) was on pilgrimage in China and Tibet. At the behest of Chandramani, Aniruddha traveled to Burma where he took the higher ordination rites:

> Five years later, upon my return from Ceylon, I found my father was in China on a pilgrimage to the temple of Manjusri. I went to Kusinagar, and the Venerable Chandramani Mahasthavir said to me: "Your father is not here. You have spent five years learning Pali and Singhalese in Ceylon. Now, you had better go and learn Pali and Burmese language in Burma." Thereupon, he wrote some letters to the teachers and sent me and Sramanera Pranavibansha from Kusinagar to Burma. I lived under the tutelage of the Venerable Chakkapala Mahasthavir of Tampoka Kyan vihara in Moulmein for 11 years (Dharmaloka 1999 [1950], 9).

He returned to Nepal in 1946, serving as the editor of the Dharmodaya Sabha's publication *Dharmodaya* for two years before turning his attention to the task of preserving Lumbini (Piyadassi 2012). Arguably the most well-educated Nepali monk of his generation, Aniruddha went on to publish extensively as well as translate several Sinhala and Burmese texts into Nepal Bhasha (Newar)(Bajracharya 2003). For forty-six years he ran the Dharmodaya Sabha temple at Lumbini before returning to Kathmandu in 1991 to preside over Ananda Kuti Vihara until his death in 2003. In 1998 he was named

the third Sangha Nayak, "Patriarch of Nepal," by the All-Nepal Bhikshu-Mahasanga and the Prime Minister of Nepal (Piyadassi 2012).

Like his predecessors, Aniruddha was initiated into a Theravāda monastic tradition by way of modernist Buddhist activists in India. Many, like Chandramani and Dharmaditya, were formally connected to the Maha Bodhi Society and propagated its founder's concerns for the Buddhist Holy Land. Aniruddha's dedication to the preservation and development of Lumbini speaks both to the saliency of the Buddhist biographical genre and the emergence of Buddhist monumental history at the turn of the twentieth century. Aniruddha's ordination in Theravāda monastic lineages in Ceylon and Burma also illustrates the importance of transnational Buddhist networks in facilitating the spread of Theravāda forms of practice and activism to Nepal, and its heightened attention to the Buddha's birthplace. These connections were highly instrumental in establishing Lumbini as international destination and eventual world heritage site under the United Nations.

Global Connections

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Lumbini became a powerful symbol in the legitimation of Nepal within the Buddha's dispensation as a site of origins. In the forty or so years following its (re)discovery at the hands of colonial archeologists, the Buddha's birthplace was monumentalized, once again, in the modernist discourse of the Buddhist Holy Land. Isolated in the rural border region, Lumbini remained relatively untouched as imaginations about its utopian potential grew within the global Buddhist community. One consequence of the modernist Theravāda mission was that Nepal

became envisaged as a land of Buddhist origins, not just amongst its Buddhist population in Kathmandu, but within the rapidly globalizing pan-Buddhist movement as well. A renewed attention to the Buddha's birthplace grew rapidly in the international Buddhist *ecumene* as modernist activists in Burma, Ceylon, India, Thailand, and Japan sought to reconstitute pilgrimage networks and patronage relationships that had eroded in previous centuries. While Dharmapala and the Maha Bodhi Society had certainly paved the way for such conceptions, it was the founders and early leaders of the Dharmodaya Sabha who promulgated them in the twentieth century, and who seized every opportunity to speak for Buddhism in Nepal—the land of the Buddha's birth.

As the political climate in Nepal shifted, the Dharmodaya Sabha leaned on its connections to the Maha Bodhi Society and its partners to bolster its custodianship of Lumbini. In representing themselves as modernist reformers tied historically to the "authentic" Buddhist heritage of Nepal and now trained in the "pure" tradition—that is Theravāda—the Dharmodaya Sabha assumed a superior position among Nepal's diverse Buddhist populations. The Dharmodaya Sabha was recognized as the official saṅgha of Nepal within the international arena of Buddhist modernism. Under the Dharmodaya Sabha's custodianship, Lumbini came to be the preeminent symbol of Buddhist revival. Aniruddha Mahathera functioned as the resident monk there for nearly a half-century. Following the model of his mentor Chandramani at Kushinagar, Aniruddha was a fixture at Lumbini, sustaining the site as a node in an expansive global network of Buddhist pilgrimage. As his biographer Bhikshu Piyadassi recounts:

> Bhikshu Aniruddha Mahasthavir, knowledgeable of different languages, made significant contributions for the development of Lumbini. Considered a father to the residents of Lumbini, Aniruddha made important contributions such as paving the road from Kakarhava and providing water. In the process of preaching the dharma from village to

> village, even if he had to face different kinds of difficulties, he would distribute the goods he received from donations to the surrounding villages (2012, i).

Aniruddha is exemplary of the transnational flows that characterized the modernist Buddhist movement in the twentieth century. Fluent in Sinhala and Burmese, Aniruddha was the perfect monk to preside over Lumbini as it began to grow as a global Buddhist destination. His linguistic prowess certainly aided in the reception of the Burmese UN Secretary-General U Thant—an avowed Buddhist—on pilgrimage in April 1967.

In addition to placing Aniruddha at Lumbini as the public face of the Dharmodaya Sabha's initiatives to reconstitute "authentic" Buddhism in Nepal, material connections between Burma and the Dharmodaya Sabha were forged with the gifting of a "a large, beautiful image of the Buddha," which, by late 1954, had already been installed at Lumbini (Vajracharya 1954, 3). As Nhuche Bahadur Vajracharya describes in his presentation to the Third World Buddhist Conference in Rangoon:

> It is gratifying to note that following an appeal made by the Sabha to help restore the sacred birth-place of the Buddha the Union Buddha Sasana Council of Burma is taking keen interest in the project. The Hon'ble U Thein Maung, Vice-President of the Council and Chief Justice of Burma conferred with the members of the Lumbini Dharmodaya Committee when he made a pilgrimage to Lumbini last year and assured the Committee of all possible help from the Union Buddha Sasana Council (1954, 3).

Nhuche Bahadur Vajracharya's account reveals the degree to which Buddhist reform organizations in Burma worked to establish significant ties to the Buddha's homeland. In addition to legitimating the Dharmodaya Sabha's reform efforts in Nepal, calls to restore Lumbini operated as potent rhetoric in the discourse of modernizing movements in locales of Buddhist majority. Fraught with political uncertainty following WWII, these burgeoning nation-states incorporated the rhetoric of Buddhist revivalism, promulgated in the decades prior, into various nationalist movements in the 1950s and

1960s (Schober 2003). Central to this discourse was the reclamation of the Buddhist Holy Land which constituted an attempt to reestablish prestigious forms of patronage based on precolonial presentations of the geographical expanse of the *śāsana*. These aims were ensconced in the active missionization of Theravāda forms of Buddhism from Burma. In the inaugural issue of *The Light of the Dhamma*, published by the Union of Burma Buddha Sāsana Council in 1952, Myanmar's first Prime Minister, U Nu, is quoted advocating for the Sāsana Council's missionary efforts:

> The first aim of the organization is to propagate the Dhamma in foreign lands to the best of its ability…How are we going to propagate the Dhamma in other lands? Generally speaking, we will send Buddhist missions abroad in the same way as other countries have been sending their missions here. The work of sending out Buddhist missions will be one of the objectives of this organization (*The Light of the Dhamma*, 1952, 46).

Burmese attempts to reconstitute patronage connections to Lumbini illustrate the degree to which the discursive formation of the Buddhist Holy Land was instantiated in the agendas of Buddhist nationalism far afield from Nepal. The confluence of early revivalist efforts in India and Nepal with the rising formation of Buddhist nationalism in Burma and Ceylon in the 1950s paved the way for modern development interventions at Lumbini. According to one source, U Nu spent a night at Lumbini, after which he donated a large white stone Buddha image, presumably marble, to the Dharmodaya Sabha *vihāra* (Okada 1969, 4). U Nu's interest in reestablishing a patronage relationship with the custodians of Lumbini represents just one way in which the biographical sites operated as mediators between multiple iterations of Buddhist reform and revival.

Pilgrimage to the Buddhist Holy Land constituted a powerful connection among disparate Buddhist communities in the twentieth century. By 1936 the Buddha's birthplace was at least accessible enough that it appeared on East Indian Railway flyers

advertising stops along the Buddhist pilgrimage circuit (*The Maha Bodhi*, 1936). The Maha Bodhi Society's propaganda continued to produce a wave of interest in visiting the excavated monuments of the Buddha's homeland, providing a rhetoric of reclamation and restoration that aided the Dharmodaya Sabha in their efforts, but perhaps more importantly, established Lumbini as destination of global desirability.

In his discussion of Japanese engagements with South Asia, Richard Jaffe recounts the exploits of Japanese expedition team to Lumbini:

> While traveling in Nepal in 1902 Shimizu Mokuji, Inoue Kōen, and Honda Eryū reached Lumbini, where Honda photographed the pillar, and the team copied the inscription. On one of the expeditions to the Buddha's birthplace, rubbings of the inscription also were taken (2019, 188-89).

Brought back to Japan, these engravings constitute a significant material connection to the origins of Buddhism in Nepal and the prestige of the Buddhist Holy Land in the global imagination. According to Jaffe, at least one copy of the rubbings is extant today at the Nishi Honganji Jōdo Shin temple, Shinshūji in Nagano (2019, 189). Jaffe suggests that the inclusion of the Brāhmī pillar inscription ornamenting the shrine "physically manifests the deep connection between Nishi Honganji, as representative of the Jōdo Shin Buddhism, and the very origins of the Buddhist tradition at Lumbini" (2019, 189). Similar to the performance of the Lumbini Festival in Tokyo in the 1920's, the pilgrimage to the Buddha's birthplace and the expatriation of physical materials to Buddhist locales in Japan described by Jaffe, suggest that the project of locating Lumbini was pan-Asian in scope and functioned to frame Buddhist encounters with modernity in the early twentieth century.

Amidst this milieu of modernist revival, reform, and nationalism 'Buddhism' emerged as a "world religion" on par with Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in its

geographical expanse and historical import. By the 1960s, those activists eager to develop the Buddha's birthplace had to contend with a variety of competing discourses, each equally invested in asserting claims to the rural Terai site. Thus, although pilgrimage was limited and sporadic in the early decades of the twentieth century, locating Lumbini emerged as a desirable project across the spectrum of Buddhist modernisms. Despite Aniruddha's sustained presence at the site, imaginations about Lumbini's future were largely outside the Dharmodaya Sabha's control, as foreign investment came to dominate how the site would be developed. This sudden influx of outside influence is certainly connected to millenarian concerns about the impending decline of *śāsana* and a growing demand to articulate a pan-Buddhist ecumenicism in the face of tidal geopolitical change in the wake of WWII. Anxieties about the place of Buddhism in a rapidly globalizing and secularizing world were soothed, at least in part, by the emergence of new international arenas of governance and development aimed at peacekeeping. The Buddha, and by extension the biographical sites, were deployed in service of these ends. The prestige of the Buddha's birthplace was quickly transferred to the curatorship of the United Nations following Secretary-General U Thant's pilgrimage in 1967, the topic of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

A COALITION FOR WORLD PEACE: U THANT AND THE UNITED NATIONS INTERVENTION

> Having worked as U Thant's Executive Director during the last two years of his term as Secretary-General, I know that Lumbini was his dream and that he counted greatly on it as a place wherefrom the peaceful vision of Buddah [sic] would radiate to the rest of the world. I am sure that nothing could be more appropriate for his memory and happier for his soul than the location of his memorial right at the place of birth of the Buddah [sic] . This will be a great inspiration to the world and will permit the continuation of U Thant's work and vision long beyond his death.[25]

While visiting Lumbini in the summer of 2019 I made a point to locate a statue of former Secretary-General of the United Nations U Thant that had been installed at the site only a few weeks earlier. As I walked rather aimlessly through the south gate of the park, a local rickshaw driver, Arjun, offered his services. I naively assumed that the monumental role of U Thant in Lumbini's development was public knowledge and took the opportunity to inquire about the statue's location. After we circled most of the park unable to locate the memorial, I decided to consult the staff at the Lumbini Hotel Kasai, who had co-sponsored the statue's construction with the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT). Thankfully the manager of the property, Rajesh, kindly informed Arjun of the statue's location. Before Arjun and I departed, Rajesh and I took a photo together, as I was apparently the first visitor to inquire about the newly installed memorial. As the rickshaw pulled up and jolted to a halt in the dusty vacant lot adjacent to the Lumbini University campus, I noticed a narrow walkway leading to tapered brick podium, upon which was a nondescript bust of the former UN Secretary-General (fig. 5).

[25] Robert Muller, "Letter to Karl Springer dated Jan. 27, 1984." UN Archives S-1076-0015-06.

Figure 5. Bust of U Thant installed at Lumbini in 2019. Photo by author.

The inscription on the placard below the bust reads (in English):

> U Thant declared that his visit to Lumbini in April 1967 was one of the most important days of his life, and he put into motion United Nations initiatives for the development of Lumbini. This statute commemorates his outstanding support to develop Lumbini as a pilgrimage and tourist center.

This chapter looks at the circumstances surrounding the former Secretary-General's fateful visit to Lumbini in April of 1967 and outlines the dynamics of his involvement in establishing the Buddha's birthplace as an international destination. While U Thant's contributions to the development of Lumbini certainly ushered in a new, modern, trajectory for the site as a pan-Buddhist project, the heart of his vision was

grounded in an unwavering aspiration for peace. As his grandson, prominent historian Thant Myint U, conveyed to me in March 2019, "U Thant believed that religion had a large role to play in bringing people together for peace." Thant Myint U reiterated that his grandfather was deeply moved during his visit to Lumbini and that it inspired him as a Buddhist and the UN Secretary-General to work for the site's preservation and development.

Like Anagarika Dharmapala's interest in Bodh Gaya in the late-nineteenth century, U Thant envisioned the potential of the Buddha's birthplace to bring together the world's diverse Buddhist communities, particularly in a time of conflict and strife amid great political upheaval and uncertainty. As I have discussed, the biographical genre is a saliant mediator of Buddhism across cultural and geographical bounds, and the sites tied to the Buddha's life story operate as extensions of his *Dharma*. U Thant, an avowed Buddhist from Myanmar (Burma), mobilized these aspirations for the alleviation of suffering under the auspices of "world peace," and attempted to materialize such convictions by developing Lumbini as an oasis of Buddhism at the doorstep of the Himalayas. During U Thant's tenure the Buddhist biographical genre came to operate alongside international development at the forefront of the United Nations' peacekeeping agenda.

U Thant's "pilgrimage" to Lumbini in 1967 is more than just another historical conjuncture between multiple genealogies of intervention at Buddhist pilgrimage sites. Akin to Aśoka's commemorative monumentalizing of the biographical sites some 2000 years earlier, U Thant's interventions can be read as an effort to construct a "mesocosm"

at Lumbini in which the Buddha's presence could be encountered once again.[26] In this rendering the *presence* of the Buddha is perhaps not ontological, as Strong and others discuss, but it is certainly symbolic and ideological—framed by the Buddha's ethical imperatives of compassion (*karuṇā*) and non-violence (*ahiṃsā*). In a certain respect, U Thant's interventions at Lumbini are a continuation of previous attempts to locate and patronize the biographical sites in the propagation of the *Dharma*. However, U Thant's efforts to reclaim the Buddha's birthplace as a site for world peace were not simply buddhalogical. Rather, the manufacture of Lumbini under UN patronage appropriated the Buddha's birthplace in service of the UN's ideological commitments to peace and human flourishing espoused in its 1945 Charter, which it endeavored to actualize through development. The modes of intervention that were initiated under U Thant's tenure at the UN have calcified as the dominant ideological framework for all subsequent encounters at Lumbini. Webb Keane's articulation of "semiotic ideologies" is a productive theoretical lens for analyzing the seismic transformations brought about at Lumbini by the United Nations. Keane defines semiotic ideology as:

> [A] reflection upon, and an attempt to organize, people's experiences of the materiality of semiotic form. Not only language but also music, visual imagery, food, architecture, gesture, and anything else that enters into actual semiotic practice functions within perceptible experience by virtue of its material properties…But people's ability to recognize those forms as the "same" depends on certain ways of framing them, since their very materiality means, they are always open to other unrealized possibilities (2007, 21).

Under U Thant's guidance, the symbolic power of the Buddha's birthplace was transformed from a singular site of Buddhist origins to a universalized public destination.

[26] John Strong, citing Paul Mus (2002 [1935]) argues that the stupa, the Buddha image, and the Bodhi Tree are "mesocosms," that is, "focal point[s] of religiously relevant reality which [are] in tune with various other cosmological levels (microcosm, macrocosm)," and create a structural milieu in which the absent Buddha in Nirvana can be evoked or made manifest (1983, 104).

U Thant was able to, at least temporarily, bridge the epistemological divide between the modern historicist impulse and the Buddhist biographical genre. For U Thant, the Buddha's birthplace was both pilgrimage site and global destination, and he worked diligently to materialize this conjuncture. U Thant's efforts to revitalize Lumbini are certainly indebted to premodern geo-spatial imaginations of the Buddhist world and previous attempts to memorialize the biographical sites as repositories of the Buddha's presence. They are also fully couched in the institutional authority and hegemonic logics of the UN, which by that time had cemented itself as an advocate of peace through development (Trent and Schnurr 2018, 71).

The United Nations interventions at Lumbini also embody the transformation in developmental thinking that occurred in the mid-twentieth century (Rabinow 1992; 1996; Ekbladh 2015). Under the colonial administration Buddhist biographical sites were prized as museums and displays of power over history (Chapter 2). Later development interventions became dominated by concerns for the social and economic impacts of developing these same places as displays of cultural heritage and as commodities in service of the emerging nation. Catering to mid-century socio-cultural conceptions of universal "New Man," these projects expanded the realm of possibility for the Buddhist biographical sites (Rabinow 1992, 54). One consequence of this expansion was the demand for a condensed narrative which could be universally "recognized" (Keane 2007, 21). In this condensation the biographical sites became easily identifiable symbols of the Buddha's dispensation *and* offered potential contribution of his teachings for shaping a rapidly globalizing world in a time of conflict, uncertainty, and political unrest shared by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. The UN's patronage of Lumbini contributed to the

rendering of Buddhist doctrines into a handful of universally digestible ethical commitments. In this way archeological sites, excavated under colonial monumental archeology (Chapter 2), came to offer a novel mode for re-presenting the *Dharma* as a peace-based philosophy of compassion and good-will to all humanity.

Benedict Anderson (1991) has famously recognized the inclusion of these sites into the modern secular nation-state as symbolic markers in the constitution of "imagined communities." Lumbini's manufacture expands and offers a critique of this argument on two fronts. First, Lumbini was never fully under colonial governance, rather Nepal was an independent vassal state of the British empire between 1816 and 1923. Despite significant influence from the British regime, Nepal was never formally colonized and its political and civic institutions, such as the Department of Archeology (DoA), were much later formations that remained under the patronage of the reigning Hindu monarchy until its full dissolution after the ratification of a democratic constitution in 2015 (see Chapter 6). In this sense, Buddhist populations in Nepal were treated as subjects of the monarchy and Nepal's Buddhist heritages were not adopted as national symbols until much later (see Chapter 6). The process of "imagining" Lumbini as a marker of Nepalese national identity has been protracted, and it is this drawn-out process that I attempt to wrestle with in the entirety of this study. Second, the early intervention of the UN, initiated by U Thant, demonstrates that the curation and development of these sites was not simply a "national" project, but extended to a global scale in service of loftier imaginations. In this sense, the United Nations took up the task of patronizing Lumbini for its universal efficacy in the promotion of peace among post-colonial nations.

As Buddhist communities from around the world have worked to make Lumbini a renewed site of pilgrimage, other forces have envisioned those efforts as publicly accessible objects for consumption. U Thant, a Burmese Buddhist-turned-diplomat ,was able to straddle two disparate semiotic ideologies, bringing together a cultural appreciation and care for the Buddhist biographical genre and the logics of modern development, liberalization, and a telos of progress. While U Thant served as s bridge between these two disparate ideological positions, there remains a tension at play between the ideologies of modern development and Buddhist practices of pilgrimage. The UN's patronage of Lumbini throughout the twentieth century has reshaped the landscape of the Buddha's birthplace in service of its peacekeeping agendas. In this regard, certain elements of the material reproduction of the Buddha's birthplace have come to be dominated by the hegemonic logics of modernity, and yet the practices of daily life at Lumbini often conflict or even erode these hegemonies (Chapter 6 and 7). The framing of "Buddhist pilgrims" over-and-against "tourists" and "local residents" is one such tension that persists today. Concerns about "proper" use of the Lumbini archeological ruins and material legacies is another.

The material production of Lumbini, in content and form, can be read in multiple registers. Its meaning often opaque to some stakeholders while clear as day to others. This is a dynamic that operates as an undercurrent in this chapter as I explore U Thant's role in re-presenting the Buddha's birthplace in a global register. What makes U Thant's vision modern, in this sense, is not its departure from traditional Buddhist concerns with the biography of the Buddha, the practice of pilgrimage, or for the alleviation of suffering of all sentient beings, but rather its reframing of those values in a mode consistent with

the prevailing logics of the time. These logics—most notably the telos of human progress and the notion of the public sphere—underpin modernity itself, which Charles Taylor famously describes as "that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms, of new ways of living, and of new forms of malaise" (2001, 1). However, as I have endeavored to show in the previous two chapters, the manufacture of Lumbini in the twentieth century is not entirely novel. Rather, it relies on the symbolic power of the Buddha's nativity scene and its saliency in textual and material reproductions across the Buddhist world.

As Buddhists and their interlocutors have endeavored to imagine the landscape of the Buddha's biography, they have subsequently built upon one another's conceptions and have participated, in varying degrees, in the material constitution of a place—one that has taken on increasingly global significance. The expansion of Lumbini's semiotic register beyond the Buddha's biographical genre and beyond local and regional pilgrimage is what makes the site a modern project. This is not unlike the processes shaping other sites across Asia, such as Borobudur, Bagan, or Angkor Wat. However, what makes Lumbini unique is the early interventions of the UN in reconstituting the site's prestige through modern forms of technocratic development premised on social-scientific conceptions of a universalized human subject (Rabinow 1992; 1996). Through the UN, Lumbini was grafted into a mechanistic worldview that understood infrastructural and economic development as a moral imperative for human flourishing.

U Thant, An Avowed Buddhist in Colonial Burma

U Thant was born in 1909 to a moderately wealthy household in Pantanaw in the Irrawaddy Delta of Myanmar (Burma). Thant was the eldest of four sons. His father, U Po Hnit, was a relatively prosperous rice miller who had gained some education in Calcutta in his youth. U Thant's younger brother, U Khant, described their father as "compassionate and self-less" and "the only man in Pantanaw who could read and write in English" (Bingham 1966, 29). U Thant, like his father, was drawn to education and his acumen for English at a young age afforded him a head start. He attended the National High School in Pantanaw before enrolling at University College in Rangoon. Unable to complete his college education due to the sudden death of his father, U Thant returned to Pantanaw to become a schoolteacher and support his family.

In addition to his Western education, Theravāda Buddhism was also a strong cultural influence shaping his adolescence. His mother, a devout Buddhist, instilled in him a reverence for the Buddha and the community of monks, whom he encountered daily as they made their alms rounds. Although U Thant spent some time in the monastery during his adolescence, he did not develop a fervent religiosity. He did, however, try to emulate the moral and ethical ideals gleaned from his Buddhist upbringing. In his memoirs U Thant attributes his acumen for neutrality, and his reserved nature, to the self-discipline he learned as a child:

> I was taught to control my emotions through a process of concentration and meditation. Of course, being human, and not yet having reached the state of *arahant* or *arhat* (one who attains perfect enlightenment), I cannot completely control my emotions, but must say that I am not easily excited or excitable (1978, 20).

Like most young Burmese boys growing up under the British colonial regime, U Thant was confused and frustrated by the ethnic turmoil that plagued colonial Burma. As Bingham notes:

> To a boy with a child's natural sense of justice, together with a tendency toward peacefulness, the situation was a puzzlement. On the surface everything was calm, but underneath there were seething forces he did not understand. The British assumed they would rule Burma for a long time; the Burmese assumed the opposite (1966, 39-40).

As a child in rural Pantanaw, U Thant was, to a large degree, insulated from the direct experience of British colonization, but that changed when he began his studies at Rangoon University in 1926. As a college student U Thant published extensively, and "applied his mind to all subjects, found solutions to all problems, passed down sermons to political leaders and sages alike, commented on everything. It was a fertile mind served by a facile pen" (Maung Maung, Guardian Magazine 1956, quoted in Bingham 1966, 88). U Thant's propensity for expounding on the various problems facing Burma in the mid-1920's was motivated by a desire to see Burmese society flourish. As frustrations mounted with the colonial regime, nationalist sentiments grew, often articulated in Anglophobic terms. However, U Thant was not so easily swayed toward anti-British rhetoric: "[U] Thant, like his father before him, favored eventual autonomy for Burma, but refused to couple this aim with a wholesale denigration of the cultural and economic improvements brought by the British to Burma" (Bingham 1966, 89).

It was at Rangoon University that U Thant became acquainted with a young U Nu, Burma's first Prime Minister, who was two years ahead of him in his studies. The two young men found many intellectual and literary interests in common, becoming fast friends (Bingham 1966, 86). They later served together in the Pantanaw District of the Burmese national school system, U Thant as the Headmaster at his former high school, and U Nu as the district Superintendent. The two grew quite close, and "spent many warm evenings discussing life, love, and the pursuit of happiness, which in Burma at the time included the pursuit of nationalist goals" (Bingham 1966, 100).

As discussed previously, U Nu's attempts to reform and revitalize the *śāsana* involved encouraging "international Buddhist missionary efforts," including renewed attention to the Buddhist biographical sites like Lumbini (Schober 2011, 77). While U Nu was "convinced that Buddhist practice was a moral prerequisite for public office," U Thant chose a softer rhetoric (Schober 2011, 79). For U Thant, embracing humanistic philosophies and systems of government that assured the freedoms offered the clearest path forward for independent Burma. As Bingham states, "[U] Thant's reasoning skills were leading him in the direction of democratic socialism…based on Buddhist compassion" (Bingham 1966, 125). U Thant favored Buddhism's ethical commitments to compassion (*karuṇā*) and good-will (*mettā*) over its symbolic, institutional, and political expressions. This subdued form of Buddhist influence was indicative of their differing political ideologies, and largely characterizes the trajectories of their respective careers. U Nu became the impassioned and "superstitious" Buddhist nationalist and U Thant the reserved, but unflappable, diplomat.

In the years following independence, U Thant served in U Nu's cabinet as Secretary to the Prime Minister. A trusted confidant and counselor, U Thant was by his friend's side for nearly a decade. But, while U Nu forcefully stated his "burning desire" to see Buddhism declared the state religion at the Sixth Great Buddhist Synod in 1956, U Thant, though a good Buddhist, dissented, advocating for a secular government. In 1957 U Nu appointed U Thant Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. As Bernard Firestone states, "Burma's growing role in the politics of nonalignment permitted U Thant numerous opportunities to engage in international diplomacy…and those experiences had made him a very different kind of man from his friend and patron,

[U] Nu" (2001, xviii). In 1961, following the sudden death of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, U Thant was selected as his replacement—the first Asian to lead the United Nations.

U Thant's Buddhist upbringing certainly shaped his moral sensibilities and character, but this did not lead to the outspoken advocacy for Buddhist reform and revival espoused by his colleague and friend U Nu. Rather, U Thant generally adopted a more private practice, choosing to embody the Buddhist ideals of compassion (*karuṇā*), good-will (*mettā*), and equanimity (*upekṣā*) (Dorn 2007). U Thant considered himself a public servant preferring to work for the common good over gaining political clout: "In Burma he deliberately chose not to become a politician, though many opportunities lay open to him" (Dorn 2007, 149). His goal, as he described it, was to ensure peace and harmony amongst nations: "All my faith and all my efforts are unhesitatingly pledged to maintaining and developing this Organization [the UN] as an indispensable centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of our common ends" (Thant 1968b, 3). This echoes his sentiments a decade earlier, where he advocated for the peaceful coexistence of nations:

> Let us not delude ourselves with the oversimplification of the world issue. The issue today is not only that of communism versus democracy. The more essential issue is the division of the world into the weak and the strong, the prosperous and the abject poor, the ruler and the ruled, the master race and the subhuman. Therefore, if the war for democracy has any meaning, it is necessary that we all sit together and create here and now the condition that will guarantee freedom, justice, well-being, and equality to all (Thant 1958, 42).

Although U Thant was mostly reserved about his religious convictions, on several occasions he did emphasize his commitment to the teachings of the Buddha and their applicability to international affairs. In one public address he voiced his ethical commitment to tolerance and compassion: "Buddhism teaches, above all, a universal

compassion to be extended to all living beings, irrespective of their status, race, or creed" (quoted in Dorn 2007, 152). Bingham notes the tolerant and ecumenical nature of U Thant's form of Buddhism:

> As profoundly as he believes in the moral and spiritual teachings of Lord Buddha, he is not attuned to religiosity…U Thant's form of Buddhism has been compared by a friend to the Christianity of a liberal Protestant in a predominantly Catholic country, such as France. U Thant compares it to that of a Unitarian in the predominantly Protestant United States (1966, 61).

This analogy to Unitarianism is apropos, as U Thant often articulated the teachings of his conservative Buddhist upbringing in the universalist language of peace and worked to build Lumbini as a location for fostering ecumenicism. Religion, for U Thant, was a potential avenue for dialogue between disparate communities, but he was also wary of the dangers of religious fundamentalism. In one public address from the late 1950s titled "On Tensions in the Middle East," U Thant stated:

> As an Asian, let me confess that a major weakness of Asia is religion employed as weapon for political ends, and the existence of politics of community or language, or a combination of all. These undesirable forces corrode within and foul the relations existing between nations. Asia has to overcome these forces in order that the potential strength of the masses for a more peaceful and good neighborly feeling may be fully developed (Thant 1958, 32).

Despite these reservations about the use of religion for political ends within the makeup of the nation-state, U Thant championed the revival of Lumbini during the last four years of his tenure as UN Secretary-General. U Thant portrayed a pacified Buddhism that he could mobilize to foster the peaceful coexistence of nations. The linking of religious ethical commitments and moral imperatives to the UN Charter speaks to U

Thant's tireless crusade for peace.[27] This is evident in U Thant's assessment of tolerance, which he viewed as a virtue to be cultivated in multiple venues:

> How are we to practice tolerance? What states of mind are necessary for all of us to live together in peace with one another as good neighbours? How are we to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security? The answers to these questions lie, it seems to me, in our ability to bring out the best in us and return to the basic moral and ethical principles of all great religions. Let us, therefore, dedicate ourselves anew to a new pledge: to make Muslims better Muslims, Hindus better Hindus, Christians better Christians and Buddhist better Buddhists (1978, 24).

These ideals, however, needed to be institutionalized within the nation-state to promote the flourishing of all people and the peaceful cooperation among disparate cultures. As he continued in his 1958 address regarding religiously motivated tensions in the Middle East: "The most effective weapon to fight this malady is the development and encouragement of democratic institutions and legitimate national aspirations, and to combat prejudice and ignorance. The United Nations, in the view of my delegation, has a significant role to play in this fight" (Thant 1958, 32). For U Thant, religion offered an avenue for the cultivation of a humanistic ethic, but its institutions and its ties to formations of polity were outmoded in the modern post-WWII geo-political landscape. The UN was envisaged as a democratizing force whose task was not only to maintain peace, but to promote it. Religion, Buddhism in particular, provided a universalizable ethical framework in U Thant's pursuit of this goal.

Development Interventions in Non-aligned Asia

[27] George Ignatieff describes U Thant's commitment to the UN's peacekeeping agenda as "peacemongering," see George Ignatieff, *The Making of a Peacemonger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

In the decade under U Thant's leadership (1961-1971), the United Nations was belabored by Cold War geopolitics—largely the product of the fractured political, economic, and social realities of newly independent nation states in Asia and Africa. It is in this historical context that Lumbini emerged as a development project under the UN and its subsidiaries the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Department of Technical Co-Operation for Development (DTCD). As inaugural members of the non-aligned movement (NAM) in 1961, Nepal and Burma were positioned within a bloc of developing Asian nations who opposed alignment with either the Soviet Union or the United States. U Thant's efforts to revive the Buddha's birthplace as a center for world peace rallied morale and financial support from within this non-aligned bloc. U Thant's position at the head of the UN afforded a unique opportunity to advocate for the development of the Buddha's birthplace as a pan-Asian concern within the UN electorate. The problem remained, if his utopian aspirations were to be actualized Lumbini would require a sizeable makeover from its current state as an unfinished archeological excavation with a singular pilgrim's rest house operated by Nepal's Dharmodaya Sabha (Chapter 3).

In the post-WWII period, development and modernization were nearly synonymous and frequently used interchangeably to characterize broad social and economic change brought about in the epoch of modernity. Both terms were defined in opposition to the "traditional" societies of the once colonized, and newly independent, global south. While colonialism was premised on outright exploitation and subjugation, modernization and development were ideologies deployed in multiple arenas to control territory and populations through infrastructural improvements that were envisioned to

bring about rapid and substantial social and economic progress (Ekbladh 2015). As historian David Ekbladh notes, the modern development paradigm internalized this dichotomy between traditional and modern:

> Traditional societies were viewed as backwards and separated by time from the exemplars of modernity in Western Europe and the United States…with outside aid they could traverse this historical gap to embrace modern relationships, institutions, and outlooks through a process of modernization (Ekbladh 2015, 10).

Development was among the UN's "three founding pillars," alongside the promotion of peace and the maintenance of security (Trent and Schnurr 2018, 71). Early UN development initiatives were premised on two concerns, 1) the deconstruction of the colonial and imperialist economic order through the promotion of "free trade and fair dealing" which could only be achieved through "assistance to reduce poverty and increase productive capacity," and 2) anxieties about recently de-colonized 'Third World' countries in Asia and Africa "drifting toward communism" (Trent and Schnurr 2018, 72). Referencing the ideological struggle between liberalism and communism, formed during the Cold War, Ekbladh notes, "among the many ways the powers sought to exert control over the newly categorized 'Third World' was development. Both sides sought transformation in the new states as a way to demonstrate that their ideologies were best suited to deliver the benefits of modern life" (2015, 2). Ekbladh argues that the presence of "countervailing development models" during the Cold War era intensified the American mission of development abroad and "served as justification for intense U.S. efforts to promote its own vision of modernity and in so doing aided the extension of its own global power and influence" (2015, 4-5). While the UN and its subsidiaries were not entirely beholden to the development models articulated by the U.S., by the mid-1960's the United Nations had formed the UNDP (Trent and Schnurr 2018, 74). Following the

American model, the UNDP underscored a commitment to human flourishing through a reconfiguration and reallocation of material and financial resources in the global south, implemented through a series of technocratic interventions, including surveying, planning, and design.

Under the aegis of the UNDP, development initiatives were operationalized through various forms of "technical assistance" interventions. These forms of foreign aid prioritized economic growth and stability as the focal elements of modernization. The UN and its subsidiaries understood that economic development would come with a cost:

> There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress (United Nations Department of Economic Affairs 1951).

Agencies like the UNDP, the DTCD, and the Department of Economic Affairs (now the Department of Economic and Social Affairs) espoused technological expertise and planning as means for coordinating and implementing broad economic and social changes, which by the mid-1950's, were widely recognized as "two sides of the same developmental coin" (Ekbladh 2015, 31). UN development initiatives embodied the belief that planning, aided by social science, technology, and engineering, offered transformative power for reshaping the "un/under-developed" regions of the world. The application of mid-century social scientific paradigms concerning race, ethnicity, and culture formed the backbone of this new attention to reconfiguring the material realities of the global south (see Lévi-Strauss 1952; Mead 1953). These formalized intervention strategies were built on mid-century social-scientific analysis that provided the development agencies with "data" about populations, institutions, and geographies

acquired under colonial rule. Margaret Mead's *Cultural Patterns and Technical Change*, commissioned by UNESCO in 1953, provides a concrete link between economic and social development in the UN's intervention efforts:

> It has become increasingly clear that the wide gap between wealth and relative welfare, ascribed to economic development in a few countries, and grinding poverty in most of the others, constitutes a basic source of economic and social instability in the world and is, in fact, a threat to peace. It has been recognized that accelerating the economic development in less advanced areas is imperative from the standpoint of all countries alike and that increase in productivity in the *under-developed* areas is a prerequisite to raising the living standards of their peoples (1953, 22).

Here Mead signals that un/under-development is a direct threat to peace. This appraisal advanced the UN's development agenda by interlinking its interventions with its foundational commitments to ensuring global peace and security. Paul Rabinow's (1992) characterization of "techno-cosmopolitanism" and "middling modernism" reflect the shifting development paradigms under late-colonialism and into the middle of the twentieth century. For Rabinow, "middling modernism" shares with "techno-cosmopolitanism" the "norms of industrialization, health, and sociality, as well as the technological process aimed at regulating social practices," but represents a shift in raw material from "the sedimented historical practices of a particular culture" to a universalized human subject "whose needs, potentialities, and norms could be discovered, analyzed, and formalized by science" (1992, 54). Lumbini's development under the UN was immersed in both paradigms: at once seeking to reconstitute the historical site of the Buddha's birth as a modern public space, while simultaneously employing the spatial techniques of modern planning, design, and zoning to encourage "healthy spaces and forms" catered to the universalized "New Man" constructed out of the mid-century social sciences (Rabinow 1992, 54). Lumbini (like other historical sites across South and Southeast Asia) was a location rife with possibilities for demonstrating

the benefits of modernization through planned and sustained technological and infrastructural improvements. This was, of course, only possible because of its lack of development and care under the reigning monarchy. While Lumbini was technically a protected heritage site under the 1956 Ancient Monument Preservation Act, little investment had been made in enhancing the local infrastructures, nor had there been any formalized plan for subsuming the birthplace in domestic economic agendas.

Delegated to "specialized agencies" within the UN, "technical assistance initiatives" were extensively planned, relying on a range of infrastructural, cultural, and socio-economic surveys to compile a comprehensive perspective on the impacts of any foreign intervention. Together with the country's government, the UN and her subsidiaries organized technical interventions to promote growth and ensure stability:

> The co-ordination of technical assistance for any one country requires at least three planning centres; each of these, conditioned by its own resources and outlook, must interact harmoniously with the others in evolving a project whose nature, scope and timing can ensure maximum effectiveness and permeance of benefit to a country's economy (Mead 1953, 40).

In the case of Lumbini, at least three such surveys were conducted between 1967 and 1971. Each successively built upon the observations of previous experts until an adequate assessment had been made. These surveys provided the data from which a Master Plan for Development could be designed and successfully implemented. While the U.S. acted unilaterally in its intervention policies, the UNDP was largely beholden to the UN secretariat and the general assembly. In this regard, U Thant's advocacy for Lumbini's development operated successfully in multiple, often overlapping, bureaucratic jurisdictions within the collection of specialized agencies in the United Nations. As the head of the United Nations, U Thant was positioned to champion the

ongoing calls by the global Buddhist community to ensure the survival of the biographical sites. From this moment forward, the process of developing Lumbini became an international concern.

The Secretary-General on Pilgrimage, April 1967

On April 14th, 1967, U Thant made a self-described "pilgrimage" to the Buddha's birthplace in the Terai region of southern Nepal. U Thant's stopover in Nepal was part of a larger diplomatic mission in South Asia which included longer visits in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and India. U Thant's enthusiasm for Lumbini is evident in the brief account of a UN staff member who accompanied him on the trip: "At 8:15 a.m., he flew to Lumbini by special helicopter to visit the birth-place of Lord Buddha. Describing his impression, he said that it was one of his life's ambitions to pay respects to this sacred spot and he felt gratification that his wish had been fulfilled" (United Nations 1967, 2). A momentous day for Nepalese foreign relations, U Thant's visit was one of hope and "mutual interest between Nepal and the UN" regarding "universal peace" ("To the Secretary-General" 1967). In an open letter to the Secretary-General, published in *The Rising Nepal*, the author expresses gratitude on behalf of Nepali people for the UN's "continued financial and technical assistance to Nepal's development projects," the importance of which "is further heightened by the fact that U Thant is also on a pilgrimage to Lumbini—the birthplace of Gautama the Buddha" ("To the Secretary-General" 1967).

In a letter dated April 17, 1967—just a few days after the Secretary-General's visit—Bhikkhu Aniruddha, the abbot of Lumbini Vihara, excitedly writes:

> I send you here/with 2, Badges as souvenir…I had intended to present you both the badges during your visit but unfortunately, I forgot to do so…we hope & believe that you

> will remember LUMBINI & extend your service for its development and refinement (1967).

U Thant graciously replied, "I am most grateful to you for sending them to me and I shall keep them as pleasant souvenirs of a most enjoyable visit to the birthplace of Buddha" (U Thant 1967). These friendly interactions represent the beginnings of a multi-year correspondence between the former Secretary-General and Aniruddha that brought the project of locating Lumbini in concert with the discourse of global development.

U Thant referenced his visit to Lumbini publicly in an address titled "Roads to Peace" given at Manhattan College on April 26th, 1967, just a few days after he returned from his sojourn to the non-aligned nations of Asia:

> I have just returned from a visit to some Asian countries. For me it became almost a religious pilgrimage. As you may know, my personal religion is Buddhism. On this visit, I had the opportunity to visit the Temple of the Tooth in Ceylon, the Stupas of Sanchi in India and the birthplace of the Enlightened One himself at Lumbini in Nepal. The Lord Buddha was, as you know, the apostle of the doctrine of non-violence, the conscious avoidance of injury or pain to any living creature. And in my mind, I recalled, not only the teachings of the great and compassionate Buddha, but also the practice of his precepts by the emperor Asoka, who became so horrified after waging one war that he relinquished all fighting thereafter and built up a great empire based only on love (United Nations 1967b:2-3).

The Secretary-General's delight in visiting the Buddha's birthplace sparked a personal investment in the site's development pervaded the remaining years of his service at the United Nations. Lumbini, and the Buddhist biographical genre at large, became, in a matter of a few days, a powerful talking point for U Thant as he publicly advocated world peace. Behind the rhetoric of peace and compassion was the powerful mechanism of development which was mobilized as a vehicle for materializing U Thant's utopian ideals. As the Secretary-General publicly vocalized his desire to see Lumbini established as a center for world peace, he began to coordinate formal surveying and preliminary development initiatives from within the UN.

In late 1967 a commission was dispatched to assess the viability of UN intervention at Lumbini. The "Mission" consisted of Susumu Kobe of Japan the Special Technical Adviser on Transport to the Resources and Transport Division of the UN, Ejler Alkjaer a Danish professor of transportation and tourism, and Silas Brown a UN Project Manager for groundwater projects in India (see United Nations 1968, 2). Their task was to "assist the Government [of Nepal] in assessing the possibilities and drawing up a plan for the development of Lumbini as a religious and general tourist centre *equipped to receive pilgrims, tourists and other visitors*" advising specifically on "the infrastructure requirements (transportation, facilities, water, energy and appropriate and adequate accommodations for *each type of visitors*" (Kobe 1968, 2, my emphasis). It is clear in the preliminary reports surrounding Lumbini's potential development that the United Nations sought to articulate its interventions in the language of modernization, while maintaining a recognition for the varied experiences of visitors to the site. If the UN were to successfully implore the Nepalese monarchy to support their interventions, it would have to do so through the rhetoric of infrastructural stability and economic opportunity.

The forty-six-page report compiled by Kobe and his associates was the UN's first formal bureaucratic intervention at Lumbini. It depicts a bleak situation, acknowledging the relative inaccessibility of the site (by bus or air) even to most residents of Nepal, its lack of potable groundwater, and the "urgent need for the preservation of ruins and relics already excavated" (Kobe 1968, 4). While the Kobe team largely accepted the historical and cultural importance of the Buddha's birthplace, their preliminary recommendations suggest that Lumbini should be developed within a much broader plan for tourism in Nepal, as a secondary tourist destination to the much more fiscally viable capital city of

Kathmandu and its surrounding areas (Kobe 1968, 25-26). The commission also cautioned, "in a country at this stage of development, pure or mainly religious investments cannot be justified from an economic point of view," and that "domestic tourism does not generate such an increase in the national income as to make it worthwhile to encourage travel from the rest of the country to Lumbini" (Kobe 1968, 26).

These assessments demonstrate a real concern with Lumbini's viability as an international tourist destination, much less a center for world peace as U Thant envisaged. Despite voicing legitimate concerns, the Kobe commission's report began to formalize a discourse within the UN concerning the Buddha's birthplace. It produced a reference point from which various positions, vis-à-vis development, could be asserted and it provided a preliminary plan for undertaking financial and technocratic interventions in Nepal's rural Terai region. By December 1968 "certain short-term projects" were initiated by the UN in agreement with the Nepalese government on the basis of the Kobe Report's preliminary findings (U Thant 1969). According to a letter dated January 14th, 1969 from U Thant to Aniruddha, these initial interventions included: 1) improvements to the road between Lumbini and Bhairawa airfield, 2) the appointment of UNDP Advisor F.E. Okada, an "expert in community development" who was dispatched to Nepal in late 1968 to "assist the Government in the preparations for development activities," 3) the formation of a team of experts from UNESCO to assess the excavation and preservation of monuments and relics, 4) preparatory work on drilling of a well, scheduled for completion March 1969, 5) arrangements between the "Government of Nepal and the Japanese Overseas Technical Co-operation Agency for assistance in providing a diesel-electric power station" (U Thant 1969).

In addition to these five preliminary initiatives, U Thant reassured Aniruddha that "proposals for long-term assistance" were being discussed between the Nepalese government and the UNDP, "so as to ensure steady economic and social progress for the people of the area." (U Thant 1969, 2). Aniruddha responded in May of 1969:

> I regret the delay in writing to you…I am overjoyed to see your fivefold Plan to develop Lumbini. May you be blessed in all your activities…May the Govt of Japan & Nepal be inspired for this Holy Task through your sincere zeal and devotion for lofty ideals and noble achievements (Bhikkhu Aniruddha 1969).

U Thant's direct communication with Aniruddha demonstrates his interest in overseeing the ongoing development proceedings at the Buddha's birthplace, and concurrently highlights the overlapping investment of the Dharmodaya Sabha and the UN in this endeavor. It is evident from the tone of Aniruddha's letters that he considered U Thant a powerful patron, and enthusiastic supporter of the project to develop the Buddha's birthplace. The two exchanged a series of communications between 1967 and 1971 when U Thant's term ended as the Secretary-General.[28]

F.E. Okada's report, compiled in January 1969, outlines the political, economic, and religious advantages of Nepal's development of Lumbini. He notes:

> The significance of Lumbini Garden as the birth site of Gautam Buddha is not merely related to religion but assumes political and economic significance in Nepal's present and future relationships with, in particular, Asia and, more particularly, with South-East Asia and Japan (United Nations 1969:1).

He goes on to assert that Nepal's development of Lumbini would be a rallying cry for the Buddhist nations of the world stating, "the emotional debt that Buddhists will feel toward Nepal, if Lumbini Garden is developed, is not to be minimized; the religious favour of Buddhists should not be underestimated" (United Nations 1969:1). These

[28] In total I have identified five sets of correspondences formally catalogued in the United Nations Archives. Although the extent of their relationship is unknown, the personal communications demonstrate a shared investment and a deep reverence.

sentiments are more than likely inherited from Okada's communications with the Dharmodaya Sabha, and Bhikkhu Aniruddha in particular. Several members of the Dharmodaya Sabha functioned as Okada's interlocutors on his initial visit to Nepal as he sought to gather a comprehensive picture of the on the ground situation at Lumbini.

As the abbot of the Raj Kiya Lumbini *vihāra* , Mahathera's role cannot be underestimated. In a letter to U Thant dated January 7, 1968, Aniruddha commends U Thant for his dedication to the Buddha's birthplace:

> May your ceaseless efforts for World Peace & welfare be crowned with every success. It is really very heartening to see that amidst all your multifarious tasks and huge burden, almost superhuman, you remember LUMBINI and about its development as an international center. Buddhists all over the world cannot but be overwhelmed with gratitude towards you (1968a).

Again, in a letter dated December 5, 1968, Aniruddha extols the interventions of the UN at Lumbini and U Thant in particular: "We read in the newspaper an article 'Development Programme for LUMBINI by aid of U.N.O.'. Reading this news, we felt a high sense of joy and thanked you, because it was only for your inspiration and devotion for Lord Buddha" (Aniruddha Mahathera 1968b). The Dharmodaya Sabha had positioned itself as the central voice for preserving and developing Buddhist monuments in Nepal and had maintained this distinction through sustained communications with U Thant and the various representatives dispatched to Nepal by the UN and the UNDP.

Okada's report also emphasizes a long-term, "dynamic," and "progressive" development plan. It outlined four "inter-related components," 1) the Lumbini Garden, 2) town planning of the neighboring city of Bhairawa, 3) the socio-economic development of the entire Lumbini Area (identified as the area within a 2–3-mile radius of the Lumbini

Garden) and 4) construction of a modern road between Lumbini and Bhairawa (United Nations 1969). Okada, advocating for UNDP oversight warned:

> Lack of action in one component retards or precludes development in others. Action, however, in one component sets up a chain reaction, leading to a dynamism whereby each component sustains, and is sustained by, the others, and to progressive development. This progression needs to be guided (United Nations 1969, 1).

Here the teleological project of modern development asserts its demand for oversight by the already sufficiently modernized "First World."[29] Japan, as Okada notes, had "already assumed the status of world economic power" by the end of the 1960's and offered a potential guiding hand in developing Lumbini, not the least of which due to a shared Buddhist religiosity (United Nations 1969, 1). While Okada recognized the possibilities of Lumbini for creating a pan-Buddhist destination in Nepal, he was skeptical of the Nepalese government's commitment to seeing the project through, writing in May 1970, "my impression is that there is an unenthusiastic attitude on the part of the Government of Nepal towards the Lumbini Project" (United Nations 1970e, 1).

Garnering Support in the UN and Beyond

By early 1969 plans for developing Lumbini were well underway following the recommendations laid out in the Kobe mission report from December 1967 and Okada's follow-up observations compiled a year later in the winter of 1968. A third report on the viability of developing Lumbini, which was now formally known as the "Lumbini Project" within UN circles, was submitted in December of 1969 by F.R. Allchin, Lecturer in India Studies at Cambridge University and consultant to the UNDP, and K. Matsushita

[29] I use this designation not to reify the hierarchy, but rather to signal an artifact of the times that was operative in my source materials.

an Architect and Planner with the Japanese firm Tange and URTEC (United Nations 1969c, 1). Just two years after U Thant's pilgrimage to the Nepal Terai, plans were being drafted for large scale development interventions at the birthplace. The Allchin and Matsushita report, in particular, highlights the direct investment of U Thant in the ongoing development initiatives. The central aim of Allchin and Matsushita's visit was to "assemble data to be utilized in connection with the perspective appeal of the Secretary-General to interest governments, especially Buddhist countries, for coordinated assistance for the development of Lumbini" (United Nations 1969c, 2). It is evident from the content of this report, in conjunction with his ongoing contact with Aniruddha Mahathera, that U Thant's vision for Lumbini was the guiding force behind the UN's interest in developing the Terai site. Certainly, there was interest from Buddhists within Nepal and other neighboring countries to make Lumbini accessible, but without the resources of the UN, the UNDP, and UNESCO, such efforts were largely unattainable. As I noted in Chapter 2, despite commitments made by the Nepalese government at the 2,500th Buddha Jayanti in 1956, very little development, if any, occurred in the years leading up to U Thant's visit.

The Allchin and Matsushita report details, for the first time, plans for the three-square mile radius surrounding the existent Maya Devi Temple, pointing specifically to the "development of a Sacred Garden and a Pilgrim Village" (United Nations 1969c, 2). The report also specifies a "monastic enclave" and calls for "buffer-zones" surrounding the three main divisions (United Nations 1969c, 2). The Allchin and Matsushita report outlines a concrete and systematized development plan focused on "zoning." As Rabinow has noted, zoning is one of the principal characteristics of modern development whereby

spatial reconfiguration produced the conditions of peaceful cohabitation (Rabinow 1992; 1996). For Lumbini to truly emerge as a desirable destination on the international stage it would have to be transformed: developed, modernized, and made accessible through new technologies. But, its historical importance, its role in the pan-Buddhist practice of pilgrimage could not simply be cast to the wayside because it was these historical and cultural realities which made it saliant in the pan-Buddhist biographical imagination.

Under the guidance of the Allchin and Matsushita report, U Thant sought to encapsulate these multivalent realities into a unified development project: a project that he could actualize through the joint efforts of UN, the UNDP, and UNESCO. Articulating his vision for Lumbini in terms of "zones" was a powerful rhetorical appeal to both the general UN electorate and to those "Buddhist" countries that were engrossed in the potency of the Buddhist biographical genre. The "monastic enclave," in particular, allocated portions of land to independent Buddhist organizations to develop shrines, stupas, temples, and monasteries at the site (United Nations 1969c, 13).

A United Nations press release dated February 16, 1970, credits U Thant with "suggesting" to the Government of Nepal that Lumbini be developed "as a pilgrimage and tourist centre with accommodation for pilgrims, visitors, and tourists" during his visit in April 1967 (United Nations 1970a, 1). The press release announces an invitation to 13 States (Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, and Thailand) to convene at the United Nations headquarters to discuss the proposed project for development (United Nations 1970a, 1). This bloc of Asian nations would later become to International Committee for the Development of Lumbini (ICDL). Additionally, the document refers to the Kobe survey mission and

"short-term projects" already carried out by the UN Office of Technical Co-Operation, as well as feasibility studies for the construction of roads, and the drilling of a well for potable water (United Nations 1970a, 1). The article "Thant in Plea for Buddhist Shrine" appeared in the New York Times a day later reporting, "gardens and forests flourished on the spot during the Buddha's lifetime, but the area now is largely desolate and lacking facilities, although up to 50,000 pilgrims make the journey each year" (New York Times 1970).

The United Nations press release also suggests that a UNESCO mission (still in its infancy and yet to establish the World Heritage program) in "cultural tourism and cultural heritage" visited Lumbini and "gave further support to the proposal for development" (United Nations 1970a, 1). The involvement of UNESCO is substantiated by a telegram from director of UNESCO Renu Maheu to U Thant dated November 16, 1969:

> Visited yesterday Lumbini Kapilavastu. Renew my pledge assist in planning and execution cultural aspects of any plan which UN or yourself personally may sponsor for touristic development of this area which means so much to mankind (United Nations 1969b).

U Thant's plan for the Buddha's birthplace recruited and empowered a wide array of stakeholders invested in seeing Lumbini developed as a pilgrimage and tourist destination. His vision coalesced into a formal committee within the United Nations electorate in May 1970. The formation of the ICDL established concrete ties between the 13 member states and effectively solidified the Lumbini project as an international undertaking. An article published in the Indian newspaper *The Stateman*, notes that the committee "will launch an appeal to the world for liberal donations," and that "the U.N. General Secretary, U Thant, who is associating himself with the development of Lumbini

would also issue a personal appeal for funds" ("Development of Lumbini Committee Formed" 1970). The project of developing Lumbini within the United Nations relied on U Thant's guiding hand from its inception.

In preparation for presentation to the UN electorate U Thant and his staff compiled a booklet, largely modeled on the Allchin and Matsushita report, which outlined a clear design and preliminary financial estimates for the initial zoning of the three square-mile area surrounding the Maya Devi Temple complex. The booklet, titled *Lumbini: The Birthplace of Buddha*, begins with a forward from U Thant where he briefly articulates his visit to the site, and, referencing the Buddha's doctrine of compassion for humanity, emphatically states, "at no time in history has the message of the Buddha been more relevant than it is today" (United Nations 1970b, 1). U Thant also expresses his "sincere hope that both interested Governments and individuals and private groups will make generous contributions in cash or in kind to help in the implantation" of a what he considered to be "a most worthy project" (United Nations 1970b, 1). The pamphlet goes on to articulate a concise description of the site and an abbreviated vision for its development.

Lumbini: The Birthplace of Buddha was a consolidation of the surveying undertaken in the Kobe, Okada, and Allchin/Matsushita reports—which were marked "confidential" and "restricted." This booklet was the first publicly accessible material outlining the socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural data about Lumbini and its surrounding area collected between 1967 and early 1970. It's simple and straightforward presentation characterized the historical and cultural significance of the Buddha's birthplace and simultaneously outlined its dire need for intervention on the part of the

UN. In the ICDL's booklet, we see for the first time, a formalized vision of U Thant's design. The Buddha's birthplace was envisioned to have three primary zones consisting of the "Sacred Garden," the "Monastic Enclave", and the "Pilgrim Village," each with their own designated purposes (United Nations 1969c, 12-15; United Nations 1970b, 11-14). The "Sacred Garden" would house the archeological ruins, of which the Aśokan pilar was identified as the most significant. The "Pilgrim Village" would "provide accommodation for both pilgrims and tourists on the one hand and local service population on the other" (United Nations 1970b, 13). Finally, the vision for the "Monastic Enclave" included allocating land for "a group of shrines, monasteries, and places of worship to be constructed by individual states and institutions" (United Nations 1970b, 14). It was even suggested that the construction of these modern spaces "might assume a diversity of styles in keeping with the free development and diversity of Buddhist sects" (United Nations 1970b, 14).

Lumbini: The Birthplace of Buddha presents a conceptual model for reconfiguring Lumbini into an international destination. It also contributed to the discourse of the Buddha's birthplace as a pan-Buddhist pilgrimage place with potential for fostering world peace. While the ICDL recognized the potential of Lumbini, the pamphlet makes it abundantly clear that the existent site was less than satisfactory. If Lumbini were to emerge as the site U Thant and his fellow stakeholders imagined it would have to be manufactured as such. Under the subheading "Lumbini Tomorrow" the ICDL pamphlet states, rather emphatically:

> Lumbini presents the architect with a formidable challenge. Almost nothing exists today, for even the *Sal* trees have retreated. Everything has to be created there and created in such a way as to reveal the universality of the Buddha's message and its significance in

> the modern world, as well as to express the early life of the Buddha and the events leading up to the Great Renunciation (United Nations 1970b, 11).

In this presentation, the desire to showcase the Buddha's life and message was nestled within the scope of development. The ICDL's 1970 pamphlet contained the tacit implication that the Buddhist *śāsana*, symbolically instantiated at Lumbini, was under threat requiring the intervention of the larger Buddhist world to survive in modernity. Likewise, there is an acknowledgement that the anxieties of the global political uncertainty could be alleviated with the aid of Buddhism's ethical imperatives of compassion and peace. This aspiration for world peace was a driving force throughout U Thant's tenure as Secretary-General. Development became the vehicle by which these utopian aspirations could be achieved. Neglected for too long, the birthplace of the Buddha was now ready to be reborn as a site of global significance. In a letter to U Thant, the Dharmodaya Sabha, which by this time had established the Lumbini Dharmodaya Committee as the national organizing body for developing the Buddha's birthplace, celebrated the formation of the ICDL in early 1970:

> The Lumbini Dharmodaya Committee the only National Organization entrusted with the noble work of maintaining Buddhist Temples and Monasteries of Lumbini has it its meeting held on 10th April 1970 expressed its heart felt gratitude to Your Excellency and to all the members of the United Nations which have actively supported this sacred decision (Amritananda 1970).

The formation of ICDL signaled a definitive moment in establishing an achievable plan for Lumbini's development, giving currency to the erstwhile development proposals formulated between the UNDP and the Nepalese Government. In a public statement from September 1970, Padma Bahadur Khatri, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations, decries the inaccessibility of Lumbini noting, "pilgrims and tourists who fly into the district from Kathmandu discover that a

21-kilometer bullock-cart track, impassable in the rainy season, is the only link between the nearest airport, Bhairawa, and the sacred site" (United Nations 1970h, 1).The ambassador goes on to reiterate U Thant's role in envisioning a new future for the site: "during a visit to Nepal, the Secretary-General, U Thant, suggested the development of the site. He envisaged a pilgrimage and tourist centre" and reiterates that "the Government of Nepal responded enthusiastically" (United Nations 1970h, 1). Here the Nepalese Government, with full support of the ICDL, acknowledges its commitment to the project, despite serious concerns to the contrary voiced by Okada a few months earlier (United Nations 1970e, 1). In an internal briefing report on Khatri's press conference, it is noted that "Mr. Khatri also said that although Nepal was not a Buddhist, but a Hindu country, Buddha was regarded as an incarnation of one of the Hindu gods. He stated that appeals would also be made to individuals for contribution" (United Nations 1970i). These remarks suggest that the Government of Nepal sought to incorporate Lumbini within the broader socio-cultural framework of the modernizing monarchy, even if only briefly. This echoes the fleeting state investment in Buddhist sites in the 1950's (discussed in Chapter 3).

Following the formation of the ICDL, U Thant could have easily taken a backseat, allowing the member states to pick up the mantle and actualize the vision he had germinated. Instead, U Thant continued to advocate for Lumbini. He took a hands-on approach exhausting nearly every avenue his position could afford. U Thant consciously utilized his diplomatic prowess, and the power of his office, to facilitate international support for the Buddha's birthplace within the UN electorate and beyond. While there was significant interest drummed up amongst the committee members, securing financial

support for undertaking the extensive and long-term development of the site in the rural Terai was increasingly dependent on the investment of independent Buddhist organizations. U Thant, unsurprisingly, played a crucial role in appealing to the ministers of the ICDL member states and to his fellow Buddhists. Records indicate that the ICDL pamphlet was sent, along with a form letter drafted by U Thant, to several heads of state across Asia (including Burma, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, and Sri Lanka) in April of 1971, soliciting financial and moral support for the project. In the letter U Thant urges:

> I hope that your Excellency personally, your Government, and people of goodwill in your country, may find it possible to co-operate with the Committee for the Development of Lumbini in raising funds for constructing a suitable pilgrimage and tourist centre (U Thant 1971).

This rallying call to aid Lumbini's development resulted in written commitments of support from the Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn of Thailand; the Malaysian Prime Minister "and various Buddhist associations in Malaysia" (United Nations 1971d); Swaran Singh India's Minister of External Affairs; Sirimavo Bandaranaike the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka; and the Government of Pakistan and the Pakistan Buddha Kristi Prachar Sangha. An internal report "Status of Lumbini Project" from early 1971 relays a telegram from Mr. Kanchanagom (a Thai national and leading member of U Thant's secretariat):

> Pleased to inform you that our Lumbini project in Thailand will be as successful if not greater than that of Japan…meeting with Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn…indications are his Majesty would wish to associate himself with the project and national committee would be established with the prime minister as chairman. This means that our project in Thailand would be a complete success (United Nations 1971b).

Despite encouraging news from Thailand, the remarks of H.S. Amerasinghe, Permanent Representative of Ceylon, reflect mixed emotions regarding the UN's development plan:

> I have been requested by my Prime Minister to state that while we consider any appropriate means of preserving Lumbini as a site sacred to Buddhists to be deserving of universal support, we feel that it would detract from the religious significance and merit of such a project if it were to serve a secular purpose such as tourism (United Nations 1971e).

These comments suggest that some governments were hesitant to financially support the "Lumbini Project" if its result would amount to a "secular" space. These early remarks signal the ongoing tension between Lumbini's preservation, development, and use.

In addition to soliciting formal governmental support, U Thant also collaborated with several Buddhist organizations, including the Buddhist Education Society of India, the Maha Bodhi Society of India, the Jagajjyoti Vihara Sabha, and the Bengal Buddhist Association. A telegram in late 1970 also acknowledges Mr. Kanchanagom's appointment as representative of the ICDL at the World Fellowship of Buddhist Conference, held in Colombo in October of 1970 (United Nations 1970f, 1970g). These connections further illustrate the complicated relationship between development and the Buddhist biographical genre that U Thant introduced within the United Nations during his tenure. Multiple stakeholders were empowered to participate in unified vision for Lumbini as a center for world peace and economic development in Nepal.

By June of 1971 it was evident that the ICDL had "limited resources" and that they had decided to "concentrate efforts on Japan, Thailand, and the United States only" (United Nations 1970d, 1). An internal report titled "Brief on Lumbini Project" notes that "so far fund-raising campaigns have not been very effective," despite evidence that there

is “sufficient interest and enthusiasm in the project” (United Nations 1970d, 1). The tension between moral and financial support for the project is evident in this early briefing as members of the ICDL sought to implement U Thant’s vision for Lumbini. The report goes on to note, “The Chairman has gathered the impression that the people and Governments concerned would like to know more about the project before they could contribute. They would also like to be assured of the proper and prudent use of the funds” (United Nations 1970d, 1-2). Here anxieties over the proper use of funds becomes vocalized for the first time. It is notable that such concerns were evident from the onset of the project, as similar anxieties remain apparent in the ongoing development initiatives at the site.

Despite over four years of dedication to the development initiatives at the Buddha’s birthplace, U Thant’s second term as Secretary-General concluded in 1971 without a formal architectural design established for Lumbini. Nevertheless, his fingerprints indelibly marked every facet of the proposals circulating within the UN at the time. U Thant succeeded in elevating Lumbini to a global concern, an arena it had failed to reach under the Dharmodaya Sabha and the Maha Bodhi Society in the decades prior.

Foregrounding Lumbini as a manufactured space, discursively and spatially produced through encounters between a variety of Asian and non-Asian actors, as well as their respective cultural ideologies, recognizes that “projects of world-making are embedded in specific settings where the contingency of encounters and particular historical conjunctures give them content and force” (Geary 2017, 10). In the Cold War era, development provided an avenue for Asia to emerge out of the shadows of colonialism and onto the world stage. U Thant’s vision for the development of Lumbini

extended the repertoire of the Buddha's biography to, at once, re-localize the historical figure of Siddhartha Gautama in the Nepal Terai and simultaneously espouse the universal applicability of his *Dharma*. Conceived, planned, and implemented through the aegis of the United Nations the development of Lumbini continues to operate in multiple, and at times conflicting, registers.

U Thant's guiding hand in the development initiatives coincided with an age of "heritage development" in Asia broadly (Di Giovine 2009). In the early 1970's UNESCO asserted itself as the arbiter of "world heritage" and began to undertake efforts to intervene in the preservation of culturally significant monuments, offering technical assistance and cooperation. Although Lumbini would not be officially inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site until 1997, the Buddha's birthplace was drawn into the spatial politics of heritage conservation through U Thant's interventions. These concerns for the continued preservation of Lumbini's "outstanding universal value" will be addressed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 6

DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL BUDDHISM: FRICTIONS IN THE LATE-TWENTIETH CENTURY

> The complex being designed by the celebrated Japanese architect, Kenzo Tange, will serve to attract pilgrims, scholars, and men and women of peace from all over the world to the birth-place of Gautam Buddha, the apostle of peace. This is as it should be, for in a world driven by strife and social injustice, and threatened by nuclear catastrophe, the message of the Buddha has most compelling clarity.[30]

While visiting Lumbini in June 2019 I witnessed various development initiatives in progress, including the reconstruction of the perimeter wall (fig. 6) and landscaping in the central canal public spaces. Members of the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) heralded these projects as evidence of Nepal's continued commitment to establishing the Buddha's birthplace as an international destination. Such comments came on the heels of the Nepalese government's inauguration of 2019 as the "Visit Lumbini Year" (see Dhungana and Poudel 2019). The national campaign aimed to increase tourism to Nepal and mobilized the slogan, "visit Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha, spread a message of peace." The promotion, headed by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, sought to attract 2.5 million domestic and foreign travelers to the rural Terai site after a similar campaign was successful in 2012. Nepal's Prime Minister, KP Sharma Oli, reiterated the government's commitment to developing Lumbini as a center for world peace "where Buddhists will make a pilgrimage visit at least once in their lifetime" (quoted in Dhungana and Poudel 2019). Although the LDT fell short of its projected target, data collected by the LDT indicate that the Buddha's birthplace received over 1.5

[30] Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, "Statement by the Secretary-General at the meeting of the International Committee for the Development of Lumbini, Thursday, 11 June 1987." UN Archives S-1024-0145-0002.

million visitors in 2019, including some 175,000 foreigners (excluding Indian nationals) doubling its total from a decade earlier (LDT 2020; Shinde 2021).

Figure 6. Exterior wall of the Lumbini complex, June 2019. Photo by author.

Despite these efforts to increase the number of tourists and pilgrims, recent survey data show that nearly ninety percent of foreigners visiting Lumbini spend less than an

hour at the park before moving on (Dhungana and Poudel 2019; LDT 2020). This trend was evident during my visit. Much of the park, and the hotels just outside the gates, remained seemingly vacant. Walking the length of the central canal that connects the Sacred Garden in the south (home to the Maya Devi Temple Complex and other archeological ruins) to the Japanese-funded World Peace Pagoda in the north, I realized that Lumbini's manufacture into a grand Buddhist pilgrimage destination and global tourist site was still incomplete (fig. 7). Justin McDaniel (2017) laments that the UN-sponsored development of Lumbini has not fostered pan-Buddhist ecumenicism as envisaged by U Thant. McDaniel somewhat pessimistically calls Lumbini a "nonteleological and nondidactic leisure space defined by distraction" (2017, 36).

Figure 7. Lumbini Master Plan footprint, June 2019. Photo by author.

This chapter seeks to offer an alternative perspective on why the development of Lumbini remains incomplete. I argue that this general sense of incompleteness is not due to a lack of investment by foreign and domestic Buddhists, nor is it the result of wanton neglect. Rather, the systematic design of the site under the UN situated the Buddha's birthplace as having a universal patron who, in the durée of the site's recent development (1967-present), has prioritized conserving the archeological remains in the Sacred Garden zone over fostering inter-community engagement. In short, the United Nations, her development subsidiaries, and Nepal's government have taken the religious *use* of Lumbini as ancillary to the site's historical import and potential to drive infrastructural development and economic prosperity in the region. Despite these agendas, Buddhists in Nepal and abroad have touted investments by the Nepalese monarchy and international agencies, such as the UN and UNESCO, as concomitant to their efforts to revitalize pilgrimage to Lumbini.

As the Lumbini Project moved through the stages of gestation, from utopian imagination to concrete construction, it collected investors from foreign and domestic governmental agencies as well as local, regional, and global Buddhist organizations. This process brought about substantial shifts in how the Buddha's birthplace could, and ought to be, encountered. In the 1970s and 1980s ,custodianship of the Buddha's birthplace shifted from the local care of monks under the Dharmodaya Sabha to state-sanctioned agencies and their international counterparts in foreign "Buddhist nations." Patronage of the site likewise shifted beyond the Nepalese monarchy to incorporate a myriad of international investors guided by the UN. This "opening up" of Lumbini to foreign

investment dramatically shifted the on-the-ground material realities, significantly altering the landscape for pilgrims, tourists, and local residents.

The UN-sponsored Lumbini Project crafted a singular narrative concerning the site's import as a historical remnant of Buddhist antiquity. This historiographic process is inherited from the British curatorial state that understood history to be a formidable tool of control and subjugation (Cohn 1996). In the three-decade long process of implementing the formal development plan and nominating Lumbini for UNESCO World Heritage status, Buddhist and non-Buddhist investors sought to authenticate and preserve the archeological remains as tantamount to the site's historical and cultural significance. All publications on Lumbini, from Nepalese sources and Western scholars, recount an event-based chronology of the site's function in Buddhist antiquity, and its symbolic value for the global Buddhist community, the Nepalese state, and humanity at large. Recent archeological excavations continue to frame the site in terms of its past ritual function (Coningham et al. 2013). Archeological excavation remains the primary mode of authentication of Buddhism's "origins" in Nepal. The centering of Lumbini's antiquity through continued archeological excavation has done double-work, as it were, ameliorating the site for Buddhist practitioners as well as international heritage investors keen on ensuring the site's permanence within a Westernized civilizational history.

Utopian imaginations that have sought to construct Lumbini as a center for world peace have not been fully materialized within the shifting priorities of the state, domestic and foreign Buddhist organizations, and, since 1967, the UN and UNESCO. Frictions among these various stakeholders emerged rather quickly following U Thant's death in

1974.[31] While U Thant was certainly a bridge figure linking Buddhist heritage to Western models of development, the process of developing Lumbini continued beyond his tenure. Infrastructural transformations on the scale of those proposed for the Buddha's birthplace demanded significant oversight. The Lumbini Project also required sizeable buy-in from the Nepalese Hindu monarchy to implement. Interwoven discourses of Buddhist ecumenicism, geopolitical cooperation and peace, as well as social welfare and economic prosperity, have engendered new possibilities and serious tensions at the Buddha's birthplace. Throughout this chapter I explore conjunctures between the interventionist model of modern development, the Buddhist biographical genre, and emergent conceptions of cultural heritage. Central to the codification of a singular narrative about Lumbini's universal significance was the drafting and implementation of a blueprint for the site's development.

The Kenzo Tange Master Plan for the Development of Lumbini

Although U Thant's tenure at the UN concluded before the adoption of a formal development plan for the birthplace, he nevertheless played a significant role in selecting its architect. By commissioning K. Matsushita to accompany F.R. Allchin to Nepal for a feasibility survey in late 1969, U Thant, along with his colleagues at the UNDP, had in effect hired the Japanese architectural firm Tange & URTEC as design consultant. Tange & URTEC, headed by famed Japanese architect and urban planner Kenzo Tange, was only later (in 1972) awarded formal consultancy as the principal design firm by the

[31] For a detailed discussion of U Thant's death and the political upheaval in Myanmar (Burma) that it precipitated see Andrew Selth, *Death of a hero: The U Thant disturbances in Burma, December 1974*. Griffith Institute- Research Paper (July 2018).

ICDL, but it was Matsushita who drafted many of the designs (McDaniel 2017, 64). The close working relationship between the UNDP and Tange & URTEC in Japan, along with U Thant's oversight of the "Lumbini Project," all but assured the Tange and U Thant would be joined by the development initiatives germinating at the Buddha's birthplace. In documents obtained from the United Nations Archives, Tange and U Thant's partnership is apparent. By mid-1970 Tange certainly considered himself an active participant in the project, writing to U Thant:

> It was my great honour and pleasure that I could meet you when I visited United Nations on July 16th. And also, I feel honoured that I can take part in the Lumbini Project, touching deeply your personal interest and passion in this project. We would like to proseed [sic] this project with our best (Tange 1970a).

Tange references U Thant's "deeply personal interest" in the development initiatives, further substantiating the Secretary-General's guiding hand in manufacturing the Buddha's birthplace as an international destination (Tange 1970a).

In his monograph *Architects of Buddhist Leisure,* Justin McDaniel suggests that Tange was reluctant to participate in the Lumbini Project from the beginning, and that he "lost interest in the project after 1978 and almost completely after 1985" (2017, 64). While all indications are that Tange's involvement certainly dwindled after his Master Plan for the Development of Lumbini was formally approved by the ICDL and the royal government of Nepal in 1978, letters between Tange and the Secretary-General tell a different story about the architect's early investment. In a letter from Tange to U Thant in September 1970, the designer enthusiastically wrote: "It was a great pleasure to see you in New York and talk about the Lumbini Project. Dr. Susumu Kobe and I are doing our best to persuade various authorities in Japan to contribute to the project" (Tange 1970b). Not only did Tange consider himself a design consultant, but he was also actively

involved in soliciting Japanese support for the development initiatives. His letter goes on to state:

> I personally discussed this question with our Premier Sato, and he showed considerable interest as a Buddhist himself. I hope it will contribute a great deal to our efforts if you can talk personally with Premier Sato about this matter and your idea on the project when he visits the U.N. general assembly in October (Tange 1970b).

Kenzo Tange felt the Lumbini Project so worthwhile that he discussed it with Japan's Prime Minister Eisaku Sato and advocated for a fund-raising committee in "Japanese political, business, and religious circles" (Tange 1970b). Tange's enthusiasm could certainly be lip-service, but why write U Thant directly? By this point the ICDL had been established with Japan's permanent representative a functioning member of the committee. Why not work through official circles? The exchanges between U Thant and Kenzo Tange indicate that the Secretary-General had a primary role in soliciting the architect for enacting his vision of Lumbini. Likewise, Tange was deeply invested in seeing U Thant's vision materialized.

McDaniel argues that Tange did not articulate himself as an explicitly "Buddhist" architect, nor did his style incorporate overt Buddhist influences: "[Tange] designed Lumbini as he would other sites—there is nothing particularly Buddhist about it" (2017, 64). In McDaniel's estimation, Lumbini may have been intended as a "Buddhist" place, but as a result of various shortcomings the site has failed to meet these expectations. He argues:

> [Tange] wanted the master plan to create harmony, but history, language, economics, culture, and human nature got in the way. The groups, despite living close to each other, barely interact, and Lumbini, a grand experiment in bringing Buddhists from all over the world together, has been a nearly unmitigated ecumenical failure (McDaniel 2017, 54).

I disagree with McDaniel's foregrounding of the transformation of the Buddha's birthplace into a "leisure space" and suggest alternative ways of understanding Lumbini's

significance in the modern era. I maintain that McDaniel underestimates the potency of the Buddhist biographical genre in shaping the various agendas—sectarian, political, and universalist—that contributed to Lumbini development in the twentieth century. This is evident in the site's continued branding as a premier pilgrim destination and a "fountain of peace" within Buddhist and non-Buddhist circles. It is not that Buddhists have been absent from the discourse of Lumbini, but that those discussions have taken place within overlapping, and at times conflicting, registers. Secondly, McDaniel underestimates the role of U Thant in guiding the development proceedings. The design of Lumbini, although officially drafted by Tange, was premised on the vision and unwavering commitment of the Secretary-General. McDaniel admits as much but fails to address it, save for a few passing remarks. Lastly, McDaniel too hastily establishes a stark, and largely artificial, dichotomy between "Buddhist spaces" and "leisure spaces." While he tempers this opposition with the caveat that "leisure is not antithetical to religion," his overt polarization of the two modes of experiencing Lumbini says otherwise (2017, 79). I concur with McDaniel that leisure is certainly not antithetical to encountering Buddhist spaces today considering that monuments and archeological ruins have largely been co-opted as spaces for the consumption of "history" by non-native persons dating back to the colonial period (Chapter 2). As Anderson 91991) and Cohn (1996) have shown, the "museumification" of Buddhist heritage has always been preoccupied with leisure.

McDaniel's concentration on Lumbini as exclusively a leisure space exposes certain anxieties about the manufacturing of Buddhist heritage sites in the modern period. It also, in my view, fails to address the crucial issue of what we consider to be "Buddhist." Such sentiments elicit tension about what constitutes authentic Buddhist

practice in the twenty-first century. Indeed, McDaniel's anxieties are confirmed when, comparing Lumbini to Bangkok's Phutthamonthon park, he states in conclusion, "it is striking not for what is there, but for what is not—no ritual implements, monks, colors, or worshipers" (2017, 80). These conclusions are partly explained by the dates of McDaniel's trip to Lumbini, which he readily admits did not coincide with the traditional pilgrimage season (December-April) or a prominent festival day (Buddha Jayanti/Vesak Day, typically the first full moon day in Baisakh, the first month of the Nepali calendar).

This perceived lack of "Buddhist" activity at Lumbini is the result of the systematic regulation of such activities to private areas—within individual temples and monasteries—secluded from the public gaze of tourists and even from each other. More importantly, this division between private and public is built into Kenzo Tange's Master Plan (KTMP). As I have previously noted (Chapter 4) the initial proposals for Lumbini's development, under the guidance of the ICDL, highlighted three distinct "zones" that catered to the various needs of multiple types of visitors—tourists and pilgrims—as well as its local residents. The KTMP sought to accommodate the disparate needs of these groups within a singular design so as to integrate Lumbini within broader development interventions in the region. Zoning was the modern design technique chosen by Tange and his associates to manufacture a singular place with multiple uses.

Latent within this technique is a blending of the logics behind "techno-cosmopolitanism" and "middling-modernism" discussed by Paul Rabinow (1992). The archeological ruins were preserved for posterity in the Sacred Garden, showcasing the historical import of the site for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. Public spaces were also designed to meet the needs of modern "Man," which were to be anticipated and met

by the proper distribution of resources and aesthetics. Concerns for walk space and other transportation; adequate water supply and drainage for waste disposal; and sufficient electric power supply along the central corridor were paramount in Tange's design (Tange & URTEC 1972, 19-20;). Linkages between the zones also were envisioned to provide a seamless transition from one zone to the next as visitors walked along the central canal.

The UN's commitment to economic development through supporting tourist infrastructures assured that Lumbini was not simply curated as a pilgrimage destination but promoted as an opportunity for generating revenue for the development of Nepal broadly. Tange approached these clashing ideologies through the design element of zoning. In doing so, the KTMP took on a particular aesthetic whereby expressions of Buddhist material culture could be relegated to their appropriate spaces, making room for "public spaces" using "buffer zones" and "green spaces" to mark divisions (Allchin and Matsushita 1969, 11-17; Tange & URTEC 1972, 7-20).

Tange's "Final Outline Design for Lumbini," presented to the ICDL in 1972, focused on a 1x3 mile area surrounding the Aśoka pillar and the Maya Devi Temple complex (Tange & URTEC 1972). The design, following the Allchin and Matsushita report, considered socio-economic; cultural and religious; historical and archeological; and touristic factors, and proposed a division of the site into four design criteria: 1) the Sacred Garden, 2) the Monastic Zone, 3) the New Lumbini Village, and 4) a Buffer Zone (Tange & URTEC 1972, 1). This quadripartite division attempted to convey a balance between preservation of the archeological and historical assets with the socio-economic and touristic factors of opening up Lumbini to public consumption. The zoning of

Lumbini produced a set of interconnected spaces that makes the Buddha's birthplace unique among other Buddhist biographical sites, where foreign Buddhist construction has largely preceded the state's adoption of a formal development plan (Geary 2017).

Due to a general lack of governmental assistance in the early twentieth century, at the time of U Thant's visit in 1967 Lumbini was relatively un-developed. It thus presented U Thant and Kenzo Tange with an abundance of malleable raw material from which to engineer a manufactured Buddhist destination. From a geopolitical standpoint, the "un/under-developed-ness" of the Terai region, and Nepal at large, became a crucial impetus for investing in the Lumbini Project. The barren site demanded intervention. This is evident in the repeated recognition of Lumbini's inaccessibility catalogued in UN surveys (Kobe 1968; United Nations1970) and decried by domestic and foreign Buddhist organizations (Deo Bhatt 1971).

Lumbini's division into the Sacred Garden, the Monastic Zone, and the New Lumbini Village presented a sophisticated and systematic articulation of U Thant's vision. It attempted to harness the potency of the Buddhist biographical genre while maintaining a degree of secularity whereby devout pilgrims and tourists could intermingle in their exploration of the Buddha's life-story and teachings. These manufactured spaces were envisioned to incorporate the "spirit of Buddhism" into a thoroughly inhabitable design with all the amenities and comforts of the modern West (Allchin and Matsushita 1969, 13). Concluding their report, Allchin and Matsushita recognized the challenge of developing Lumbini, given the situation on-the-ground and the Secretary-General's grandiose vision:

> The Lumbini project, as we have tried to suggest above raises a peculiar challenge. The successful design must incorporate in itself something of the spirit of Buddhism,

> including its international and universal aspects. And yet, it must be firmly rooted in the soil of the Nepal Terai, and be interlocked with the local countryside and population, and with its regional development…For all these reasons, the choice of an architect or planner is peculiarly important. Whoever is selected, must be able to form a very strong concept of the intangible aspects of the project, so that the design as a whole will realize them in creative form (Allchin and Matsushita 1969, 31).

Kenzo Tange was granted the opportunity to execute U Thant's vision as the designer of a modernized Lumbini, and he did so, fully embracing the "intangible aspects of the project." In their final design Tange and URTEC listed the "spiritual background" of the site as a basic orientation:

> The Lumbini area should be a place where many people from the world visit and stay together to think about and learn the spiritual inheritance originated in Buddha's teachings and seek the way to make use of it for the peace of the world and human life in future society (1972, 3).

It is obvious that U Thant's vision for the Buddha's birthplace was a driving force of the design outlined by Tange and URTEC. While McDaniel has asserted that the KTMP has failed to provide an adequate Buddhist ecumenical space, I argue that Tange's design mobilized zoning as a technique to allow "traditional" Buddhist practices to flourish despite the overtly secularized production of public space. In the monastic enclave Buddhists could, to a degree, retain the "spiritual" element of their encounter with the Buddha's birthplace. This was adopted into the KTMP. In the Monastic Zone, subsequently divided into East and West areas, Buddhist communities were "invited to construct their own buildings, either to house residents or visiting monks, or to provide places to worship" (Allchin and Matsushita 1969, 31). Allocating space for more traditional material encounters was essential in executing U Thant's vision of ecumenicism, and it eventually became a powerful tool in recruiting foreign Buddhist stakeholders in the project. For U Thant, the design of Lumbini needed to incorporate the various cultural expressions of Buddhism extant across Asia, bringing together

individuals and institutions to promote peace. In U Thant's vision, Lumbini, like Bodh Gaya under the Maha Bodhi Society's protection, could be reclaimed as a "mesocosm" for encountering the teachings of the Buddha and fostering peace. Without the Monastic Zone, Lumbini would be comprised of entirely public spaces regulated, in varying degrees, by the universalizing institutions of the West—simply another "manicured garden" in the colonial museumification of Asia's ancient Buddhist history (Chapter 2).

The need for designated monastic spaces also attests to the nature of the UN's curation of the Sacred Garden zone. As the Sacred Garden area was drawn under the custodianship of archeologists and surveyors, the ability to conduct traditional forms of devotions at the Maya Devi Temple, the nearby bathing pool, and the remains of surrounding *stūpa*s became increasingly difficult. Offering coins, flowers, food stuffs, such as sweets, milk, and rice, as well as lighting butter or oil lamps and incense are common practices at Lumbini and have been a staple of traditional Buddhist encounters at the biographical sites (fig. 8). The UNESCO publication *The Sacred Garden of Lumbini* lists these activities as potentially damaging to the archeological site, alluding to the various tensions between preservation and use (Weise 2013, 160).

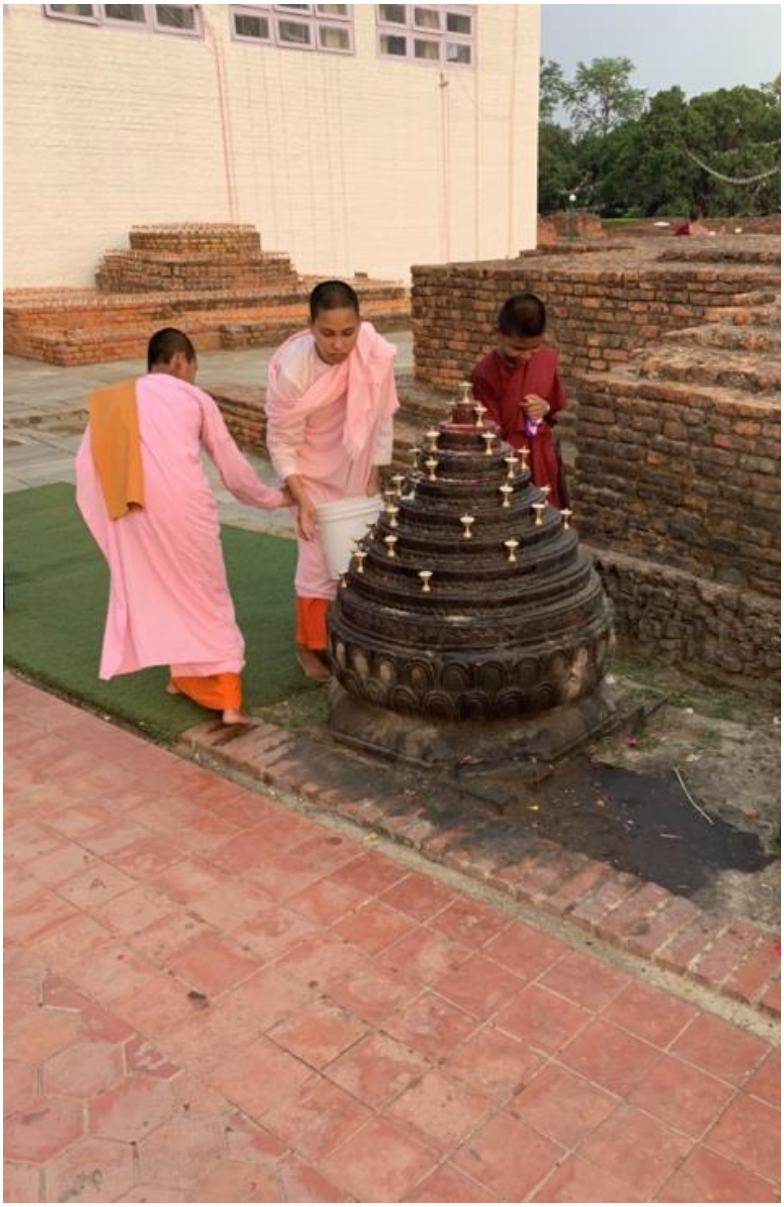

Figure 8. Lighting butter lamps near Maya Devi Temple, June 2019. Photo by author.

As the Allchin and Matsushita Report recommends, “thorough excavation” of the archeological ruins should be undertaken as a “rescue mission” whereby “all significant structural remains should be properly conserved” (Allchin and Matsushita 1969, 8). This process of conservation sought to move traditional practices of veneration to designated areas beyond the buffer zones surrounding the Sacred Garden. In addition to regulating

the practices within the Sacred Garden, UN plans for development also sought to curate the site significantly by removing unwanted vestiges regarded as having "no historical or archeological significance" (Allchin and Matsushita 1969, 9).

The internal tensions of the Lumbini Project are evident in the general assessments of the Allchin and Matsushita report. Recognizing the stark contrast between Lumbini's historical importance and its dilapidated material condition at the time, the report states:

> The importance of the site is difficult to measure. From one point of view, it was the starting place of the earthly career of one of the great creative thinkers of all time, whose proclaimed Dharma has spread throughout the great part of the world. From another, it is a collection of monuments of no great importance, held together by the single fact of the Asokan [sic] column. The garden, whatever its ancient condition may have been, is no more than a neglected field (Allchin and Matsushita 1969, 10).

The Allchin and Matsushita report continues:

> The project for the development of Lumbini offers a remarkable subject, and an extremely difficult challenge…It would seem essential that any work should serve to express the historical and cultural aspects of the site, viewed from the twentieth century, in light of the universality of the Buddha's message, for the comfort of all people, for the welfare of all people…It should also produce as one of its parts the Pilgrim Village which properly planned will become a center for local development of all kinds, thus providing a link between the sacred site and the surrounding population (1969, 11).

By dividing Lumbini into three zones, Kenzo Tange's design attempted to balance the various agendas of those stakeholders invested in seeing the Buddha's birthplace become an international destination. It allocated spaces for the multivalent significance of the site to pilgrims, tourists, and local residents. Zoning is a modern design technique that helped balance these aims. In the Monastic Zone, Tange's plan attempted to incorporate the hopes, dreams, and imaginations of domestic and foreign Buddhist communities with concrete material transformations sorely needed to provide access and reliable facilities such as clean water and consistent electricity. It also allocated resources for preserving the Sacred Garden, which housed the Maya Devi Temple complex and the Aśoka pillar.

These monuments continue to serve as the primary legitimation of the site as the "authentic" birthplace of the Buddha Śākyamuni, despite competing claims to the birthplace in India. The colonial legacies of monumental archeology continue to permeate the UN as arbiter of these heritages. In conceiving of the Monastic Zone and the Sacred Garden as discrete spaces, the KTMP sought to sanction normative practices of encounter at Lumbini. Tange's design for the Sacred Garden, adhering to similar logics implemented by the ASI in India, prioritized preservation over use, and embodied prevailing anxieties about deterioration, destruction, and erasure. The KTMP relegated Buddhist ritual activities to discrete spaces in the Monastic Zone, in effect disentangling them from their material realities in the Sacred Garden. Tange and URTEC's final design plan for the Sacred Garden incorporated sentiments from the Allchin and Matsushita report:

> The essence of the design must be to create an atmosphere of tranquility, universality, and extreme clarity, *consistent with the idea of the birth of Buddhism*. Whatever landscaping or planting are done, or whatever structures are made, they must serve this end, and therefore, must be of the highest quality of design, reflecting as it were the spirit of man, rather than any sectarian or national bias (Allchin and Matsushita 1969, 12, my emphasis).

This universalization of the Sacred Garden area reflects similar sentiments embodied in colonialist approaches to Buddhist monuments under the ASI, and gestures to the prevailing logics of cultural heritage conservation which emerged in the post-WWII era. Not only did Tange's zoning help regulate normative practices ;it also ensured that those features which were of "universal significance to all mankind" were preserved and showcased as such. In this manner, U Thant's attempt to elevate Lumbini to the international stage accentuated the process of historicizing Buddhism which had begun decades earlier under British colonialism (Chapter 2). U Thant's vision also embodied the

ideal that the Buddha's teachings were also universal, gifted to all mankind in service of world peace. At Lumbini, the Buddhist biographical genre was extended in service of a universalized message, a message that began at the earthly birthplace of "a truly remarkable apostle of peace and brotherhood among men" (Pérez de Cuéllar 1986).

Tange's juxtaposition of the Monastic Zone and the Sacred Garden functioned to cement identifiable differences between a universalized historical Buddhism on the one hand and the subjective cultural practices of diverse Buddhist communities on the other. In addition to regulating normative practice within the Sacred Garden, the Tange design delimited what was considered Lumbini's most important elements: the Maya Devi Temple complex and the Aśokan pillar. The KTMP called for the removal of a "stupa shaped earth mound" and "new Buddha temples" from the Sacred Garden, as well as the relocation of a "pillar in honour of king Mahendra" and the existing pilgrim's rest houses (Tange & URTEC 1972, 3). The date of these constructions is unknown, but their removal deemed them inconsequential to the historical value of the Sacred Garden. The redistribution, or outright elimination, of organically constructed elements surrounding the archeological ruins highlights attempts to curate the landscape and regulate permissible encounters. Many of these elements were to be reconstituted in their appropriate zone—either in the Monastic Zone or the New Lumbini Village—so as to adequately accommodate the site's diverse visitors (Tange &URTEC 1972, 3). In addition to demarcating spaces for various types of activity (ritual, worship, education, and tourism) and the preservation of monuments, the KTMP also prioritized the New Lumbini Village (termed the "Pilgrim Village" in earlier proposals) as a mundane space to "provide various services for tourists and pilgrims," leaving the design open-ended "so

it can adapt to future growth in tourism and resident population" (Kenzo Tange and URTEC 1972, 17).

The central component of the New Lumbini Village was the Lumbini Center, which was intended to operate as a central tourist hub "designed as a place where visitors from various countries can mingle freely" (Kenzo Tange and URTEC 1972, 17). The entire zone was intended to operate as a public space that not only serviced visitors to Lumbini–both pilgrims and tourists—but also functioned as a commercial center for the entire district. In early iterations of planning, the New Lumbini Village was conceived of as a "nucleus" which was "likely to become a generator for further development" allowing for "future expansion in all directions" (Allchin and Matsushita 1969, 15). Initial proposals included transportation services, a police post, a small health center, "arts and crafts shops," as well as a "primary school to replace that presently situated in the Sacred Garden" (Allchin and Matsushita 1969, 15). Only the primary school was left out of Tange and URTEC's final design.

The proposed reconfiguration of the material make-up of the entire Lumbini site demonstrates the latent logics of modern development operative within the UN and her subsidiaries. Through the modern technique of zoning, the Tange and URTEC design provided the normative structures for encountering the Buddha's birthplace. It fundamentally altered the landscape of the Sacred Garden and its surrounding area, and it engineered modern public spaces for the consumption of a universalized Buddhism. In relegating Buddhism's diverse cultural instantiations to the Monastic Zone, the KTMP worked to create adequate spaces for all of the site's visitors, but it also effectively

stripped the archeological site of its "Buddhist" character—removing its ritual implements, monks, color, and worshipers.

The tensions that the Allchin and Matsushita Report identified between Lumbini's ancient prominence and its relative disregard in modernity are still felt today. These anxieties are now physically manifest in the juxtaposition of the finely manicured Sacred Garden and the sporadic, and often unkempt, construction projects characteristic of the Monastic Zones. The isolation of the Sacred Garden from the cultural forms of Buddhist practice in the Monastic Zone has led to a sharp sense of private-public dichotomy at the site. This compartmentalization of the once homogenous region surrounding the Maya Devi Temple into discrete modern spaces with singular purposes has given some visitors cause for concern.

Many Buddhist pilgrims that I spoke with lamented that spending time in contemplation and prayer within the Maya Devi Temple is difficult, as guards usher people through quickly. Many also commented on the prohibition of offerings to the "marker stone" and bas relief of Māyādevī giving birth, which are considered the site's most cherished material legacies. Traditionally, donations to images of the Buddha, prayer, and the recitation of *sūtras* are considered meritorious acts that facilitate the devotee's aspirations for a better rebirth. Juliane Schober notes that merit-making is central to Theravāda societies, and that for lay people "the accumulation of merit over time ensures one's rebirth in an abode free of suffering and misfortune; empowers one to obtain a prosperous, peaceful life; and ultimately leads to insight into enlightenment" (2022, 116). While there are several "meditation platforms" dispersed throughout the grove of trees adjacent to the bathing pool and the Maya Devi Temple, these are

generally regarded as accommodations for tourists, not pilgrims seeking to encounter the presence of the Buddha and make merit. The museumification of the Lumbini Sacred Garden has led to the fragmentation of these traditional merit-making and devotional practices which have been largely displaced to individual temples within the Monastic Zone. While some recognize that this displacement is concerning, most are keen to assert that rituals, offerings, and devotions in the modern temple spaces beyond the Sacred Garden are no less efficacious.

Following the implementation of the KTMP in 1978, encounters at the Buddha's birthplace have been structured in such a way as to meet the social needs of all visitors, prioritizing secularity over "traditional" forms of material interaction. In authorizing this hierarchy of value, the UN museumized Lumbini as an open-air historical exhibit. The Master Plan's reconfigurations produced sizeable transformations in the norms and forms of daily life in and around the site. Whether or not these transformations include the economic growth and stability of the larger Terai region is up for debate. What is certain is that the footprint that the KTMP remains the cornerstone of all future development.[32] This was abundantly clear during my visit to Lumbini in 2019 as a I witnessed workers reconstructing the exterior perimeter fencing. The borders of the roughly 1x3 mile blueprint have been retained, effectively limiting all future reimaginations and reconfigurations to the territory within, for it is the central purview of the Nepalese state to actualize the KTMP.

Shifting Custodianship to the State

[32] See Appendix II for a detailed rendering of the KTMP.

U Thant's public crusade to develop Lumbini drastically shifted existent structures of patronage and custodianship established in the preceding decades. These transformations are evident in the frictions that emerged between national governments, the UN and her development subsidiaries, and local, regional, and international Buddhist investors during the last three decades of the twentieth century. Anna Tsing's term "friction" is a productive theoretical lens for characterizing the history of Lumbini as a social project straddled between semiotic ideologies (Tsing 2005). Describing her project as "an ethnography of global connection" Tsing recognizes that "spatially far-flung collaborations and interconnections" are shaped by cultural diversity (2005, ix). Friction, as Tsing describes, "makes global connection powerful and effective" and it also, without even trying, "gets in the way of the smooth operation of global power" (2005, 6). Lumbini today is the product of creative frictions germinated in utopian aspirations enacted in the "sticky materiality of practical encounters" (Tsing 2005, 1). Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, global Buddhist organizations, national governments, and the UN worked at varying speeds, and to varying degrees of efficacy, to manufacture a global destination to foster world peace, sustain the Buddha's dispensation, and promote social and economic development.

As the UN proceeded to guide development initiatives, Nepal's monarchy, under Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev (hereafter King Birendra), gradually reappropriated custodianship of the site as a national heritage monument. Lumbini's care, once invested to the Dharmodaya Sabha by King Tribhuvan (see Chapter 3), shifted back to the State as the monarchy sought to capitalize on the site's prestige and social capital under UN sponsorship. Successfully executing the KTMP would renovate the Buddha's birthplace

into an economic generator in the region, elevating Nepal's GDP and providing a means for social transformation in the rural Terai. As the UN sought to manufacture Lumbini as a global destination for peace (Chapter 4) the Nepalese monarchy quickly moved to include the project in its grander development agendas for the region. As one UN "Aide Memoire" signals:

> The Government of Nepal has given high priority in the development of this site because of the location of Lumbini which lies along the North-South axis of the Gandaki region. Thus, the development of Lumbini will be of great help in the development of this region. The long-term objectives of the project are to promote regional development in Nepal for economic and social benefits of the people who are now residing in the Gandaki zone (United Nations 1973, 4).

A separate survey titled "Gandaki/Lumbini Regional Planning Project" was commissioned by the UNDP to support the Nepalese government in its national development. Due to the "great disparity in resources and income" in Gandaki/Lumbini regions, the Nepalese government sought assistance in "reducing the social and economic imbalance throughout the country through regional development and to make the regions more economically and socially complementary to each other" (UNDP 1974, 1). The ongoing development of the Buddha's birthplace was used to bolster these petitions for foreign aid. An additional survey mission was commissioned by the UN Office of Technical Co-operation (OTC) in 1973 at the request of Nepal's government. The document highlights the monarchy's inclusion of Lumbini in its grander development agendas:

> The present Mission was commissioned in reply to a more recent HMG request for assistance to plan the development of the whole Region extending from the Tibetan to the Indian borders, including the Lumbini Garden located in the southern part of the Region. Considerable progress has already been achieved in planning the Lumbini Shrine and Garden as a pilgrimage and touristic site and funds are now being solicited to begin construction of the buildings and other pilgrimage facilities. However, because of the serious social and economic problems throughout the Region the Government has now given a high priority to the development of the entire Region (UNOTC 1973, 1).

The OTC survey concluded that Lumbini's development would significantly impact economic development in the region:

> If the Lumbini Garden project is implemented within the Fourth Plan period, the Terai will acquire major tourism significance. The project has the scale to create a momentum in the local economy and when properly managed could initiate long lasting upward tourism linkages with Tansen and Pokhara and perhaps even as far north as Marpha and Mustang. The building program of the project is elaborated and the design concept imaginative. Since the design is still evolving, it is too early however, to predict the full impact of Lumbini Garden on the Regional economy. Nevertheless, it may be safe to assume that the project would be a major step in diversifying the socio-economic structure of the Terai (UNOTC 1973, 98).

As the Lumbini Project progressed into the 1980s, the potential for economic and infrastructural development for the entire nation was reiterated:

> The completion of the local airport at Bhairawa, and the construction of a road linking it with the Lumbini Sacred Garden, provide the basic framework within which Lumbini, if properly developed, can produce maximum impact on the regional development of the Gandaki region, and ultimately that of the entire nation (United Nations 1981b, 1).

In addition to the Gandaki/Lumbini project, the monarchy also repeatedly petitioned the UN to name Nepal a "Zone of Peace," beginning at King Birendra's coronation in 1975. Both campaigns for foreign aid envisioned Lumbini as a central tourist destination and regional center for social and economic stability. In advancing these agendas, the Nepalese monarchy consigned Lumbini's significance to its potential value to the economic growth of the nation. The Nepalese government quickly seized custodianship of domestic efforts to develop the Buddha's birthplace and preserve its archeological heritage. The monarchy's attempts to reappropriate Buddhist monuments into its modernizing agendas is consistent with the model set forth by neighboring India (Geary 2017; Ober 2023). While the process of incorporating heritage monuments and other archeological sites into the modern nation-state was pervasive throughout post-colonial South and Southeast Asia (Anderson 1991), Lumbini's symbolic capital was

only harnessed after UN intervention. This is a striking difference that I have sought to trace throughout this study.

The Nepalese government, generally apathetic to the religious aims of the ongoing Lumbini Project, sought to capitalize on increased foreign aid in its national infrastructural development plans geared toward tourism revenues (Liechty 2017). This is evident in the establishment of the Lumbini Development Committee (LDC) in 1976 with Prince Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah (the king's brother) serving as chairman. The Dharmodaya Sabha's "Lumbini Dharmodaya Committee," which had consulted on the initial UN survey missions between 1967 and 1969 (Kobe 1968; Okada 1969) was quickly supplanted by the LDC (later reformulated as LDT in 1985). However, unlike King Tribhuvan's patronage of the Dharmodaya Sabha decades earlier, the newly formed LDC was not invested in the continuation of Lumbini's spiritual potency. Rather, the LDC was tasked with the preservation of the historical heritage of the site and its development into a prosperous tourist destination for the economic and geo-political benefit of the monarchy. Members of the Dharmodaya Sabha were included on the committee, but this was largely ceremonial.

An internal financial report filed in 1981 with His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG/Nepal) refers to the LDC as "the present work-oriented committee" and suggests that in the years prior (between 1970 and 1976) "nothing could be achieved" due to a lack of accessible funds and clear direction for advancing the project (Lumbini Development Committee 1981, 1). The document also touts the successes of the LDC between 1976 and 1981, reporting that "road construction, airport extension, electrification, drinking water, and artisan well" were entirely successful, utilizing all

allocated HMG/Nepal funds (Lumbini Development Committee 1981, 2). These findings are confirmed in the LDC's 1979 publication *Lumbini Kapilavastu* which includes a detailed expenditure of 4.5 million USD by HMG/Nepal (Lumbini Development Committee 1979, iii).

The transfer of Lumbini's custodianship—from the independent Dharmodaya Sabha to the Nepal monarchy—signaled a shift in ideological emphasis, aligning future imaginations for the site more closely with the universalist messages of the UN. King Birendra's financial and political sponsorship moved to subsume the site into a domestic bureaucracy that expected to capitalize on Lumbini as a valuable economic resource, with the LDC as executing agency. In this reconfigured heritage network, Buddhist monks such as Aniruddha Mahathera were supplanted with governmental representatives and diplomats as the principal ambassadors for the joint Lumbini Project between the UN and HMG/Nepal. This bureaucratic reshuffling effectively consigned development efforts to two overlapping, but at times conflicting, registers. Fundraising and awareness campaigns were formed in two interrelated arenas which I, for convenience, identify as the "religious-ethnic" and the "secular-governmental." The shared reference point for both movements has been, and remains, the KTMP.

In the first domain, local Buddhist communities and global organizations such as the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) actively solicited financial and moral investment from their memberships. These donations were regularly earmarked for the construction of individual temples, monasteries, and stupas within the Monastic Zone. Sometimes donations from these investors were allocated to fund the beautification of the Sacred Garden Zone or the construction of monuments in the public spaces linking the

various design elements. In the second domain, the "secular-governmental," the UN and her development subsidiaries, along with HMG/Nepal, worked to collect funds in support of infrastructure developments such as roads, clean water, adequate electricity, and tourist amenities in the New Lumbini Village, buffer zones, and other public spaces. These petitions operated at the national governmental level as diplomats connected to the ICDL petitioned their foreign ministers to form independent national committees. The governments of Japan, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, and the United States were identified as the most fruitful partners for securing foreign aid (United Nations 1981c). Campaigns in both arenas sought to fund the continued excavation and preservation of the archeological remains in the Sacred Garden.

Efforts to secure funds from "Buddhist" nations were entrusted to newly established national committees comprised of high-level government officials, and, ideally, members of prominent Buddhist sects—although these Buddhist leaders rarely participated in top-level decision-making. Under the aegis of the UN and her bureaucratic structure, Buddhist stakeholders in the Lumbini Project were relied upon only as drivers of local fundraising campaigns to meet national pledges. The Dharmodaya Sabha, serving as the regional centre for the WFB in Nepal, was relegated to the same status as foreign Buddhist organizations, despite their long-standing custodial role at the site. Although the Dharmodaya Sabha's Raj Kiya Lumbini Vihāra remained the singular Buddhist edifice well into the 1980's, it was envisioned to be just one of many within the KTMP's design—a design that sought to relegate Buddhist devotion to the East and West Monastic zones. By 1979 Thailand, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, and the Republic of Korea had formed national committees entrusted with securing governmental sponsorship and

soliciting and managing donations from citizens (United Nations 1981a), and by the mid-1980s India, Bhutan, and the United States had established national-level fundraising organizations of their own tasked with similar goals (Basu 1981; 1984).

To increase the visibility of the UN-funded project and raise capital for the completion of the KTMP, a resolution passed at the twelfth general conference of the WFB, declaring 1979 the "Lumbini Year." The LDC—with King Birendra as patron—often couched state investment in the language of global Buddhist zeal for the biographical sites despite its (less than subtle) prioritization of infrastructural contributions. This double-speak is characteristic of the Nepalese government's interest in the project following U Thant's tenure. This position is evident in the LDC's "Lumbini Year-1979" publication *Lumbini Kapilavastu*, which opens with a royal message from the King:

> I am happy to hear that the twelfth World Fellowship of Buddhists conference held in Tokyo sometime ago passed a resolution to observe the year 1979 A.D. as the Lumbini Year. While I am hopeful that this resolution will help bring about an increased tempo in materializing the master plan for the development of Lumbini, it will also help, I believe in reminding us all of the gospels of Gautama, the prince of peace.
>
> As a part of Nepal's contribution to these ends, we will intensify our efforts to complete, if possible within this year, a metalled road linking Siddhartha Highway with Lumbini. In addition, we will also extend airport facilities, provide drinking water, electricity and other infrastructural components as Nepal's share to the development of Lumbini.
>
> While it is natural for us to expect our countrymen to come forward with whatever assistance they may lend within their means and hire, institutions and people interested in developing the birth-place of the Buddha will be more than welcome to cooperate to fulfil the dream of developing Lumbini (Lumbini Development Committee [LDC] 1979, i).

Much of the 1979 *Lumbini Kapilavastu* publication is directed at legitimating the Nepalese locations of the Buddha's childhood landscape. The booklet contains three articles disputing "shallow and erroneous" claims by Indian archeologists that locate Kapilavastu at the reliquary site of Piprahawa, instead favoring Tilaurakot in Nepal as the

most probably location (Perera 1979, 20). The publication of the "Lumbini Year- 1979" pamphlet illustrates the efforts of the Nepalese monarchy to assert custodianship over Lumbini and the surrounding archeological ruins as objects of national heritage. The assertion of Buddhist heritage as synonymous with Nepalese national heritage is evident in the polemical nature of the articles concerning Buddhism's storied history in Nepal. These claims are bolstered by visual elements, including a photograph of the nativity scene at Lumbini, a topographic survey of Tilaurakot, and a sedimentary diagram illustrating the "sequence of culture" in "Ancient Kapilavastu." The document also attests to the ambitions of the monarchy to capitalize on the Terai's archeological remnants as tourist destinations. It concludes with a "route map" illustrating the key sites and their accessibility from Kathmandu (fig. 9) as well as the tripartite design of the KTMP for Lumbini.

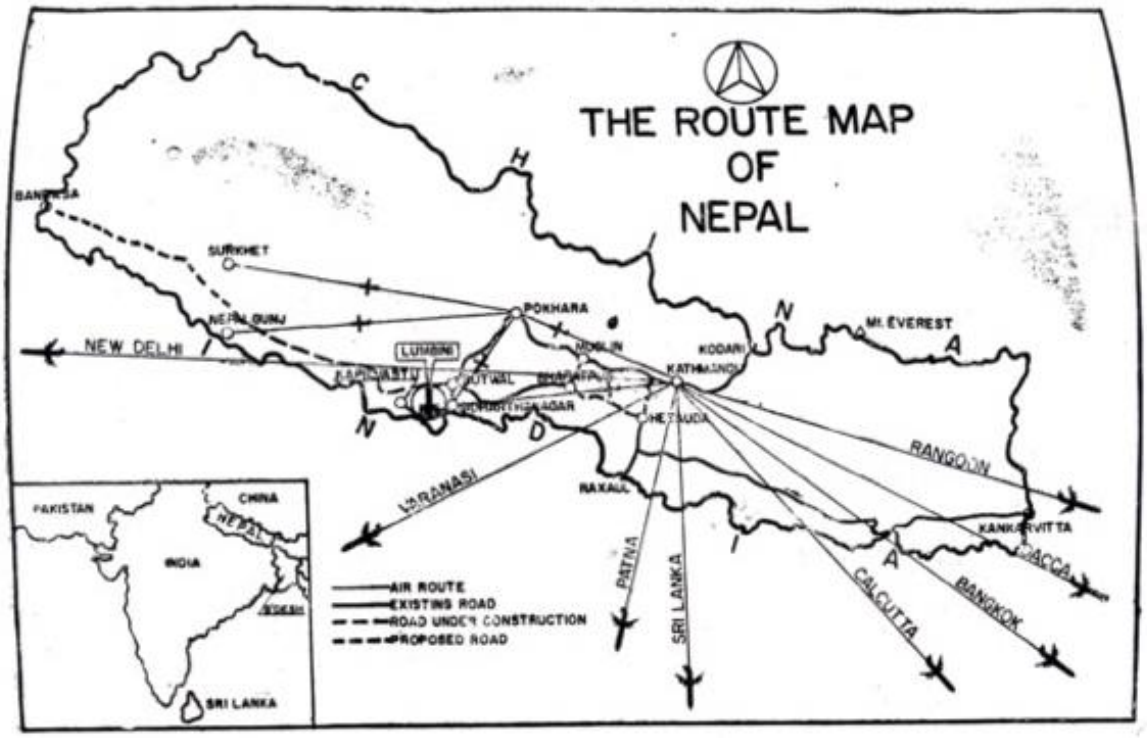

Figure 9. "Route Map of Nepal" from Lumbini Development Committee publication Lumbini Kapilavastu, 1979, plate no. vii.

The 1980 pamphlet *Lumbini Nepal*, published by Nepal's Department of Tourism, also includes the same "route map," as well as two others: one outlining the greater "Lumbini Zone" development region (previously referenced as the Gandaki zone), and another described as an "Asian Highway Map" depicting vital linkages to Southeast Asia (fig. 10 and fig. 11). The inclusion of these visual elements attests to the monarchy's interest in developing Lumbini and capitalizing on transnational networks of tourism and pilgrimage. The *Lumbini Kapilavastu* publication was created in association with the World Tourism Conference held in Manila, Philippines in 1980. The tourism pamphlet touts HMG/Nepal as "anxious to share its heritage" with the world and signals the benefits of the KTMP's tripartite zoning (HMG/Nepal 1980, 11). The document

describes the Sacred Garden as contributing to "the promotion of international cultural exchange and international friendship, goodwill and understanding" (HMG/Nepal 1980, 15-16). In the same section, the pamphlet underscores the universality of Lumbini for the Nepalese state and all of humanity:

> The Lumbini Project, as a whole, unlike what was conceived of at the inception as a purely religious project, is now an integral part of the multipurpose development of the National Plan of Nepal in general and the development of Lumbini in particular, As Lord Buddha belongs to the entire humanity, the accessibility of his birthplace shall, *inter alia*, provide and attract perennial flow of visitors with aesthetic and general interests (HMG/Nepal 1980, 16).

From these materials it is evident that the Nepalese Department of Tourism and the LDC sought to reinforce proprietorship of the rural Terai site in the advancement of grander political and economic aims in the years following the adoption of the KTMP. The religious or "spiritual" aspects of the site were relegated to their proper spaces in the Monastic Zones, and the Sacred Garden—with its archeological monuments—came to function as the principal mediator of both Buddhist and Nepalese civilizational heritage.

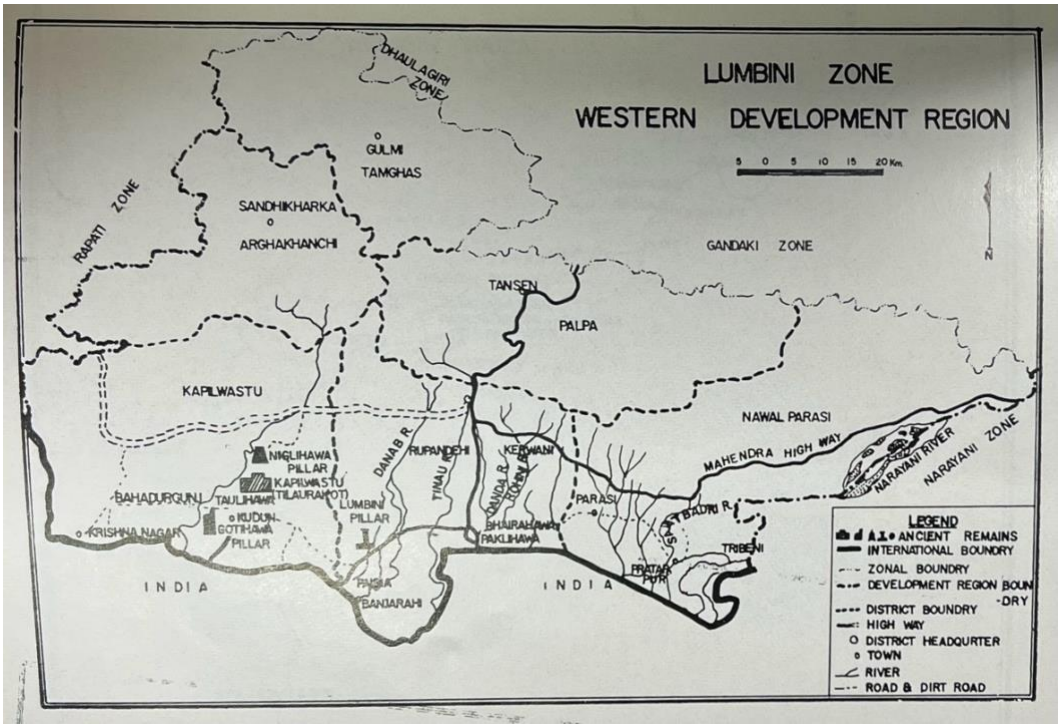

Figure 10. "Lumbini Zone Western Development Region" from Nepal's Department of Tourism publication Lumbini Nepal, 1980, pg. 23.

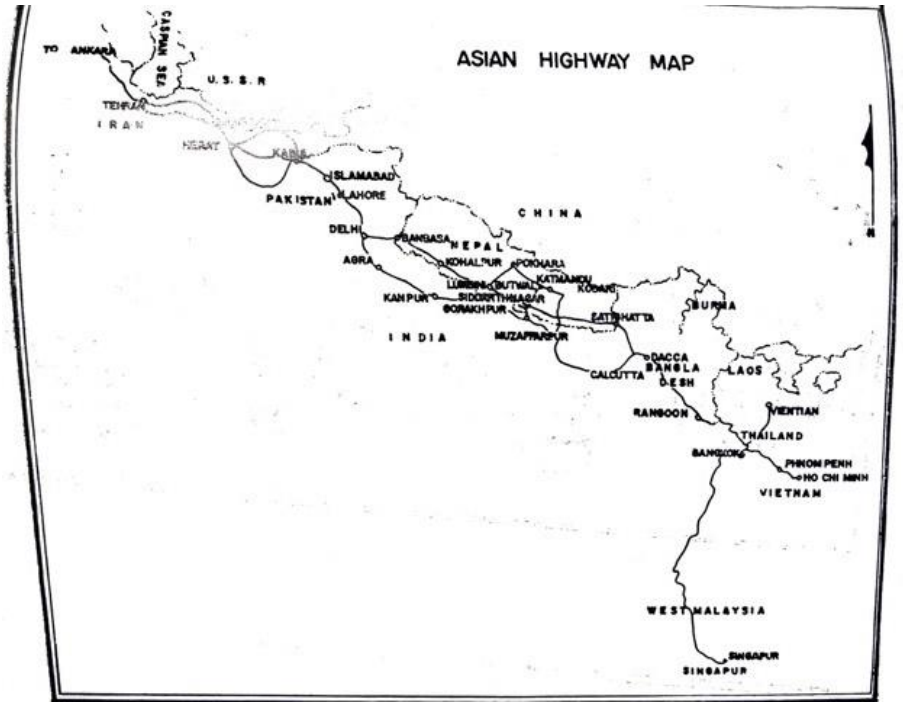

Figure 11."Asian Highway Map" from Nepal's Department of Tourism publication Lumbini Nepal, 1980, pg. 24.

For some Buddhists in Nepal, however, this did not represent a sizable change in attitude. Rather, the government's assistance was heralded as a direct continuation of King Tribhuvan's efforts following the 1950 revolution:

> This is an exciting time in the history of Nepal. We have witnessed the change from an autocratic and feudal system of administration to a representative government. In religious matters too, which form a very integral part of our life, we have seen how Lord Buddha had been forgotten in the land of his own birth but also witnessed how the noble King, His Late Majesty Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah Dev, restored the ancient tradition of the Kings of Nepal to give patronage to the cause of Buddhism…the Buddha's birthday has become a national holiday. Lumbini has received Royal patronage and is being developed with international cooperation (Lall 1986, 9).

Here Kesar Lall, writing for the Dharmodaya Sabha, links King Birendra's patronage of the development initiatives at Lumbini to the emergence of representative government and the resurgence of Buddhist cultural consciousness in Nepal. Lall's sentiments are in concert with those expressed during the 15th General Conference of the WFB held in Kathmandu in 1986, reprising the theme "Lumbini-A Symbol of World Peace," as part of the organization's "International Year of Peace" (Lall 1986, 9; Dharmodaya Sabha 1986). These remarks signal that the Lumbini Project existed within a nexus of multiple patronage relationships transcending traditional negotiations of power between the Nepalese state and its Buddhist constituents. The Dharmodaya Sabha publication *The Buddhist Heritage of Nepal*, drafted as a souvenir for the 15th General Conference of the WFB, includes a photo of King Birendra and begins with a short message from the monarch:

> We are happy that the World Federation of Buddhists has chosen Nepal as the venue for the Fifteenth World Buddhist Conference. It is only befitting that the Conference is being held in Nepal in the land where the Buddha was born and a country which wishes itself to be a Zone of Peace. While Lumbini at the time of the birth of Prince Siddhartha in 623 B.C. was a garden lying in the border principality of the Shakyas and Koliyas, it is now a centre of pilgrimage for people from various parts of the world. Efforts are underway on a national and international scale to restore and preserve the rich cultural and religious heritage of Lumbini.

> It is my hope that the Conference will enlighten the international community of the teachings of Lord Buddha for peace and wellbeing of mankind throughout the world (Dharmodaya Sabha 1986, v).

Capitalizing on Buddhist zeal for the biographical genre and the UN's sponsorship of Lumbini's development, the Nepalese monarchy recycled the rhetoric of peace to pacify anxieties about the incomplete KTMP, which, by the time of the 1986 WFB gathering in Nepal, was significantly behind schedule.

An account of the 15th General Conference by Jens-Uwe Hartmann sheds light on the complicated relationship between the Nepalese monarchy and its Buddhist heritage:

> [The conference] was placed under the guiding principle of world peace, and 1986, as the international year of peace, certainly contributed to this choice. The WFB had made "Lumbini, a Symbol of World Peace" its motto…[it] dedicated a morning to the topic, during which lectures related to the respective motto were held as part of a symposium. The motto of the WFB showed the religious symbolic value that Lumbini, located in southwestern Nepal, has as the birthplace of the Buddha for Buddhists all over the world, but at the same time took into account a political wish of Nepal, namely the proposal to make Nepal a "Zone of Peace", which took place on the occasion of the coronation of the current king on February 25th, 1975 and for whose international support Nepal is constantly campaigning (1987, 392-393).

Hartmann's report also signals the symbolic value of the conference for Buddhist communities in Nepal who represented a significant religious minority:

> The meetings were embedded in an extensive supporting program of tourist and social events, which took up a good half of the time available. This included a number of receptions, including one attended by the royal couple, a dinner with the prime minister, an extended tour of the city of Patan with visits to various Buddhist sights, a day trip to Lumbini by plane and much more. This varied framework allowed the actual conference to recede into the background, and one could not entirely resist the impression that the organizers wanted at least as much to create a memorable presentation of the country's Buddhist sites and, above all, the various forms of the Buddhist religion Nepali Buddhism was located. This is not incomprehensible; since the Buddhists of the Kathmandu valley, whose organizations had taken on the organization of the conference, live as a minority in an environment determined by Hinduism, the organization of an international conference gains additional importance as an opportunity for self-affirmation not only externally, but also in one's own country (1987, 393-395).

The 1986 conference of the WFB signals a moment in which creative frictions within the global connections constituting the Lumbini Project became apparent. The monarchy's support for the Lumbini Project constituted a tacit

recognition of its Buddhist subjects and reiterated the historical import of Nepal as the true birthplace of Lord Buddha. The monarchy's custodianship of Lumbini signaled to the global Buddhist community a commitment to preserving the Buddhist heritages within its territorial bounds, all the while profiting off of their global prestige.

Foreign Investment, the Monastic Zone, and Tourism

During the "preparatory phase" of the Lumbini Project ,the UN secretariat, in conjunction with the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development (DTCD), worked collaboratively with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to conduct feasibility studies and commission the KTMP (Joseph 1980, 1; United Nations 1981a). For nearly a decade the UNDP assisted in establishing the Lumbini Project as an ongoing development intervention in Nepal, contributing $820,000 in technical assistance (Joseph 1980, 1). In a brief statement to the ICDL in September 1980, UNDP regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, Andrew Joseph, praised Lumbini as a "sacred and prestigious location which is of great historical and heritage value," advocating hope that "the International Community will recognize the great human value of this undertaking and come forward willingly to provide funds to take this admirable project through to a successful conclusion" (Joseph 1980, 1-2).

Despite Joseph's insistence that the UNDP would remain a partner in the ongoing Lumbini project, within a year the UNDP sought to relieve itself of the managerial burden, relinquishing further oversight to the DTCD and R.K. Basu, serving as the UN Coordinator for the Development of Lumbini (United Nations 1981a, 1). In a "Note for

the Secretary-General," dated April 1981, it was made clear that the "UNDP wants no further role in Lumbini," despite the Nepalese Government's eagerness "to retain the project under UN-sponsorship" (United Nations 1981a, 1). The same document outlines a tension at the heart of the Lumbini project stating, "while this is obviously a religious project, there are considerable tourism and employment opportunities which would be of substantial benefit to Nepal" (United Nations 1981a, 1).

Basu's 1981 "Mission Report" outlines efforts to gain support for the Lumbini Project from UNESCO as well as governmental and private agencies in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan, Nepal, and China. Although Lumbini was not inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list until 1997, early support for the project under U Thant's tenure was reiterated in Basu's meetings with the agency. Basu writes,

> Assurance was given by UNESCO that as the birth place of Lord Buddha there would be no difficulty in including Lumbini in the list of UNESCO cultural heritage…[UNESCO] fully support the Lumbini Project and [are] willing to co-operate in any way possible within the limits of their financial resources and mandate given to them for this type of assistance (Basu 1981, 1-2).

By the mid-1980s it was becoming increasingly apparent that, despite sizable pledges from Thailand, Japan, Sri Lanka, and the U.S. the funds necessary to complete the KTMP were not materializing as expected. Basu's 1984 "Mission Report" details the difficulty of garnering financial support for the Lumbini project. In Japan, Basu's request for $2 million in assistance toward the implementation of the KTMP was met with reluctance as the Japanese Government insisted on a formal request from the Government of Nepal. Basu notes that, "this is a change of position on the part of the Japanese Government," signaling the wavering support from a primary financial donor (1984, 2). Basu goes on to relay an additional concern; "a major factor in the consideration of

Japanese contribution was to assure Japanese donors that foreign funds would be properly accounted for, and the Nepalese Administrative structure would be placed on sound footing" (1984, 3). This anxiety about proper use of foreign funds is one that has plagued the Lumbini project since its inception. While the UN was a prestigious patron in Lumbini's development, the management of financial contributions and the on-the-ground implementation of the KTMP were left to the discretion of the Nepalese national organization, the Lumbini Development Committee.

In Thailand, Basu was confronted with the grave reality that "the National Committee was not functioning, and no funds had yet been pledged by the Government of Thailand" (1984, 4). In the initial stages of garnering support for Lumbini's development, Thailand was considered a prominent partner, as Basu and others had secured significant financial pledges a decade earlier from Thai Buddhist leaders and government officials alike. Basu's report details that a provision of $50,000 was made available by the Thai Government, a sum Basu deemed "grossly inadequate" (1984, 5).

During his visit to Nepal, Basu recounts his frustration with the lack of "follow up action," and decries several "last minute" budgetary cuts that stalled "expeditious implementation of the Project" (1984, 6). Basu notes that these delays are "causing frustration to the UN team as well as other donors," but that the "Government's keen interest in early implementation of the Project is without doubt," acquiescing that "there is no other alternative but to be patient and prod relentlessly for rapid progress" (1984, 8). These sentiments reflect the realities of funding a project on the global scale of Lumbini. While U Thant's efforts to establish the birthplace of the Buddha as an international destination and world peace center were well received, materializing these aspirations

was much more difficult. It is clear that the project encountered numerous setbacks, largely due to the inadequacies of the Nepalese government to handle the day-to-day responsibilities of implementing the KTMP in a timely manner. In his "Progress Report of Lumbini Development" presented in 1980 on behalf of His Majesty's Government of Nepal, LDC Chairman Loke Darshan Bajracharya assured the UN assembly that "with the co-operation and goodwill of all, the smooth implementation of the Master Plan can be carried and completed by 1985" (Bajracharya 1980, 5). This ambitious timeline was never actualized. Four decades later the KTMP remains incomplete, and despite the prestigious patronage of the United Nations and UNESCO, the Buddha's birthplace is underrealized in the eyes of many Buddhists.

In a 1986 account of his audience with His Royal Highness Prince Gyanendra, Chairman of the newly formed Lumbini Development Trust (LDT), Basu laments that the Nepalese Government had not acted regarding his efforts in promoting cooperation with the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand (1986a, 1). He also stressed the urgency of several pending matters, including the "allocation of land for Viharas to 11 applicants" and "priorities for the construction plan" (1986a, 1-2). Basu decries Prince Gyanendra's reluctance to participate in the biennial meeting of the International Committee for the Development of Lumbini (ICDL) in Tokyo, scheduled for June of 1986. This ultimately led to the meeting's cancelation, further sparking anxiety about the administration in Nepal. Basu's remarks signal the ongoing struggle to gain satisfactory investment from the Nepalese monarchy, which certainly derailed the Lumbini Project during this period. In another "Note for the File" dated May 21, 1986, Basu reports that, despite the formation of the LDT in 1985, to date no action had been

taken to coordinate fundraising efforts with the ICDL working group—representatives from Bangladesh, India, Singapore, and Sri Lanka (1986b, 1).

In a letter to S.S. Kaimal, UNDP Technical Advisor in Nepal, dated August 8, 1986, Basu expresses his concerns regarding "rumors" of the Lumbini Development Trust's intentions to move forward without the ICDL and the United Nations. Basu writes:

> If that should happen, (which I certainly hope will not be the case), believe me this would be so detrimental to the fund raising that it is hard to imagine that the construction of Lumbini will be realized as planned. The position of all of us is that it will be virtually impossible for any other source than the International Committee to mobilize support for Lumbini and raise funds from Governments, institutions or individuals without the help of the United Nations and the International Committee. This message should be sent across to all who are concerned with the Lumbini Project (1986c, 1).

Whether or not these "rumors" were substantiated, the newly formed LDT, under the direction of Prince Gyanendra, sought to plot an alternate trajectory for the completion of the KTMP, distancing themselves from the UN's patronage. Basu's anxiety over this assertion is palpable in his communications with the ICDL and the UN secretariat. In another correspondence to the Under-Secretary-General, Basu details "conflicting opinions" that "the Nepalese Government wishes to change the international project financed by the UNDP to national execution, rather than have the DTCD execute the project" (1986d, 1). Calling this shift "extremely disturbing news," Basu recounts that the Sri Lankan Ambassador was adamant that the ICDL's role "must never be subordinated, regardless of what happens" (1986d, 1). Advocating for the continued oversight of the ICDL and the execution of the KTMP through the DTCD, Basu contends:

> The capability of the Nepalese to manage the UNDP project is questionable…It is considered the view of the Organization that without the support of the United Nations it would be extremely difficult for the Nepalese Government to go and raise money on their

> own initiative from the world community. The reason for this is that the question of credibility and accountability have become a paramount issue for the potential donors (1986d, 1-2).

The DTCD's terminal report for the five-year period (January 1, 1983-December 31, 1987) outlines a general inability on the part of the LDC, and its later formulation as the LDT, to secure subcontracts needed to carryout additional design necessities and to oversee construction initiatives for the first phase of implementing the KTMP (DTCD 1987). The document attests that "the work contemplated originally in the Project has not been completed" and that the "existence of many management related issues" demands further oversight and organization "if the construction work is to proceed smoothly" (DTCD 1987, 11). These structural issues demonstrate that the LDT was ill-equipped to execute the KTMP both in its capacity to raise funds and oversee construction efforts. These anxieties echo the concerns shared by the first UN surveyors a decade and a half prior. Developing a world peace center in Nepal's Terai is a lofty ambition, one that, despite sizeable national, regional, and international investment, remains under materialized. The technocratic interventions of the UN and her subsidiaries were significantly derailed by the uninspiring support from the state's Hindu monarchy, which continuously failed to meet construction deadlines. Coupled with the waning support from prominent donor bases in Japan and Thailand, the LDT's efforts were reduced to a slow crawl well through the early 1990s. Here we can see the tensions at play between the overarching public patronage of the United Nations and the on-the-ground custodianship of the LDT. Ideally the two would work in tandem to manage and distribute financial resources to execute the KTMP, but this symbiotic relationship was never actualized.

The World Fellowship of Buddhists 1972-1992

In the decades following U Thant's tenure as head of the UN, global Buddhist investment was drafted into the development process in the form of various fundraising campaigns intended to 1) contribute to the general conservation and "beautification" of the Sacred Garden (Basu 1981), 2) fuel infrastructural projects in the New Lumbini Village and buffer zones (UNDP 1974; HMG/Nepal 1980; Basu 1981), and 3) support the construction of individual monasteries and temples in the Monastic Zone (HMG/Nepal 1980; Basu 1981; WFB 1976; 1978a; 1978b; 1978c). These divergent agendas often led to complications among the various local, regional, national, and international stakeholders. One arena in which the development of the Buddha's birthplace remained a recurrent talking point was the biennial general conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. This global Buddhist organization continued to vocalize support for the UN-sponsored Lumbini project throughout the 1980s and 1990s. By the close of the century, however, anxieties about the proper use of funds and a desire for Buddhist oversight contributed to the WFB's waning sponsorship of the (largely ineffective) LDT.

The World Fellowship of Buddhists was formed in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1950 by representatives from twenty-seven countries (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 998). Although the organization includes membership from most Buddhist traditions, with 130 regional centers in over thirty countries, Theravāda Buddhists have played a central role in its formation and continuation into the present (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 998). The organization holds as its core commitments the "advancement of the teachings of the Buddha; the promotion of unity, solidarity, and brotherhood among Buddhists; and the

organization of social, cultural, and other humanitarian services, including working to ensure peace and amongst men and happiness for all beings" (WFB 1966, 2).

Well into the 1990's the WFB sought to facilitate the flow of investment into the Lumbini Project, advocating that the world's Buddhists contribute to the successful completion of the development initiatives. This is congruent with early efforts to support the Dharmodaya Sabha custodianship of Lumbini at the 3rd General Conference held in Rangoon, Myanmar (Burma) in 1954 (see Chapter 3). Between 1972 and 1992 Lumbini was a consistent theme reprised in WFB regional and general conferences. However, the tensions that plagued the successful implementation of the KTMP in the "secular-governmental" arena became equally apparent in the Buddhist organization's efforts to raise funds and see to their successful use. For a decade and a half, the WFB publicly supported the development initiatives at Lumbini championed by the Nepalese government until the relationship between the organization and the LDT soured following the 15th General Conference in Kathmandu in 1986.

Initially, the WFB operated as a conduit linking the joint United Nations-HMG/Nepal-sponsored Lumbini Project to a network of Buddhist communities ready to raise funds for the revitalization of the Buddha's birthplace. During U Thant's tenure several staffers in the UN secretariat, including Cham C. Kanchanagom, convened with the executives of the WFB at its Bangkok headquarters to raise awareness about the impending Lumbini Project. Calls to continue partnership with the UN and its development initiatives at the Buddha's birthplace were echoed in successive conferences through 1992. Formal resolutions were passed by the WFB membership in support of the Lumbini Project. Through a survey of these resolutions, we can garner that Lumbini's

development was a priority for the global Buddhist community and a rallying cry for spreading the Buddha's *Dharma*. These resolutions were frequently vocalized through the idioms of heritage and peace. In championing Lumbini within its membership, the WFB sought to articulate a universalized, ecumenical, and modern Buddhism. This project built upon early efforts of the Maha Bodhi Society to reclaim the Buddhist Holy Land, maintaining foreign investment from Buddhist majority countries in Southeast and East Asia, and contributing to a global Buddhist consciousness amid the shifting geo-political uncertainty of the twentieth century.

At the 10th General Conference of the WFB held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1972, the organization passed Resolution 153/7/GC10 recognizing the efforts of Anagarika Dharmapala and the Maha Bodhi society, Ven. Kripasaran (founder of the Bengal Buddhist Association), B.R. Ambedkar, and Jawaharlal Nehru to restore "the leading places of religious interest" to the world's Buddhists (WFB 1972, 6-7). The resolution makes an explicit connection between the efforts of these leaders and the Government of Nepal's proposed plan to restore Lumbini in conjunction with the UN and UNESCO. The resolution states:

> This Tenth General Conference of the WFB, hereby calls upon all the Buddhists of the world to extend their fullest co-operation to the UN Committee in charge of the Lumbini project and resolves that all necessary steps be taken by the WFB to restore similar places of Buddhist interest (WFB 1972, 7).

At the 11th General Conference, held in Bangkok, Thailand in 1976, the WFB passed Resolution 168/11/GC11 "Declaring Nepal a Peace Zone," which echoed the Dharmodaya Sabha's request in support of King Birendra of Nepal's declaration of Nepal, "the birthland of Lord Buddha," as a Zone of Peace (WFB 1976, 7). This declaration came in conjunction with Resolution 180/23/GC11, which reiterates the

Dharmodaya Sabha's request for WFB support in Lumbini's development. The petition requests cooperation with Nepal's LDC so that "Lumbini might be developed into *the* foremost international centre of Buddhist pilgrimage" (WFB 1976, 12; my emphasis).

Again, at the 12th General Conference in 1978 the WFB listed the "restoration" of Lumbini as one of its four declarations: "In light of the preamble and in view of the contemporary global situation we hereby solemnly declare that…we will assist in the complete restoration of Lumbini, the birthplace of Sakyamuni Buddha" (WFB 1978a, 1). During the proceedings of the conference, held in Tokyo, the WFB passed resolution 201/9/GC12 declaring 1979 the "Lumbini Year" advocating the organization's commitment to "cooperate with and provide the Lumbini Development project with funds, publicity and other means" (WFB 1978b, 3). The Resolution states:

> Whereas the UN has been planning to restore the pristine glory of LUMBINI, the sacred Birth-Place of Lord Sakya Muni Buddha, as part of its efforts to maintain world peace and world brotherhood; We hereby resolve to declare the year 1979 as the Lumbini Year, and that all Buddhists in all countries should observe it with solemnity, respect and dignity, and that we plan and implement various programmes and functions, including the publication of books and periodicals, the organization of seminars and conferences, the promotion of pilgrimages to Lumbini, and to cooperate with and provide for the Lumbini Development Project, now in operation, with funds, publicity and cooperation (WFB 1978c, 8).

This formal resolution was reiterated in successive years as the WFB sought to bring attention to the UN Lumbini Project and raise funds for the completion of the KTMP. Resolution 214/1/GC14, passed at the 14th General Conference of the WFB in 1984, enhanced previous resolutions, noting "the need to preserve [Lumbini] for now and for posterity, a historic place of the utmost importance to all Buddhists and to others interested in Buddhism's peaceful way of life" (WFB 1984a, 1). Resolution 214/1/GC14, titled "The Lumbini Project," recognizes, and thanks, the Nepal monarchy's interest in Lumbini's development, but also signals anxieties about the proper execution of the

project; petitioning the UN Secretary-General to request a new oversight board executed through the United Nations Economic and Social commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) in Bangkok. The request notes that a new "International Advisory Committee" would "assist the Project Management in policy, implementation and resource mobilization functions" and should ideally consist of "members who are experts and who are deeply interested in this project to be selected on the basis of equitable geographical distribution, bearing in mind that the great majority of Buddhists reside in the ESCAP region" (WFB 1984a, 1-2). This attempt to assert a degree of oversight in the Lumbini Project signals growing anxieties among various Buddhist communities about the proper implementation of the KTMP. There was no follow up on this request to form a new advisory committee in the ESCAP. Efforts were, however, successful in establishing national-level committees for fundraising and publicity purposes (WFB 1984b, 5).

The Lumbini Project resolution was affirmed in conjunction with Resolution 223/10/GC14, the "Protection and Preservation of Objects of Buddhist Veneration," which speaks to the growing awareness and attention to "Buddhist heritage" (WFB 1984a, 5-6). Resolution 223/10/GC14 asserts the need to petition governments to intervene on behalf of Buddhist monuments, temples, monasteries, and works of art in recognition that "most of them are now in a state of disrepair and neglect due to lack of adequate funds of protective action" (WFB 1984a, 5). The WFB resolved:

> To undertake immediately the preparation of a list of such monuments scattered in each country after an adequate survey to determine their traditional boundaries, and, on the findings, the national authorities of the countries concerned whether Buddhists or non-Buddhists, to undertake adequate measures for the preservation and restoration and for their protection from vandalism and to seek assistance for this purpose from such world bodies as UNESCO (WFB 1984a, 6).

Here the connection between the WFB and UNESCO is made explicit, signaling the organization's close collaboration with the international agency's support for education and the preservation of cultural heritages throughout Asia. Anxieties about the degradation of Buddhist heritage are evident in the WFB's petitions to national governments and larger international agencies to safeguard valued material remnants. Lumbini's restoration and preservation were certainly contiguous with this agenda.

At the 15th General Conference of the WFB held in Kathmandu in 1986, the WFB asserted in its five key declarations that the organization was committed to "interreact with the Lumbini Trust to expedite the development of Lumbini as a permanent symbol of World Peace and as a foremost spiritual centre for World Buddhism" (WFB 186a, 1). The WFB resolved to formulate a formal committee within its membership "with the principal purpose of mobilizing financial and material resources" in support of the Lumbini Project (WFB 1986b, 1). The new committee was to be designated as the "WFB's Global Resource Committee for Buddha's Birthplace (WFB-GRCBB)" (WFB 1986b, 1). The new committee was envisioned to be an internal body aimed at facilitating the flow of donations from Buddhist communities to the newly formed Lumbini Development Trust for execution of the KTMP. Resolution 235/1/GC15 tasked the WFB-GRCBB with "closely interacting with the Lumbini Development Trust in fund-raising and other activities" (WFB 1986b, 2). It was resolved that this new internal committee would consist of a membership "widely representative of the various Buddhist countries and denominations" (WFB 1986b, 1). The WFB internal committee was chaired by WFB President Sanya Dharmasakti, Sunao Miyabara, and Richard Paw U (1986c, 3).

At the 15th General Conference, President Sanya presented the Chairman of the Lumbini Development Trust (Prince Gyanendra) a check for 160,000 USD as a contribution toward the "building of Friendship Bridge leading from the monastic area to the Sacred Garden" (1986c, 4). Consultations between the WFB Global Resource Committee and the Lumbini Development Trust continued through 1990 "without the achievement of a joint machinery for actual consultation of projects in the Monastic Zone and the Sacred Garden" (WFB 1986c, 4). As a result of these failed efforts to effectively collaborate with the LDT, the WFB eventually resolved to take a "larger perspective" of development for the "four major sites" that also included "Bodh Gayā, Sarnath and Kusinārā, all of which were recognized by the W.F.B. as equally important places of Buddhist pilgrimage" (1986c, 4). In the years following the 1986 General Conference in Nepal, WFB investment in Lumbini became articulated within efforts to restore and preserve the set of four Buddhist heritage properties corresponding to the founder's birth, enlightenment, first teaching, and death (the other three besides Lumbini are in northern India). This is evidenced in Resolution 24/2/GC16 at the 16th General Conference held in Los Angeles in 1988:

> Emphasizing the need for the WFB to bear in mind that Buddhist ideas and inspiration in art and culture be reflected appropriately in all its endeavors to further develop the four major Buddhist sites; [the membership of the WFB] requests the President and Executive Council of the WFB to explore ways and means of augmenting the organizations operational activities by directly contributing to the further development of the four major international historic Buddhist sites, viz., Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and Kusinara, with top priority given to Lumbini (WFB 1988, 2).

Here it is evident that Lumbini's development remained a priority; however, there is a decidedly different tone as to how WFB investment should be handled, as anxieties about "appropriate" development are more apparent. Further calls to raise funds for the successful completion of the KTMP were received at the 18th General Conference.

Resolution 266/10/GC18 advocates: “As Lumbini Development is the concern of all the Buddhists in the world let the WFB headquarters send a letter requesting all the Regional Centres of the WFB to contribute, in whatever way possible, to the earliest completion of the Lumbini Development Project” (WFB 1992, 5).

These numerous resolutions represent three decades of ecumenical Buddhist support from the WFB. While this support may not have materialized as intended, it is nevertheless important to recognize the contributions of the global Buddhist community to the modern manufacture of Lumbini. The under-realization of the KTMP today is the result of multiple moments of disconnect and tension between various stakeholders at all levels of investment throughout the twentieth century. As the Nepal monarchy gradually reappropriated custodianship of the Buddha’s birthplace from the Dharmodaya Sabha, concrete connection to the site and oversight of development was removed from the hands of Buddhist organizations. Powerless to enact substantial change at the site as an ecumenical body, the WFB directed its efforts toward encouraging the construction of individual temples and monasteries in the Monastic Zone. Most of these development campaigns were not actualized until the early 2000s. In this way, the WFB contributed to the manufacture of Lumbini as an ecumenical landscape adorned with multiple cultural expressions of Buddhism. While the WFB was not able to directly influence the integration of these disparate Buddhist communities on the ground at Lumbini, it did contribute substantially to integrating Lumbini within its imagination of the Buddhist universe. Lumbini became part of the WFB’s mission to “strive with all might and main to make known the sublime doctrine of the Lord Buddha so that its benign spirit of

service and sacrifice may pervade the world…that there may be and peace and harmony amongst men, and happiness for all beings" (WFB 1950, 1).

In the WFB's foregrounding of Lumbini's preservation and development within its general conferences throughout the twentieth century, we can see that Buddhist material heritages came to operate as one extension of global Buddhist ecumenicism. This is not to say that there was ever a unified vision for what Lumbini ought to be, but rather a commitment to the site's potential to bridge sectarian divides and bolster the Buddha's dispensation. In this regard, Lumbini's prestige as a global destination for peace was understood to be a missionary endeavor: radiating the fundamental doctrines of the Buddha in a rapidly globalizing world. These global connections, however, were subjected to frictions among the site's various stakeholders. As the WFB sought to incorporate Lumbini into its missionary agendas and mobilize resources for the site's development, several factors contributed to the slow progress. Chief among them, the rigidity of the KTMP and the disorganization, and at times outright corruption, of the LDT. Again, these frictions are highlighted here, not to make any normative assessments of the Lumbini Project in this period. Rather, I demonstrate that the Buddha's birthplace remained a provocative and powerful element in the pan-Buddhist social imaginary throughout the twentieth century, even when the perceived measures of success, i.e., "development," were not readily apparent. Some of these tensions between Buddhist communities, the state, and the UN have contributed to assessments of Lumbini as a failure. I, however, maintain that the frictions that I have highlighted here were generative of new imaginations and re-workings in multiple arenas. In the following chapter I explore Lumbini's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site as another

moment in which the Buddha's birthplace took on increased significance in Nepal and beyond.

CHAPTER 7

BUDDHA WAS BORN IN NEPAL: WORLD HERITAGE, HISTORY, AND TOURISM AT LUMBINI

How did international society "manufacture" world heritage, by combining abstract concepts with practical experience, by sailing between Utopia and empiricism?[33]

The Lumbini Museum is a showcase for the history and significance of the Buddha's birthplace. It is also a mandate to set a new standard for how heritage and arts are preserved and promoted in Nepal.[34]

Although the three-decade-long period following U Thant's death was largely characterized by friction between various stakeholders in the UN sponsored Lumbini Project (Chapter 6), the conservation of Buddhist material heritages at the Buddha's birthplace continued to draw interest from foreign investors into the 1990s. Much of this investment came in the form of renewed archeological interest in the Maya Devi Temple complex located in the Sacred Garden zone. Further excavation and repair of the Maya Devi Temple was undertaken between 1992-1996 with assistance from the Japan Buddhist Federation (JBF) (Uesaka 2001; Japan Buddhist Federation 2005). During this phase of restoration, the modern temple structure, built in the 1930s, was dismantled and the foundation was excavated, revealing several layers of construction, the earliest dating to the third century CE (Weise 2013, 73; Coningham et al. 2013). These excavations revealed a conglomerate block that archeologists termed the "Marker Stone," believed to have been placed by Aśoka to indicate the "exact birthplace of Lord Buddha" (Rai 2006, 10; Coningham et al. 2013, 1107; Weise 2013, 73). The discovery of the marker stone

[33] Jean Musitelli "World Heritage, between Universalism and Globalization," *International Journal of Cultural Property* vol. 11, no. 2 (2002): 323.
[34] Sumnima Udas, Executive Director of the Lumbini Museum, via Lumbini Museum social media post August 17, 2022.

contributed to the "universal value" of Lumbini's material heritages in its nomination for World Heritage status under UNESCO and is heralded by some as the most important object at the site (Ghimire 2006, 103). The cooperative excavation work between the LDT, the JBF, and Nepal's Department of Archeology (DoA) continued up until 1996. Following these excavations, a new exterior structure to house the excavated temple ruins, the sandstone bas-relief sculpture of Queen Maya giving birth, and the marker stone was undertaken at the behest of the LDT to prevent erosion due to harsh weather conditions in the Terai (UNESCO 2003, 45; Weise 2013, 74). In September 1997, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) recommended Lumbini for inscription on the World Heritage List, granting the site greater prestige and international oversight.

In this chapter I explore the UNESCO world heritage designation as another conjuncture between the Buddhist biographical genre and the Western historicist episteme. This conjuncture is characterized by analogous functions of the biographical genre and the modern idiom of 'heritage' as modes of re-presenting the past in service of contemporary economic, political, and religious agendas (Harvey 2001, 333). As I have endeavored to show, Lumbini has been co-opted in the production and maintenance of religio-political power at least since the time of Aśoka. Lumbini's protection under UNESCO codifies twentieth-century formations of Buddhist heritage in Nepal—espoused by the Dharmodaya Sabha and the Nepalese monarchy (Chapter 6)—under a singular designation of "world heritage," further hypostatizing Buddhism as a symbolic and tangible commodity in geopolitical discourses and economic markets (local to global).

I begin to interrogate these reconfigurations of patronage and custodianship through a critical discussion of heritage as an idiom in the exercise of symbolic power (Hall 2000). Here my aim is not to make any assessments of the World Heritage Program (Di Giovine 2015, 84) nor Nepal's national heritage regime. Rather, by critically examining the power dynamics shaping the modern manufacture of Lumbini, we might better understand how Buddhist material heritages have become universalized in broader agendas concerned with re-presenting the past in the present and dictating "what should be passed on to an imagined future" (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996, 6). What does Lumbini re-present, and for whom? Taking cues from Stuart Hall (2000) and David Harvey (2001), I pose the questions, whose Buddhism is being "heritagized" and to what ends? These questions speak to contemporary scholarship that has sought to conceptualize heritage as a *process*, by which historical artifacts and places are turned into objects of display and exhibition (Harvey 2001; Howard 2003; Harrison 2013).

This analysis moves beyond conversations of "social memory" (Halbwachs 1992; Assmann 2006) to discuss how re-presentations of Lumbini continue to inform characterizations of Buddhism as a peaceful and nonviolent tradition within the arena of World Heritage. Modern re-presentations of Lumbini have shaped contemporary understandings of Buddhism as a "spirituality" and "secular philosophy" globally, and as a cultural and economic commodity in Nepal. These secularizing processes have been incorporated into the fabric of the modern nation-state of Nepal and continue to inform its exhibition and interpretation of Lumbini's material legacies. Twentieth-century renderings of Lumbini speak to the shifting terrain of power relationships on domestic, regional, and global scales.

This chapter also wrestles with some of the frictions between Buddhist philosophical commitments to impermanence (Skt. *anitya*) and twentieth-century preservationist ideologies embodied in UNESCO and the new Lumbini Museum project scheduled for completion in 2024. How is Buddhism understood in relation to its material legacies at Lumbini, and by whom? How has the state come to embody its role as custodian of a prestigious world heritage that has "universal significance for all mankind"? Recent attempts to reimagine the Lumbini Museum have built upon previous discourses of national identity, geopolitical "soft power," and economic growth through the exposition of Nepal's Buddhist past. Harvey argues that "every society has had a relationship with its past" and that critical heritage studies concerns "understanding the meaning and nature of what people tell each other about their past; about what they forget, remember, memorialise and/or fake" (2001, 320). Through interviews with members of the new Lumbini Museum project I explore novel formations of Buddhist heritage in Nepal and their global resonances in the contemporary world. Here I attempt to bring into focus various tellings, rememberings, and memorializations of Nepal's Buddhist past in the present. This discussion leads into a broader conversation about the commodification and curation of Buddhism within a global network of spiritual and religious tourisms (Timothy and Olsen 2006, Stausberg 2011).

Ongoing development and conservation efforts at Lumbini speak to the entanglement of religious, economic, and political sensibilities in a rapidly globalizing world shaped by increased connectivity through transportation and communication technologies (Appadurai 1990). Lumbini has never been more readily accessible than it is today. The inclusion of the Buddha's birthplace into Nepal's national heritage regime

underlines the commodification of the site in broader economic agendas. Noting dramatic shifts in the globalization of heritage sites since the 1972 Convention, Jean Musitelli signals that "heritage finds itself being bestowed with meanings and goals that go beyond the simple imperative of conservation, making it, alternatively or simultaneously, a sign of identity, an engine of development, a tool of cooperation, or a vehicle of tourism" (2002, 330). This echoes the critique of Rakic and Chambers, who draw attention to UNESCO's WHS brand: "World Heritage Site status has become a measure of quality assurance, a trademark and an 'authenticity stamp' for the heritage tourist and an arena for the presentation of prestigious national heritage, integral to the nation building projects of States Parties" (2007, 146).

Since its inception, the UN-sponsored Lumbini Project has touted economic growth through tourism. These ambitions have capitalized, to varying degrees, on conceptions of Nepal as an oasis of "Eastern spirituality" originating in nineteenth century orientalist scholarship (King 1999) and re-articulated in the Euro-American countercultural movements in the mid-twentieth century (Liechty 2017). Mark Liechty (2017) has recently linked Nepal's rapid modernization since the early 1950s to the influx of Western "seekers" who converged on Kathmandu in droves in the 1960s and 1970s, pursuing "Eastern wisdom" as a presumed cure for the "ailments of Western modernity" (2017, 323). The Nepalese state continues to harness these imaginations by commodifying Lumbini, and other Buddhist material heritages, in its tourism campaigns. These investments have contributed to a significant growth in Buddhist monastic institutions in Kathmandu (Liechty 2017) and in increased awareness of, and attraction to, Global Buddhism among Nepali Hindus in recent decades (Warner 2017). These shifts

are certainly indebted to the Nepalese state's investment in Lumbini since the 1970s and the site's codification under UNESCO. Despite having only roughly a 10% Buddhist population, Nepal is now considered a significant "dharma destination" for "seekers" and tourists interested in encountering the homeland of the Buddha. This chapter speaks to the various re-presentations that have contributed to forging Nepal as a repository of Buddhist spirituality and history in the contemporary world.

Heritage Politics and Lumbini's "Universal Value for All Mankind"

World Heritage, along with its antecedent cultural heritage, is a contested category increasingly questioned in the fields of anthropology (Owens 2002; Shepard 2006; Tilley 2006), archeology (Karlström 2005), museology (Kreps 2003), and history (Price et al. 1996; Hancock 2008; Peleggi 2012). Geographers Brian Graham, Greg Ashworth and John Tunbridge argue that heritage is "a view from the present, either backward to a past or forward to a future" (2000, 2). Following Hall (1997, 3), they assert that heritage, like language, is a mechanism by which meaning is produced and reproduced through current concerns and predispositions toward "a highly selective view of a small fraction of possible pasts or envisaged futures" (Graham et al. 2000, 2).

In this understanding, the vantagepoint of heritage "cannot be other than now" (Graham et al. 2000, 2). Other scholars (Harvey 2001; 2008; Harrison 2013) have criticized the "presentism" of this perspective of heritage and have sought to broaden the temporal framework. These trajectories shift the conversation away from what heritage *is* to what heritage *does*, by probing the ways in which "historic artifacts and places turn into objects of display and exhibition with an effect in the present" (Thouki 2022, 1036).

To encompass this processual perspective, the terms "heritagization" and "heritage-making" have been advanced as conceptual lenses for investigating the intersection of a variety of economic, social, and political processes—commodification, representation, institutionalization, and conservation—concerning material objects and places (Harvey 2001; 2008; Smith 2006; Thouki 2022).

As I have endeavored to show, Lumbini emerged in the discourses and practices of various regimes of power-knowledge throughout the twentieth century. The modern manufacture of Lumbini has brought together a variety of stakeholders that includes the Nepalese government, international agencies like the UN and UNESCO, and various domestic and foreign Buddhist organizations. Through the idiom of heritage, Lumbini has been hypostatized as a historical artifact mobilized in Buddhist missionization (Chapters 4), international geopolitical posturing and peacebuilding (Chapter 5), and state-sponsored tourism campaigns (Chapter 6). These agendas are not inherently antithetical, but they do offer competing imaginations of the future. Here I am interested in exploring several ways in which the semiotic register (Keane 2007) of Lumbini has been expanded through the site's formal inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage Program (Di Giovine 2009; 2015). This expansion contributed to negotiations of identity and difference in Nepal's protracted democratization between 1990 and 2015 (Letizia 2006) and continues to factor prominently in the state's economic and geopolitical agendas in the present moment (Upadhyay 2022).

Stuart Hall, following Foucault, remarks that the production of heritage constitutes an exercise of power: the "symbolic power to order knowledge, to rank, classify and arrange, and thus give meaning to objects and things through the imposition

of interpretive schemas" (2000, 4). The process of heritagization entails a colonization and naturalization of the "past" by those "whose versions of history matter," but heritage regimes are fuzzy and fragile, subject to "contestation, re-negotiation, and revision" in the passage of time (2000, 6). In the previous chapters I have shown how Lumbini emerged as a heritage object under the Dharmodaya Sabha, the World Fellowship of Buddhists, and the United Nations, rendering Buddhism legible in multiple registers. Here I am concerned with the 1997 World Heritage Site (WHS) inscription and its "de-localizing" of Nepal's Buddhist heritages for their inclusion in global conservation and preservation regimes (Di Giovine 2009, 29).

My aim is to link UNESCO's *heritagization* of Lumbini to previous configurations of patronage and custodianship, not as an inevitable outcome, but as an emergent condition of possibility for new imaginations of Buddhism domestically and globally. In this sense, Lumbini's WHS designation is another contingent conjuncture in which Buddhism became centrally visible in several prominent discourses of identity and difference within Nepal and within broader international regimes of power. As Miura argues, "World Heritage has become a global language, a world of its own, recreating and representing particular cultures, ethnic groups, and/or national icons to be shared universally" (2011, 9). This universal language has rendered Buddhism meaningful for its contributions to human history and has conferred a significant degree of prestige on to Lumbini as a "world class" destination that the Nepalese government has capitalized on economically and geopolitically (Roy and Ong 2011; Geary 2017, 165). My analysis of Lumbini's WHS designation, then, outlines two interrelated processes: 1) the incorporation of Lumbini into what Michael Di Giovine (2009) has termed the global

"heritage-scape," and 2) the conferral of prestige through UNESCO "branding" as a new form of symbolic power negotiated between the state, its citizenry, and its neighbors—India and China. Both processes reflect ongoing attempts to locate Lumbini.

Michael Di Giovine argues that the inclusion of a given heritage object or monument into the UNESCO "heritage-scape" involves a radical disembedding from its original local, national, and regional significances (2009, 29). He describes this novel formation of heritagization as a protracted "ritual process" that proceeds through three stages: 1) de-contextualization and objectification followed by 2) a liminal phase of evaluation and idealization, before emerging 3) re-aggregated into a new social context within a constellation of World Heritage Sites linked only by their inter-referential value as loci for performing UNESCO's ethical commitment to world peace (Di Giovine 2009, 29). This process might characterize how heritage sites are folded into UNESCO's broader ideological regime, but it does not appear that these places can be "de-localized" entirely. In all cases, the state retains a vested interest in maintaining and developing heritage sites under its own specialized agencies, and nongovernmental organizations continue to vie for influence in shaping their development and use.

At Lumbini, it is evident that the shift in patronage from the UN to UNESCO has given way to reconfigurations of the state's custodianship since 1997. The Buddha's birthplace, far from being an economic commodity as it was under the Hindu monarchy in the 1980s, remerged in Nepali imaginations of a secular nation-state and factored prominently in popular political discourse in the years leading up to the ratification of the Constitution in 2015 (Letizia 2006; Leve 2007: Dennis 2017; 2023). Here it is important to situate Lumbini's heritagization within recent scholarship on the "politics of heritage"

(or as Laurajane Smith describes, the "politics of recognition") concerning the right to define and control the use of, and access to, heritage materials (Smith 2006; 2007). Contributing to this trajectory in critical heritage studies, Keiku Miura argues:

> The [heritage-making] process often entails negotiation, competition, compromise, coercion, actual fighting over, or giving away, whereby questions may rise such as whose heritage it is, how World Heritage status affects local communities and regional cultural politics, how tourism develops and how it affects socio-economic development of the country, how to balance between conservation, development and local ways of life, and what approaches of heritage management may be most appropriate (2011, 10).

Scholars in several fields have investigated similar questions concerning Lumbini in recent decades. Kate Molesworth and Ulrike Müller-Böker (2005) have drawn attention to the "under-realization" of the KTMP and its impact on local communities, while Nyaupane (2009) and Shinde (2021) have debated the sustainability of religious and heritage tourisms to the Terai site. These studies are representative of the formation of the more specialized, yet equally broad, field of "Asian Heritage" that has emerged in the last decade (Silva and Chapagain ed. 2013; King ed. 2016; Matsuda and Mengoni 2016). This sub-field has largely sought to contest the epistemological and ontological groundings of Euro-Western models of heritage conservation and preservation strategies inherited from colonial monumental archeology and museology, proposing alternatives linked to "traditional" Asian cultural and religious practices (MacKee 2013; Byrne 2009; 2022). Studies of Lumbini within this sub-field demonstrate that the politics of representation concerning Buddhist heritage in Nepal is intimately connected to broader economic, political, and regional geopolitical agendas. However, the particular configurations of power by which Lumbini is rendered meaningful as a "place" in the present demands further investigation (Cresswell 2004, 11).

Lumbini's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997 marks another significant moment in which the Buddha's birthplace emerged as a centrally visible object in negotiations of power through patronage and custodianship. This moment marked a shift in patronage from the UN, and its development agencies, to UNESCO and its World Heritage Program. I will briefly discuss this shift in patronage before returning to the ways in which the Nepalese state's custodianship of the site has been altered in relation to this new configuration of symbolic power. While I have argued in the previous two chapters that the United Nations endeavored to manufacture Lumbini as a center for world peace where pilgrims and tourists could learn from the model of the Buddha, UNESCO's ambitions were much grander: to subsume Buddhism, by way of its material heritages, into a global narrative of "unity through diversity" (Di Giovine 2009, 29).

Since its inception, the mandate of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been tied to the project of peacebuilding; particularly through assisting under-resourced nations with the implementation of educational and cultural programing. Ratified in 1945, Article 1 of UNESCO's Constitution states:

> The purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law, and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world.

Embedded in the rhetoric of international collaboration is a commitment to preserving cultural and natural—and more recently intangible, or "living"—heritage (see UNESCO 1972, 2; 2003). This commitment became explicit in UNESCO's adoption of the "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage" in 1972. The World Heritage Convention defined "cultural heritage" as series of material

remnants (monuments, groups of buildings, and sites) which are "of outstanding universal value" from the point of view of history, art, or science (UNESCO 1972, 2). The Convention defines outstanding universal value as :

> [C]ultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. As such, the permanent protection of this heritage is of the highest importance to the international community as a whole (UNESCO 2000, 6).

The Convention attests that these material legacies hold historical significance beyond their locality and are worthy of international protection. Di Giovine argues that the 1972 World Heritage Convention is just one component in a far-reaching Program constructed by UNESCO to satisfy its ambitious goal of world peace:

> By World Heritage Program, I mean the structured ensemble of interlocking initiatives by UNESCO which, through Conventions, declarations, proclamations, norms and projects, represent a coordinated and evolving effort by UNESCO to universalize the discourse and practices concerning heritage, its preservation, and its utilization, for the ethical aim of fostering "peace in the minds of men" through an active appreciation and internalization of the historical nature of human diversity (2015, 84).

It is evident that Lumbini's designation as a UNESCO WHS builds on the imperatives of the UN Lumbini Project envisaged by U Thant. Aspirations for world peace during the Cold War framed the UN's development interventions in Nepal and left lasting impacts on the ideological and practical applications of Buddhist heritages in domestic and regional political arenas (Chapters 4 and 5). If heritage is, as Anderson (1991) and Hall (2000) suggest, an activity of symbolic power by the state to construct a historical past and envisage a shared future, then UNESCO's World Heritage Sites are intended to "transcend the temporal and spatial situatedness of *one* culture's heritage claims" (Di Giovine 2009, 27 my emphasis). Di Giovine argues (following Anderson 1991) that the World Heritage Program is a "global place-making endeavor" that constructs a new "imagined community" designed to satisfy UNESCO's mandate (2009,

33). He terms this imagined global community the "heritage-scape," which diverges from other local or national heritage discourses in its inter-referential production of universal value through the meta-narrative of "unity in diversity" (2009, 29). As the UNESCO website boldly proclaims, "what makes the concept of World Heritage exceptional is its universal application. World Heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located" (UNESCO.org).

Here the shift from UN patronage to UNESCO indicates a much larger ideological transition from development to conservation. While preservation of the archeological remains at Lumbini was a driving force under the UN sponsored Lumbini Project, it represented just one aspect of the KTMP. UNESCO's codification of the site within its global "heritage-scape" relies exclusively on the conservation and authenticity of the material remnants contained in the Sacred Garden zone. For UNESCO, it is the outstanding universal value of these material remains that make the site worthy of international protection. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is charged with overseeing the evaluation of UNESCO's heritage sites. The criteria for inscription on the World Heritage List are as follows:

> **(i**) to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
> **(ii)** to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
> **(iii)** to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
> **(iv)** to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
> **(v)** to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
> **(vi)** to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (ICOMOS 2016).

Lumbini was inscribed on the WHS list on the basis of criterion *iii* and *vi*, as the "remains contain important evidence about the nature of Buddhist pilgrimage centres from a very early period" and the Maya Devi Temple complex continues to be a "sacred" center for Buddhists today (ICOMOS 1997, 81). The WHS inscription codifies Lumbini's historical import as a vestige of Nepal's ancient Buddhist past. While I have shown that Buddhist heritage became a useful category in the formation of global networks and integrating domestic Buddhist communities into Nepal's monarchy throughout the twentieth century, these historicizations were mobilized in the service of revitalizing the *śāsana* in a period of perceived decline (Chapters 3 and 4). As such, they were focused on integrating distinctly Buddhist geopolitical and soteriological imaginations into a rapidly modernizing world with its emergent communication and transportation technologies that rendered Buddhist material legacies in Ancient India accessible once again. In this encounter the biographical sites became nodes in a field of missionization driven by flows of Buddhism across national borders, with pilgrimage emerging as a revitalized practice advancing the Buddha's teachings. Similarly, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Nepalese monarchy sought to articulate an authoritative narrative of Buddhist history in Nepal displaying vested interest in the control and maintenance of Lumbini as part of its broader geo-political agendas. The UNESCO WHS designation absorbed both of these energies, conferring prestige to the state as custodian of Lumbini's "universal value" while codifying the Buddha's birthplaces as "one of the holiest places of one of the world's great religions."

As UNESCO's former Director-General Irina Bokova expressed at the inauguration of the joint UNESCO and Japanese Funds-In-Trust project in April 2016:

> Lumbini is the birthplace of Siddharta [sic] Gautama, the Buddha – it is the starting point of a spiritual journey that has inspired the world in its quest for tolerance, respect and peace. The Buddha teaches us it is through inner knowledge that you reach the middle way, and Lumbini is the source of this universal message. It is a symbol of peace, harmony and reconciliation. It is a source of enlightenment, to build a new harmony with oneself, with others, with the earth, with future generations, aware of the intimate connection of all beings and things. This resonates at the heart of UNESCO…Lumbini has been a World Heritage Site since 1997. The Greater Lumbini Area is home to more than 130 other Buddhist sites, which bear testimony to a rich spiritual and cultural life since ancient times. There is no other place in the world to hear so clearly the resounding call for compassion, for unity and for peace that lie at the heart of Buddhist message (UNESCO 2016, 2).

These remarks epitomize UNESCO's historicization of Buddhism as a cultural resource in advocating for global peace. Referencing recent efforts to safeguard the material heritages of Lumbini, Bokova continues:

> These are far more than technical and cultural achievements. All this bears witness to the great resources blessing this land, to the creativity and ingenuity of the people of Nepal, over the millennia until today. Lumbini is an open book on the spirit of Nepal, the determination to look to the future together, united in solidarity and peace. This is the spirit we need most today. We can build on this energy, so future generations of pilgrims and visitors may experience fully this ancient religious and historical landscape. We can harness the power of this heritage to foster sustainable development, decent jobs and livelihoods for all. Heritage can be a driver to learn new skills and knowledge, developing new capacities for the whole population. This is my message today -- there is no need to choose between the conservation of historical remains and the development of Lumbini. There is no need to choose between the preservation of heritage and the needs of the Buddhist pilgrims. We can have all of these, if we manage to coordinate in harmony the initiatives being planned in Lumbini by so many actors who care for this place (UNESCO 2016, 2-3).

This characterization of Lumbini as a repository of "ancient" Buddhist religiosity and its commitments to peace as well as a testament to the "spirit of Nepal" signals the incorporation of the Buddha's birthplace within a larger agenda that envisions world heritage as constellation of human diversity united in the pursuit of peace and human flourishing. Here a connection between national identity and heritage is being levied to further solidify the position of UNESCO as a harmonizing force between the "secular" interests of the state and its citizenry (sustainable development, decent jobs and livelihoods) and Buddhist pilgrims who have alternate "needs." Barkova's linking of

conservation and development also speaks to the growing commodification of WHSs within global tourism network predicated on the prestige of the UNESCO "brand."

Following the 1997 UNESCO ascription, the state moved to "rebrand" the site, capitalizing on the increased visibility within the global network of heritage sites. David Geary, following Smith (2006, 99), argues that the UNESCO World Heritage "branding" is a meaning-making enterprise that involves defining which heritage places are globally important (2017, 165). For decades the LDT was tasked with implementing the KTMP with operational support from the UNDP and a degree of oversight from the ICDL (Chapter 6). As frictions emerged between various stakeholders throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it became increasingly apparent that the LDT did not have the capacity to effectively manage the development initiatives nor ensure the proper care of the material remains of "outstanding universal value."

In the article, "Digging up Lumbini," published in *Himal Southasian* in June of 1998, Sangeeta Lama laments the state of Lumbini:

> The birthplace of the Buddha, far from being Nepal's pride, is a disgrace…the atmosphere of the site, rescued from the jungle only so many decades ago, is today clouded by mistrust and suspicion between moneyed donors from East Asia and the ineffectual Nepali caretaker organization [the LDT], and marked by the uncaring attitude of Kathmandu-based politicians and bureaucrats (Lama 1998).

Lama goes on to note the impact of the political tumult of the time on Lumbini's conservation and development:

> During the height of the *Panchayat* regime in Nepal, before 1990, the LDT had served as a fiefdom for palace-assigned administrators. At the very least, however, they had provided continuity and (in retrospect) a fairly sophisticated sense of preservation and development. Since the advent of democracy in 1990, the unstable evolution of party-led politics has greatly affected all aspects of national life, and Lumbini was not spared. In the anarchical situation that characterizes Nepali politics today, Lumbini is not a priority for the national-level politicians, and it has been set adrift. Meanwhile, the LDT is hit every time during the numerous changes of government in Kathmandu, as a forum to provide employment to party flotsam. The Trust´s staff has swelled, but the budget remains low, as does morale (Lama 1998).

These characterizations speak to the ineffective custodianship of Lumbini under the LDT during the political and social unrest of the 1990s and early 2000s, which saw the rise of the pro-democracy Peoples' Movement, followed by a protracted Maoist civil war between 1995 and 2005, and finally the forced resignation of the final king of Nepal in 2008 (Adhikari 2014; Jha 2014).[35] These tectonic shifts in national politics certainly contributed to changes in the Nepalese government's investment in Lumbini, further delaying the completion of the KTMP.

In his contribution to *Proceedings of the World Buddhist Summit*, Harka Gurung signals the instability of the LDT leadership in the 1990s, reiterating the need for HMG/Nepal to establish the LDT as "an autonomous institution above politics" (Gurung 1999, 34). Gurung, like Sangeeta Lama, laments that the constant turnover in LDT leadership has significantly hampered the functioning of the institution, even including an accompanying table noting shifts in the LDT leadership structure since 1992 under the designation "Musical Chair of L.D.T. Management." Gurung's table demonstrates that the LDT leadership, in addition to being plagued by rampant turnover, was decidedly non-Buddhist, conforming to the status quo of political representation in the reigning Nepalese Congress. Attempts to assuage these anxieties about the development of Lumbini and the politics of representation within the LDT were incorporated into HMG/Nepal's proposal for an international conference to reassert the global prominence of the Buddha's birthplace.

[35] For a detailed timeline of Nepal's political history see BBC News, "Nepal Profile – Timeline," 2/19/2018. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12499391.

Between Nov. 30th and Dec 2nd, 1998, the World Buddhist Summit convened at Lumbini, bringing together representatives of Nepal's national and local governments, prominent monks and nuns from multiple monastic lineages, and scholars of Buddhism and Nepal's history. The four-day conference, jointly sponsored by the LDT and HMG/Nepal, sought to build on the momentum of the site's recent UNESCO WHS inscription to reinvigorate development efforts toward the successful completion of the KTMP. In his foreword to the LDT-published *Proceedings of the World Buddhist Summit*, Vice-Chairman Gajendra Kumar Lama situates Lumbini as a utopian destination for peace and a symbol of national identity:

> World Buddhist Summit is a historic event of Nepal which has inspired not only the participants but also all the Buddhists and peace-loving people of the world to contribute something substantial for the development of Lumbini, the sacred birthplace of Lord Buddha, *the most illustrious son of Nepal* (Vaidya and Khatry 1999, ii, my emphasis).

In its new custodial role, HMG/Nepal "made a historic decision" to organize the International Buddhist Summit with four main objectives:

1. To have the attention of the world to the sanctity of Lumbini and preserve and protect the Sacred Birthplace of Lord Buddha,
2. To materialize the Peace Concept of Lord Buddha, the Apostle of Peace, for the humanity, welfare, peace and prosperity of the World,
3. To draw attention of the whole world to Lumbini as the Fountain of World Peace when the world is in tension caused by racial, communal and ideological conflicts, violence, bloodshed, and armament competition, and
4. To acquaint the world with the development initiatives now underway in the Lumbini complex as per the Master Plan along with the development of other prominent Buddhist sites of Nepal related to the life of Lord Buddha (Vaidya and Khatry 1999, 1).

These initiatives signal that the LDT and HMG/Nepal continued to mobilize the rhetoric of world peace in the promotion of Lumbini on a global stage following the UNESCO designation. More importantly, the monarchy's convening of the World Buddhist Summit marks an early effort to mobilize Lumbini, and the Buddha, as a national symbol amidst the ongoing Maoist civil war (see Adhikari 2014; Jha 2014).

Under the section "Highlights on the Main Outcome of the Summit," the LDT publication heralds HMG/Nepal's commitment to protecting religious diversity in the country:

> This event once again demonstrated the fact that in Nepalese culture Hindu monarchs provide equal protection to different religious faiths, practices and places of pilgrimage and Nepalese people do not make distinction between the state religion, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Vaidya and Khatry 1999, 3).

These sentiments underscore that Lumbini was a powerful symbol in negotiations of secularity in domestic political discourses at the time. In Nepal, like many Asian nation-states, secularity is understood to be the government's patronage of all, or a select set of, religions, not the absence of religion from politics as conceived in the Euro-American West (Madsen 2011, 249-250). These forms of secularity are the result of what Richard Madsen calls a strategy of "co-optation" as a means to tame religious expressions among a diverse citizenry and incorporate them into the collective whole of the emergent nation-state (2011, 253). Such strategies were employed in Indonesia and Taiwan. He argues that co-option strategies did not lead to the removal of religion from social and political arenas; rather, these strategies "helped to reproduce and maintain communal religious identities" (Madsen 2011, 254). Nepal's Buddhist minorities were drafted into the processes of secularization and democratization partially through Lumbini's global prestige and symbolic power. While Nepal's Hindu monarchy was principally legitimated through public rituals venerating Viṣṇu (Mocko 2015), the monarchy has at various times throughout its history, patronized Buddhism in service of maintaining social cohesion among its Buddhist and Hindu subjects.

The integration of ethnic and religious minorities into new social and political imaginations of Nepal were codified in the monarchy's re-presentations of Lumbini

domestically. As Chiara Letizia (2006) notes, the People's Movement in the early 1990s provided the context for the rise of ethnic-based political identities collectively referred to by the Nepali term *janajāti*. After the overthrow of the Panchayat regime in 1990, Nepal's diverse religious and ethnic populations demanded that the new constitution "guarantee ethnic, religious, and linguistic minority rights" (Letizia 2006, 71). Demands for representation within modernizing 'New Nepal' came in tandem with criticisms of Hinduism's role in maintaining social and economic inequalities under the monarchy (Letizia 2006, 71). As Lauren Leve demonstrates, Theravāda monks and laymen contributed to the discourse of secularity in Nepal, arguing for a multicultural, inclusive, and democratic society (2007, 84). The aim of this form of secularism was "not to banish religion from public life" but rather to "recognize religious diversity and bring an end to Hindu high caste domination" (Letizia 2006, 72). Although the 1990 constitution recognized ethnic minorities in Nepal, it maintained the state's allegiance to Hinduism.

In the protracted period of transition from Hindu monarchy to a secular democracy between 1990 and 2015, the Buddha's birthplace became a powerful mediator of identity and difference. During this moment of heightened political and social transformation, Lumbini was reimagined not simply as one Buddhist heritage site, amongst many, to be developed for the purposes of tourism, but a symbol of Nepali national identity that could be leveraged in domestic and regional political arenas (Lal 2001; Dennis 2017). The prestige of the UNESCO world heritage designation contributed to a growing sense that "Nepal's claim to the Buddha's birthplace gives it a unique status among the nations of the world, and thus can be a source of nationalist pride and identity, akin to and often coupled with the boast that Mt. Everest is in Nepal" (Dennis 2017, 176-

177). Dannah Dennis (2017) argues that, in the years leading up to the ratification of a secular constitution in 2015, the Buddha's birthplace was used by the state and its constituents to mediate competing claims to Nepali national identity and citizenship. In that time period, the slogan "Buddha was born in Nepal" (BWBIN) emerged in popular political discourses domestically and in expatriate communities abroad (Dennis 2017; 2023).

Today, the BDBIN slogan is thoroughly ubiquitous in Nepal appearing on T-shirts and bumper stickers, and graffiti on walls throughout Kathmandu (fig. 12). Although it is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment in which the phrase BWBIN took on larger political and social symbolism, it is evident that popular news outlets in Nepal began linking the Buddha to negotiations of national identity and citizenship as early as 2001. In an editorial published in the *Nepali Times*, prominent Nepali intellectual C.K. Lal pointed out the irony of restrictive citizenship provisions targeting people living in the Terai, bemoaning that, "if the Buddha was alive today, he probably would not be eligible for Nepali citizenship" (Lal 2001). Although certainly hyperbole, Lal's scathing critique of the Nepali government's exclusionary citizenship laws signals the symbolic capital of the Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini, now formally recognized by UNESCO.

Figure 12. "Buddha was Born in Nepal" slogan on taxicab in Kathmandu, July 2019. Photo by author.

In the 21st century the Buddha's birthplace has become a preeminent source of symbolic capital premised on "descriptions of Nepal as a land of peace and religious harmony" and mobilized to resist the "perceived cultural domination and potential territorial encroachment by India" (Dennis 2023, 45). Dennis argues that the BWBIN slogan is a claim used in popular political discourses that must be continually maintained: "Like a claim to a valuable inheritance or a royal throne, the claim to Buddha's birthplace

is regarded as something precious that may be lost to challengers or usurpers; thus, many Nepalis view it as a patriotic duty to defend the claim" (2023, 45). While I agree that the BWBIN slogan emerged in response to negotiations of national identity and citizenship in the late 2000s, I think it bears repeating that Lumbini operated as an object of discourse in the formation of religious identity throughout the twentieth century. The BWBIN phenomenon, and its proliferation on social media (Dennis 2017; 2023), relies on a broader genealogy of discourses circumscribing Lumbini. The shift in patronage from the UN to UNESCO in 1997 is paralleled by the Nepali government's re-conceptualization of its custodianship of the Buddha's birthplace amid the secularizing transition from Hindu monarchy to constitutional democracy (Mocko 2015). These re-presentations of Lumbini relied on the prestige conferred by the UNESCO WHS "branding," rendering the Buddha's birthplace as a potent symbol for positioning the secular federal democracy in regional geopolitical conversations with its powerful neighbors—India and China.

Caretakers of Lumbini's History: The New Lumbini Museum

The UNESCO World Heritage Site "brand" conferred a significant degree of prestige to Nepal as the custodian of Lumbini and its "universal value for all mankind." This prestige has been leveraged by the state in multiple venues to advance economic and geopolitical agendas, and more recently these aspirations have prompted the further curation and display of Nepal's Buddhist heritages. In the last decade renewed attention to Lumbini has prompted the government of Nepal to collaborate on the completion of public facing elements within the KTMP, focusing its efforts on elevating the museum to "world-class" status. In 2018, the non-profit Buddha Foundation, chaired by Sumnima

Udas, signed an agreement with the Nepalese government to create, curate, and manage the new Lumbini Museum. Born to a Newar Buddhist family, Udas received an art history degree from Oxford before becoming a Delhi-based CNN correspondent for South Asia. Following the 2015 earthquake that ravaged much of central Nepal, causing significant damage to prominent Buddhist sites throughout the Kathmandu Valley, Udas was moved to contribute to the preservation of Nepal's Buddhist heritages:

> I travelled to Nepal to cover the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and it was devastating to see so much suffering and hundreds of temples and monasteries destroyed. Like so many Nepalis, I too was affected deeply and wanted to help in any way I could. I think the interest or urge to do something for the heritage of my country began then. That was the turning point.
>
> A short while later I visited Lumbini, and while I was impressed by the development in terms of all of the monasteries and the whole complex, the museum was deeply disappointing. At that point I started writing a proposal for the government of Nepal not really thinking anything would come out of it. Why don't we build a world-class state-of-the-art museum here given the numbers of people who come here but also because people have no sense of the significance of the site. There is no interpretation really, when you go to Lumbini, you don't know what any of it really means (Interview with Udas 2/9/2023).

After the Buddha Foundation formed a partnership with the LDT on a 35-year contract to design and manage the new Lumbini Museum, Udas became aware that her interest in elevating the status of the museum was shared by several domestic and foreign entities, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and UNESCO. When asked about the role of the new museum, Udas signaled that her initiatives were part of "renewed interest in Lumbini in general and the mandate to complete the master plan, of which the museum was a small part." Udas attributes the Nepalese government's interest in the museum to broader global investment in Lumbini within a growing competition over "soft-power" in the region between China and India. She acknowledges that the heightened global attention brought about by the failed bid to acquire Lumbini by the APECF between 2011-2012 contributed to the renewed investment in completing the

KTMP. Asked about the specific role of the museum within Nepal's development of Lumbini, Udas recognizes that the mandate has expanded since the initial 2018 proposal:

> It started off as a simple renovation and upgrading project with a very wide-ranging narrative showcasing the birth, the Buddha's teachings, the evolution and spread of Buddhism and its relevance today. Now we are very focused on the specificity, significance and sacredness of the Buddha's natal landscape told though an immersive contemporary experience. The Lumbini Museum is poised to play a crucial role in the re-positioning or re-branding of Lumbini (Interview with Udas 2/9/2023).

Udas' initial vision for the new Lumbini Museum is in line with the symbolic value of the museum within the original conception of the KTMP:

> Tange wanted the pilgrim's personal journey in Lumbini to be an expression of the Buddha's own journey: beginning from the real world (Hotels and Guesthouses), we travel to a place of learning and wisdom (Museum and Library), then through the monastic zones with temples built by different nations, and finally reach the inner sanctum at Maya Devi Temple, which represents enlightenment (lumbinimuseum.org).

In the final draft of the KTMP, the museum was envisaged as part of the "Cultural Center" containing a cluster of facilities "for giving information to visitors who want to learn about Buddhism and its history" (Tange and URTEC 1972, 15). In Tange's plan, the role of the museum was the "exhibition and safe keeping of findings from the Lumbini area" (Tange and URTEC 1972, 15). This is a rather narrow vision that has, until now, rendered the space as a simple "site museum" displaying archeological remnants and providing very little interpretation or context to the visitor. The extant museum has been hamstrung by the relatively small catalog of artifacts and the lack of a sustained curatorial vision. The slow progress of development throughout the 1980s and 1990s also significantly diminished the priority of the museum. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, various frictions emerged between investors that slowed the progress of the development for the site as a whole, but particularly in the New Lumbini Village zone and other public spaces.

The museum's iconic barrel-vaulted brick structure was designed by Kenzo Tange and was initially intended to be a key feature for creating a comprehensive experience for visitors (see Fig. 4). The construction of the museum epitomizes the glacial speed of development at the site in the late twentieth century, as financial pledges were received as early as 1984, with the groundbreaking occurring over a half decade later in 1990. The extant museum building was eventually completed in 2004, thanks to financial contributions from the Government of India, though they did not retain a curatorial or managerial role. While the Buddha Foundation remains committed to telling the history of Lumbini, the curatorial and civic vision of the museum has shifted under their direction. Scheduled to reopen in 2024-2025 the re-imagined Lumbini Museum entails renovations to the existing building and the implementation of a consistent curatorial narrative:

> The project aims to re-imagine, improve, extend, and develop the existing Lumbini Museum and its surrounding area. This will include renovations and additions to the existing museum building, curatorial and exhibition design, master plan of the campus, construction of additional buildings including an auditorium, contemporary art galleries, cafe, gift shop, a sculpture park in a sacred grove (Lumbini Museum 2022).

Although Udas acknowledges the need to provide a framework for understanding the role of Lumbini in the spread of Buddhism broadly, she envisions that much of the comprehensive interpretive work will be done by the LDT-run visitor center—built, but yet to be fully implemented—with the Museum focusing on a more specific narrative:

> The narrative that the museum has adopted is a sacred biography and geography of the place. This is not a museum of Buddhism per se but a museum of the birthplace, of Lumbini. This does not mean that we cannot wrestle with larger issues, it just means the Lumbini museum will be focused on Lumbini and what happened here (Interview with Udas 2/9/2023).

The current iteration of the new museum's thematic narrative was drafted by curator Naman Parmeshwar Ahuja, Professor of South Asian art history at Jawaharlal

Nehru University. Ahuja's formal "Curatorial Statement," adopted in 2021, describes the narrative focus:

> This is not a museum about Buddhism at large, but its focus is on the birth of the Buddha, the story of Maya and the location where the birth took place, i.e. Lumbini…This is a museum that gives us an insight into the sacred geography of Lumbini, it informs us about the history of Lumbini and it interprets the specific myth of the story of the Buddha's birth so that people can understand what the story symbolises and what relevance it has even now (Ahuja 2021, 2-3).

This attention to the history and geography of Lumbini lends itself to broader concerns that the museum seeks to address, mainly the role of women in early Buddhism and the relevance of the site for local Nepalis:

> The significance of Lumbini may satisfy the pilgrims' curiosity, but the story of Maha-Maya and Mahaprajapati, i.e., the Buddha's mother and stepmother, also gives people a profound insight into the place of women in early Buddhism. The region of Lumbini still has many active sacred shrines as well as persistent local myths that may be interpretations of or variations on the theme of Buddha's birth, but they may also pre-date the history of Buddhism. Their significance links the interests of the historian or scholar with those who reside in and around Lumbini, giving the community that lives there a sense of the importance of their own region. My curatorial vision, therefore, aims to make the heritage site locally relevant, apart from addressing the diversity of international pilgrims and tourists (Ahuja 2021, 3).

Here we can recognize a conscious effort to position the new Lumbini Museum as a mediator between the site and the local community. Addressing the role of the museum in building relationships with the local communities around Lumbini, which are predominantly non-Buddhist, Udas conveyed:

> We realized very quickly that we can't have a successful museum if we don't work with the communities there. If you drive five minutes outside of the Lumbini Sacred Garden Area to see there are entire villages who don't feel like they are part of Lumbini's growth story. These communities need to feel a sense of ownership, they are the true custodians, so we need to work with them (Interview with Udas 2/9/2023).

This attention to crafting sustainable partnerships with nearby villages extends to the equity and accessibility of the Museum's narrative and civic purpose:

> It is the curatorial endeavour to present a narrative that will be of relevance for the next 25-year horizon. What lessons can Lumbini impart / learn on climate change and deforestation, questions of justice and gender, political and social representation have to be seen alongside excellence in art and culture. We are therefore mixing antiquities,

> contemporary art and ethnoarchaeology in each gallery so that the past can be seen in relation to the questions we ask today, and the public can also see how, or by what process, we have learnt what we currently know. This serves to make the public participate in the process of shaping history rather than just be informed of 'facts' (Ahuja 2021, 5).

The new Lumbini Museum board of directors and curatorial team are working to re-imagine the role of the museum in response to Lumbini's symbolic power in local and national negotiations of identity and difference, and in the geopolitical landscape of "soft power." Here it is apparent that the question of who gets to speak for Nepal's Buddhist heritages is being taken seriously, informed by a growing attention to the politics of recognition in critical heritage studies (Smith 2006). Local communities are being recognized as partners in the telling of Lumbini's history, and their interests, predominantly economic, are being considered. While these shifts offer hope for the future of Lumbini, the redesigned museum is just one element in the KTMP yet to be completed. Dissatisfaction with the LDT's custodianship over the past several decades has led to a fair amount of skepticism among many Nepalis regarding Lumbini's development and contribution to the nation, economic or otherwise.

Many Buddhists, however, remain optimistic that increased attention to Lumbini will further the propagation of the Buddha's teachings. As Vice Chair of the LDT Ven. Metteyya Sakyaputta remarked in 2019, "when we travel to Lumbini we hope to find peace, solace and serenity as part of the Buddha's teachings, so the re-imagination of the Lumbini Museum is going to be a very special milestone" (quoted in Dixit 2019). For some, the Lumbini Museum is an "integral part of the architectural landscape and cultural experience of the Buddha's birthplace," that will transform Lumbini into "a major spiritual and cultural centre to share with the world the Buddha's teachings of

compassion, openness and truth" (Dixit 2019). These sentiments echo the universalization of the *Dharma* espoused by the United Nations and its subsidiaries through the incorporation of Lumbini's development into its peacebuilding agendas (Chapters 4 and 5). They also encapsulate the Lumbini's symbolic power in the national identity politics and the geopolitical posturing of the Himalayan kingdom as a "zone of peace" throughout the twentieth century. Here the museumification of a pacified and universalized Buddhism within the national heritage regime continues to be a priority for the state as custodian of the Buddha's birthplace.

Recently, scholars have endeavored to explore "secularizing Buddhism" as a dynamic movement at work in the present-day iteration of Buddhist ideas and practice, and in the formation of institutions (Payne 2021, 10). Pamela Winfield contends that the museumification and curation of Buddhist visual culture is part of this ongoing secularizing process creating a "pseudo-sacred" and "hybrid" space wherein the "dichotomies of sacred versus secular, icon or art can be mediated, and the museum can be appreciated for its role in cultural preservation and transmission" (2021, 97). Speaking to the secularizing of Japan's temple complexes through the advent of "temple museums," Winfield recognizes the pervasive reclassification of Buddhist religious spaces as "cultural properties" in the twentieth century (2021, 105-110). This evaluation captures the fundamental paradox at the heart of Lumbini's manufacture, and most certainly attests to the hybrid nature of rendering Lumbini's history legible to both "secular" and "religious" audiences.

While the new Lumbini Museum project seeks to comprehensively rethink how the history of Lumbini and Buddhism are presented in relation to the modern nation-state

of Nepal—with its diverse Buddhist and non-Buddhist citizens—there remains significant pressure from the central government to complete the restoration quickly and reopen the museum to the public. This is a testament to the symbolic value of Lumbini within domestic politics and geopolitical relationships with neighboring India and China, where effective completion of the KTMP carries significant cultural cachet. The Buddha Foundation recognizes the importance of striking a balance between curatorial vision, artistic expression, civic responsibility, and accessibility in partnership with Nepal's government. Although the timetable for completing the project has been set back by the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the high turnover rate of local ministers and bureaucrats, the Buddha Foundation and the Nepalese government retain a strong partnership that has led to significant progress in the last five years. Udas reiterated that her team has received very little governmental oversight regarding the curatorial vision for the museum, recognizing that the LDT consists of administrators, not scholars of Buddhism, who are "preoccupied with the mandate to complete the Master Plan."

Recognizing the role that the museum will play in the elevation of Nepal's Buddhist heritages, Udas remarked in 2019, "It is not often that one is given an opportunity to participate in such a momentous undertaking that can have a transformative impact on the identity of Nepal and its people. The Lumbini Museum is not a project, this is our common mission" (quoted in Dixit 2019). A commitment to positioning the redesigned museum as a unifying institution at Lumbini, and in Nepal at large, is echoed in Ahuja's concluding remarks to his interpretive plan:

> Every denomination/ community of Buddhists holds Lumbini sacred and each of them should be able to find value in the museum experience. Ecology, forests and climate are of no small importance to us today and this museum responds to that requirement in a fundamental way. It looks at issues of gender, and it looks at issues of language. By

> taking a comprehensive approach, I hope this will not just be a museum but a focal point for the region's social development and uplift: serving as an exemplar for sustainable and ethical public involvement and development (Ahuja 2021, 25).

The re-imagined Lumbini Museum is one of many ongoing initiatives by the state to draw attention to the Buddha's birthplace and gain foreign investment. The presentation of Lumbini's history within Nepal's national heritage regime and UNESCO's "heritage-scape" attest to the dynamic process of "secularizing Buddhism" which simultaneously "makes Buddhism secular" and incorporates those kinds of Buddhism that "promote a secular interpretation" (Payne 2021, 3). These kinds of egalitarian, non-ethnic, and socially liberal Buddhism are also driving the creation of global spiritual and religious tourism networks.

Nepal as a Dharma Destination

As I discussed in Chapter Four, state patronage of the Dharmodaya Sabha and the organization's membership in the WFB during the 1950s were bolstered through rearticulations of Nepal as the historical homeland of the Buddha Śākyamuni, and thus a repository of Buddhist heritage. Mobilizing Orientalist scholarship and building on the discoveries of colonial monumental archeology modernist Buddhist organizations, such as the Maha Bodhi Society, sought to reclaim these Buddhist heritages and reestablish pilgrimage networks for devotees, both domestic and foreign. In Nepal, localized conceptions of the Kathmandu Valley as a ritual field and a meritorious landscape (Skt./Nep. *puṇyabhūmi*) were fused with these broader aims and championed by Buddhist groups seeking recognition under the Brahminical Hindu monarchy.

As I have endeavored to show, the incorporation of Lumbini into the modern Nepalese state in the twentieth century was undertaken principally for economic and geopolitical reasons. This too, represents a novel articulation of the dynamics between patronage and custodianship. As I have demonstrated, the monarchy's participation in UN development programs garnered significant capital investment from foreign banks and aid agencies as international development drove geopolitics in the region (Chapter 5). In the 1970s and 1980s, Buddhism, in the form of its domestic heritages, emerged as a tangible commodity in solidifying Nepal's global image and advancing a thriving tourist industry already predicated on the exoticism and mystery of the Himalayan kingdom (Liechty 2017). Amid the contentious geopolitics of the Cold War, the monarchy's repeated attempts to inscribe Nepal as a "Zone of Peace" were premised on popular conceptions of the Buddha as "an apostle of peace" through his teachings of nonviolence (Skt. *ahiṃsā*), compassion (Skt. *karuṇā*), and good-will (*mettā*)(Chapter 6).

As Mark Liechty has recently chronicled, the rapid modernization of Nepal was partially premised on the arrival of Western countercultural "seekers" who converged on Kathmandu in droves in the 1960s and 1970s, pursuing "Eastern wisdom" as a presumed cure for the "ailments of Western modernity" (2017, 323). Liechty explains that dharma tourists "come to Nepal seeking *expert* (spiritual) *guidance* in an *exotic* (fabled, god-filled, mysterious) *landscape*—and *pay* for the privilege" (2017, 324). In Liechty's estimation, the emergence of an economy of spiritual tourism in the Kathmandu Valley (and Nepal and India more broadly) is predicated on an increase in Western "seekers" and the reconfiguration of Buddhist and Hindu temples and monasteries to meet this demand. This conclusion is a bit overstated and fails to consider the various ways in

which Nepalese and other Asian actors have contributed to the formation of Kathmandu as a cosmopolitan city as well as the maintenance and propagation of Buddhist heritages within Nepal in the twentieth century. That being said, Liechty is certainly correct in acknowledging that religion, especially Buddhism, has become—although reluctantly at times—a central feature of Nepal's tourism brand since the early 1970s. The increased visibility and accessibility of the Buddha's birthplace in recent decades has contributed to Lumbini as a "real-and-imagined" place, where the historical personage of the Buddha and his teachings, can be encountered "out there" in his fabled, mythic, and mysterious Himalayan homeland (Soja 1996, 11). This reified Buddhism is consumed by foreign visitors as well as Nepali nationals.

According to LDT data, Nepali nationals made up the largest demographic of visitors to Lumbini in 2019, totaling nearly 1.2 million (Shinde 2021, 6). These data suggest that the state's incorporation of Buddhist heritages into the national narrative, along with its focus on tourism, has contributed to the manufacture of Nepal as "dharma destination" in the globalized religious marketplace (Arjana 2020). The adoption of Buddhist heritage into national tourism campaigns in the present is, perhaps, no more striking than at the busiest point of entry, Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport. Immediately upon entrance to the main international terminal, visitors are greeted by a large bronze Buddha statue backgrounded by a mandalaic lotus design and framed by the proclamation, "Nepal the Birthplace of the Buddha" in English and Nepali (fig. 13). On an adjacent wall key episodes in the biography are displayed, with the nativity scene at Lumbini foregrounded (fig. 14). This reliance on Buddhist heritage is observable elsewhere in Nepal's vast tourism industry. One of the county's three major domestic

airline carriers, “Buddha Air,” shuttles passengers to Lumbini, Pokhara, and abroad to the holy city of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, India. In 2019, a national tourism campaign disseminated pamphlets, posters, and other paraphernalia at hotels, guest houses, and transportation hubs throughout the Kathmandu Valley (and presumably elsewhere). These materials showcased idyllic images of the Maya Devi Temple complex at Lumbini and a panoramic of Mount Everest.

Figure 13. Bronze Buddha image Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu, Nepal. January 2022. Photo by author.

Figure 14. Scenes depicting the Buddha's biography Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu, Nepal. January 2022. Photo by author.

The mobilization of Lumbini in Nepal's tourism branding harnesses Western imaginations about what Richard King (1999) has termed, the "mystic East," presenting the Himalayan nation as an exotic and mysterious landscape just beyond the reach of modern society. Building on King's work, scholar Sophia Arjana deploys the term "muddled Orientalism" to describe the messy and unregulated amalgamation of Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist mystical traditions in the Western imagination and their reified

renderings in Euro-American popular culture through mediatization and the commodification of religious objects and landscapes in the "mystical marketplace" (2020, 100). Arjana's term "muddled" speaks directly to encounters at Lumbini where visitors are confronted with a variety of cultural expressions of Buddhism. Manufactured as an ecumenical Buddhist destination, the Buddha's birthplace engages visitors with a diversity of architectural styles and ritual practices in the Monastic Zone.

What is shocking, then, is not that such diversity of architectural styles and religious practice exists, but rather that it is being showcased, exhibited to a broader public, some seeking spiritual fulfillment and others simply enjoying a picnic in the park (McDaniel 2017, 79-81). John Strong remarks that the Monastic Zone at Lumbini presents to the visitor, whether tourist or practitioner, an exposition of the Buddhist World: "a snapshot glimpse of Buddhist traditions from all over Asia and the globe, in their present-day complexity and relation to their past history" (2015, 5). Similarly, Justin McDaniel argues that Lumbini's ecumenical design renders the site "open to all forms of Buddhism" and that its "explicit Buddhist sculptures and symbols are not objects of direct worship but are ornamental," providing "affective encounters for visitors" (2017, 81).

The production of Lumbini as a staple of Nepalese national identity has contributed to the exoticization of Buddhism and its material legacies domestically and for within globalized networks of travel and exchange. This process has produced domestic economies that cater to global flows of pilgrims and tourists as well as local and regional travelers. Just as the Dharmodaya Sabha mobilized the Buddhist biographical genre and its attendant material legacies to carve out a space for Buddhism in Nepal's

rapidly modernizing public sphere in the mid-twentieth century, the Nepalese state has internalized Buddhism as part of its national identity rendering a hypostatized object that can be commodified in service of the state's economic or political interests. In this sense, the state is actively "secularizing" its material and cultural heritages by rearticulating their value vis-à-vis historicity and universality. This is similar to the postcolonial shift in other parts of South and Southeast Asia, where the adoption of monuments and museums into the regalia of the colonial state was mirrored in the imaginative process of delimiting the bounds of the post-colonial nation-state (Anderson 1991). Here we can see the shifting of value ascribed to Lumbini through the "quotidian reproducibility" of the site, in tourist paraphernalia and other commodities, and its ongoing adoption into the national narrative of Nepal (Anderson 1991, 183).

The rendering of Lumbini as static and monosemic historical place has allowed the state to reduplicate what John Urry has famously described as the "tourist gaze" through postcards, guidebooks, photographs, and other commodities (1995; 2002; 2012). Urry argues that the touristic gaze is indicative of a distancing that takes place over-and-against the normal, or everyday:

> "The tourist gaze is directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday and routine experiences. Such aspects are viewed because they are taken to be in some sense out-of-the-ordinary. The viewing of such tourist sights often involves different forms of social patterning, with a much greater sensitivity to visual elements of landscape or townscape than is normally found in everyday life. People linger over such a gaze which is then visually objectified or captured through photographs, postcards, films, models and so on. These enable the gaze to be endlessly reproduced and recaptured" (1995, 132-133).

The touristic gaze, then, is predisposed to the unique, the out-of-the-ordinary, and the unknown. The uniqueness of Lumbini as the preeminent site in one of the world's largest religious traditions is codified in the UNESCO WHS designation and its value is

indexed to its universal contribution, which invites touristic visitation by Nepali nationals and foreigners. Urry and Larson recognize that the tourist gaze is now a global phenomenon influencing the active construction of difference:

> Because of the globalisation of the tourist gaze, all sorts of places (indeed almost everywhere) have come to construct themselves as objects of the tourist gaze; in other words, not only as centres of production or symbols of power, but as sites of pleasure. Once people visit places outside capital cities and other major centres, what they find pleasurable are buildings which seem appropriate to that place, and which mark it off from others…Outside the major cities the tourist gaze has made most other places enhance difference often through the rediscovery of local vernacular styles that convey particular histories (2011, 145).

The ongoing manufacture of Lumbini attests to the ways in which the state has invested in commodifying Buddhism within its economic and geopolitical agendas. Much of the uniqueness of Lumbini can be indexed to the KTMP and its inclusion of aesthetics that, on their face, are foreign to the Nepal Terai. Justin McDaniel argues:

> Lumbini is the only place in Nepal that a local tourist can experience firsthand the art and architecture of many different cultures in one place, and this display of world architecture has been one of its major attractions. While Buddhist pilgrims are concerned with seeing the spot where the founder of their religion was born, local tourists are interested in seeing the Buddhists who have come on pilgrimage and taking photographs in front of their monasteries. The teaching or books inside are not important for non-Buddhist local tourists because they are in foreign languages (2017, 71-72).

Lumbini has, in one sense, been rendered as a "mystical utopia" that indexes a bygone era of ancient Buddhist knowledge that can, thanks to the processes of modern development, be encountered once again (Arjana 2020, 44). Sophia Arjana argues that "mystical utopias" harbor the legacies of a more direct Orientalist gaze (Said 1985) by instantiating fantasies of exotic lands through modern advancements in transportation technologies and global flows of consumerism (2020, 44-46). The romanticized "mystic East" is no longer simply a fantasy to be reproduced in Euro-American popular culture, it is also grafted onto the real topography of the "East" through the modern construction of temple spaces and meditation centers, and in domestic and global economies of

commodity production. As Christopher Tilley notes, “Tourism is fundamentally dependent on the production and reproduction of difference, new things to discover and experience, and the exoticism of experiencing other supposedly more authentic and less corrupted cultures” (2006, 17). Accessing these spaces has never been more possible.

In recent decades trekking agencies, once solely focused on connecting travelers to Nepal’s highest peaks, have begun operating “Buddhist cultural tours.” Patrons of Himalayan Glacier Adventure and Travel Company can experience an eight-day tour of Nepal’s Buddhist heritages for a base fee of 1,500 USD:

> Welcome to the Land of the Buddha. Join our 8 days Nepal Buddhist Cultural Tour in which we take you to some of the most important Buddhist sites in the world, including the birthplace of Buddha – Lumbini. The tour combines both the natural and cultural aspects of touring in Nepal, starting from Kathmandu: the cultural, historical and political center of Nepal. Kathmandu has its own brand of cultural life which is based on unique mixture of different religions and faiths. In Kathmandu, we visit Boudhanath, Swayambhunath, and many other important Buddhist monasteries. Then we head toward Pokhara – the adventure capital of Nepal. In Pokhara, along with some natural sites, we pay our visit to the World Peace Stupa and the Tibetan Refugee Center to get a firsthand experience of the Tibetan Buddhism lifestyle. Then we drive further southwest to the birthplace of Buddha, Lumbini. Devoting one full day in discovering the various cultural and spiritual sites at Lumbini. The Nepal Buddhist Cultural Tour – 8 Days exposes you to a combination of natural and cultural sites, especially designed for those interested in the Buddhist monuments in the birthplace of Buddha (Himalayan Glacier 2023).

A simple internet search reveals countless other agencies offering similar travel accommodations to tour sites of Buddhist heritage in Nepal, each referencing Lumbini as a preeminent “sacred” destination. The commodification of Nepal’s Buddhist heritage is not overly surprising, given the abundant material and visual cultures that Buddhism has engendered in the Kathmandu Valley region, and the modern manufacture of Lumbini under the United Nations and UNESCO. Lumbini’s inscription on the World Heritage List authorized the state to mobilize the Buddha’s birthplace within grander economic and political agendas, mobilizing the LDT and the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation to attract new investors in infrastructural development in the Terai region.

The heritagization and commodification of Lumbini in the twentieth century has been amplified through the site's inscription in the UNESCO WHS program as a prestigious location of universal value for all mankind. This broadening of the semiotic register of the Buddha's birthplace beyond its cultural resonances in the biographical genre is indicative of the complex, messy, and multidirectional process of secularizing Buddhism. These impulses are the result of interventions, interpretations, and re-imaginings of Buddhist and non-Buddhist actors and institutions. Approaching this process through the shifting dynamics of patronage and custodianship allows us to capture Lumbini's emergences and submergences more vividly in the discursive formation of Buddhist modernism, the democratizing Nepalese state, and the global heritage-scape. This dialectic also contextualizes modern re-presentations within a much longer genealogy of power-knowledge inscribing Lumbini.

CHAPTER 8

END DISCUSSION: PLACE-MAKING AND BUDDHISM IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NEPAL

I began this study by exploring several ways in which Lumbini operated throughout the premodern Buddhist world, with particular attention to the pervasiveness of the Buddhist biographical genre as a cross-cultural repertoire for instantiating and perpetuating the Buddha's dispensation (*śāsana*). Scenes of the Buddha's nativity at Lumbini are depicted in elite and vernacular textual narratives and operate as focal points in the production and re-production of Buddhist visual cultures throughout the tradition's diaspora beyond the Gangetic Plain. Legends of Aśoka's pilgrimage to the birthplace link piety and polity, epitomizing an idealized patronage relationship that has been inherited by all Buddhist traditions (Chapter 2). These inheritances are operative within the modern manufacture of Lumbini as a global destination for world peace throughout the twentieth century and into the present.

Influential studies have recognized that the Western picture of 'Buddhism' is, at least in part, the result of colonial legacies of knowledge production (Almond 1988) and the romantic fantasies of Orientalism (King 1999). Others have discussed the ongoing processes of curation (Lopez 1995) and the appropriation of Buddhist cultural elements into popular media and global marketplaces (Iwamura 2011; Arjana 2020). These studies focus on critiquing the West's production and consumption of Buddhism. While I have sought to advance these critiques at various points throughout this present study, I have also worked to show that a variety of Asian actors and institutions have contributed to re-presenting Buddhism in modernity. Beyond the rationalization and westernization of

Buddhist doctrines (McMahan 2008) and meditation practices (Braun 2013; McMahan and Braun 2017) the development of Lumbini demonstrates that Buddhist encounters with modernity refract traditional modes of religio-political power focused on the preservation and cultivation of the *śāsana* materially and spatially. Such agendas span the entirety of the Buddhist world and have been leveraged, at varying speeds and at varying degrees of success, through the revival of patronage relationships with the places associated with the tradition's founder. These networks of financial investment and pilgrimage were aided by new technologies that led to Lumbini's excavation, reconstruction, and eventual development under the guiding hand of the United Nations. The manufacture of Lumbini throughout the twentieth century demonstrates that the Buddha's birthplace is a real-and-imagined place (Soja 1996) that mediates multiple configurations of power—social, political, and religious.

In the complex dynamics of patronage and custodianship circumscribing Lumbini we can see the confluence of multiple forms of Buddhism, including its diverse iterations in modernity. In Chapter Four I demonstrate that the Buddha's birthplace was a powerful mediator of modernist Theravāda on the Nepal frontier. Campaigns to repatriate Lumbini to its rightful custodians were repeatedly catalogued in the Maha Bodhi Society's publications throughout the early twentieth century. These calls built on the legitimizing force of colonial monumental archeology to articulate claims to the authentic, the original, and the historical and spurred the adoption of "heritage" as a powerful idiom in the re-presentation of 'Buddhism' as a world religion on par with Christianity, complete with a revered "Holy Land" of its own (Lopez 1998, 185; Masuzawa 2005, 144). Through the overlapping and intermingled projects of colonial archeology, philology,

modernist exegesis, and Theravāda missionization, Lumbini emerged as a site of "origins" in the global discourses of Buddhist revival and reform.

David McMahan signals that "Buddhist modernism," as a novel form, emerged out of the unique and unprecedented problems posed by modernity in the confluence of "cultures, individuals, and institutions in a time of rapid and unprecedented transformation" (McMahan 2008, 5). McMahan problematizes the exclusive production of Buddhism by the West, pointing us to the diverse ways in which Asian actors crafted responses to the "dominant problems and questions of modernity" and participated in the processes of refinement, curation, and re-presentation of Buddhism to a global audience (2008, 5). This study has sought to advance this trajectory, recognizing that articulations of Buddhism have been rendered legible by governments, Buddhist activists and reformers, and global organizations both religious and secular. While McMahan's *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* predominantly focuses on globalized articulations of Buddhism directed toward the West, I have sought to balance this with the domestic social and political transformations that these large-scale agendas influenced in Nepal. In short, I have endeavored to show how these discourses were localized through Lumbini.

Other scholars have explored how the unprecedented conditions of modernity "profoundly affected the traditional lifeways" within the Theravāda Buddhis world (Schober and Collins 2018, 8). For Schober and Collins (2018), Theravāda modernities in South and Southeast Asia are linked by their shared inheritances of *śāsana* and *vaṃsa*. The maintenance of social relationships that facilitate merit-making and anxieties about the decline of the *śāsana* remain central concerns of modern Theravādins. Such concerns have spurred monastic reforms in various parts of the Theravāda world and have

prompted renewed attention to Buddhist histories (*vaṃsa*) and their legitimation of places in the production of Buddhist publics (Berkwitz 2018, 104). While this study is not entirely rooted in Theravāda encounters with modernity, it does recognize that missionary networks linking Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand to the Buddhist Holy Land significantly shaped imaginations of authentic and "pure" Buddhist belief and practice in Nepal (Chapter 4). Such networks helped legitimate Buddhist social reforms and gain custodianship of Buddhist material heritages under the Dharmodaya Sabha (Chapter 4).

In foregrounding Lumbini as a manufactured place within the discourses of Buddhist modernism and Theravāda reform, revival, and missionization, this study demonstrates that the production of knowledge about 'Buddhism' has not been limited to the academic study of texts, nor is it the exclusive purview of the West. Asian actors contributed substantially to the care and maintenance of material legacies in the Buddhist Holy Land, not at the cost of rationalization, modernization, and globalization of the Buddha's *Dharma*, but in tandem with such forces. While much scholarly attention has been paid to how the modern West has come to understand "what the Buddha taught," this study has contributed to advancing discussions about how the *dharma* has been rendered meaningful through its material heritages. In this sense, I have attempted to speak to the tension at the heart of Buddhist modernism, between what McMahan has identified as "scientific rationalism and romantic expressionism" (2008, 13). The manufacture of Lumbini is a formative example of the complex ways in which the Buddha's teachings have been refashioned as a "way of reenchanting and ushering escaped meaning back into the world" through a "broadly naturalistic cosmological framework" and aligned with "rationalistic and scientific sensibilities" (McMahan 2008,

13). Lumbini's formation as site of global importance is framed by the intersections of pilgrimage and patronage; piety and politics; use and preservation.

Locating and Dis-locating Lumbini

Throughout this study I have sought to draw attention to the various configurations of power-knowledge that have contributed to rendering Lumbini meaningful. While the title of this dissertation, "Locating Lumbini," is intended to signal the social and political processes of (re)locating the Buddha's birthplace in time and space, it is also apparent that the manufacture of Lumbini in modernity involves various processes of de-localization and "dis-location." Lumbini's prestige is amplified in its removal from its local moorings and through its transplantation to other geographical, historical, and institutional contexts. The productive tensions that exist between the processes of "locating" and "dis-locating" give this study conceptual shape.

In seeking to revive Buddhism in Nepal, modernist institutions crafted Lumbini as a heritage object uniquely valuable for its historical import and its potential to mediate pan-Buddhist ecumenicism. While these aspirations for a utopian Buddhist "Mecca" were not actualized in the moment, they nevertheless gave way to new renderings of Buddhism domestically and within larger geo-political discourses that have outlasted the Cold War. In thinking through the conceptual processes of "locating" and "dis-locating" it is also apparent that Lumbini is the product of scalar social formations—local to the universal—and the frictions that exist among them.

Throughout this study I have demonstrated that Lumbini has acquired a variety of stakeholders invested in re-telling the story of the Buddha's birth and imagining possible

futures for the site in Nepal's rural Terai. These potential futures are delimited, at least at present, by the Kenzo Tange Master Plan and its tripartite zoning, which has curated the landscape based on the presumed needs of its multiple types of visitors (Chapter 6). As a real-and-imagined place, Lumbini's significance in the present is profoundly tied to the locative and dis-locative processes of heritagization (Chapter 7). Lumbini's manufacture into a global destination is overdetermined by the site's inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List, which has generated significant prestige for the newly democratized nation of Nepal as custodian of the site's "universal value to all mankind."

I agree with Di Giovine that world heritagization is a protracted process that occurs within a field of production whereby local, national, international, and nongovernmental "stakeholders" position themselves vis-à-vis the monument and each other (Bourdieu 1993, 34; Di Giovine 2009, 29). In fact, it is this broader field of cultural production of power-knowledge that this dissertation speaks to. However, in the case of Lumbini we are not dealing with a singular culture, society, or nation-state, but the entire expanse of the Buddha's dispensation (*śāsana*) as catalogued and re-presented in the biographical genre, and its attendant material and visual legacies. Additionally, what is being adopted into this globalized "cultural field" is not just a heritage site that can serve the secular interests of UNESCO's ethical commitment to fostering "peace in the minds of men," nor the meta-narrative of "unity in diversity." Rather, the incorporation of Lumbini within UNESCO's global "heritage-scape" attests to ongoing secularization and re-sacralization of Buddhist cosmologies, ontologies, and ethics throughout the twentieth century.

Spatial theorist Edward Soja, following Henri Lefebvre (1991) has coined the term "Thirdspace" to denote the "simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical, and the spatial, their inseparability and their interdependence" (1996, 3). Soja argues:

> *Everything* comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history (1996: 56-57; added emphasis).

Characterizing Lumbini as a "real-and-imagined" "Thirdspace" also involves the *secular-and-religious*. What I mean by this is that the processes of heritagization, even on the global scale of UNESCO's World Heritage Program, are neither unilinear, totalizing, nor final. As the various conjunctures discussed in the previous chapters have shown, the ongoing process of locating and dislocating Lumbini involves both Buddhist and non-Buddhist actors and institutions. It also involves various frictions that emerge in the negotiation between regimes of power and the epistemological and ontological commitments framing them.

In this sense, this study poses an alternate perspective on the World Heritage Program that acknowledges its indebtedness to Euro-Western cultural hegemonies, while simultaneously recognizing that Buddhist communities continue to encounter the site and use its prestige to further their own agendas. So, while Denis Byrne (2009; 2022) laments the hegemonic logics of heritage conservation that have hypostatized Buddhist material legacies as static and monosemic objects of history, I am more interested in advancing the provocation that heritagization under UNESCO has provided certain conditions of

possibility for sustained Buddhist investment in Lumbini despite its geographic isolation within a minority-Buddhist nation.

Here it is far more apparent that Lumbini exists as what Jacob Kinnard (2014) has termed a "place in motion" animated through its diverse social encounters with Buddhists and non-Buddhist actors and institutions alike. While Di Giovine (2009; 2015) is keen to recognize the macro level processes that have rendered cultural sites meaningful through the protracted process of heritagization, my encounters at Lumbini have demonstrated that this process is never totalizing, or at the very least, its full hypostatization has yet to be completed. This is perhaps most evident in the continued veneration of a Buddha image at a small shrine situated in a sal tree just to the south of the Maya Devi Temple and the Shakya bathing tank (fig. 15).

Figure 15. Buddha shrine in sal tree within the Sacred Garden zone, Lumbini, Nepal June 2019. Photo by author.

This shrine is a testament to the continued veneration of Lumbini as a soteriologically significant locale where the presence/absence of the Buddha is negotiated and remains profoundly affective. While I was unable to identify the creator of this

shrine, it was apparent to me during my visit in June of 2019 that the image served to consecrate a space otherwise devoid of Buddhist iconography and ritual materials. This tiny Buddha statue exemplifies what Michel de Certeau refers to as the strategies and tactics of everyday practice that make use of the elements of an imposed terrain (1984, 34-35). Characterizing these daily practices, de Certeau argues:

> They are sentences that remain unpredictable within the space ordered by the organizing techniques of systems. Although they use as their *material* the *vocabularies* of established languages (those of television, newspapers, the supermarket or city planning), although they remain within the framework of prescribed *syntaxes* (the temporal modes of schedules, paradigmatic organizations of places, etc.), these "traverses" remain heterogeneous to the systems they infiltrate and in which they sketch out the guileful ruses of *different* interests and desires. They circulate, come and go, overflow and drift over an imposed terrain, like the snowy waves of the sea slipping in among the rocks and defiles of an established order (1984, 34).

Despite the intentions of UNESCO and the Nepalese state to manufacture a secularized space for showcasing the historical value of Buddhist cultural heritage, those communities who regularly engage Lumbini have continued to employ “tactics” aimed at encountering the Buddha (de Certeau 1984). These practices of daily piety are also evident in the copious number of coins dropped on to the maker stone within the Maya Devi Temple, despite signs expressly forbidding offerings. Such ritualized activities signal that Buddhist visitors have “transgressed” the designated zones reconfiguring the archaeological remains of the Maya Devi Temple and other features of the Sacred Garden as objects in the continued veneration of the absent Buddha. At Lumbini the internal logics of modern development and preservation have given rise to renewed expressions of piety: expressions that help re-locate the site within a global proclivity to the biographical genre and practices of pilgrimage. These processes are ongoing and provide fruitful avenues for exploring Buddhism’s continued social, cultural, and political influence in the twenty-first century.

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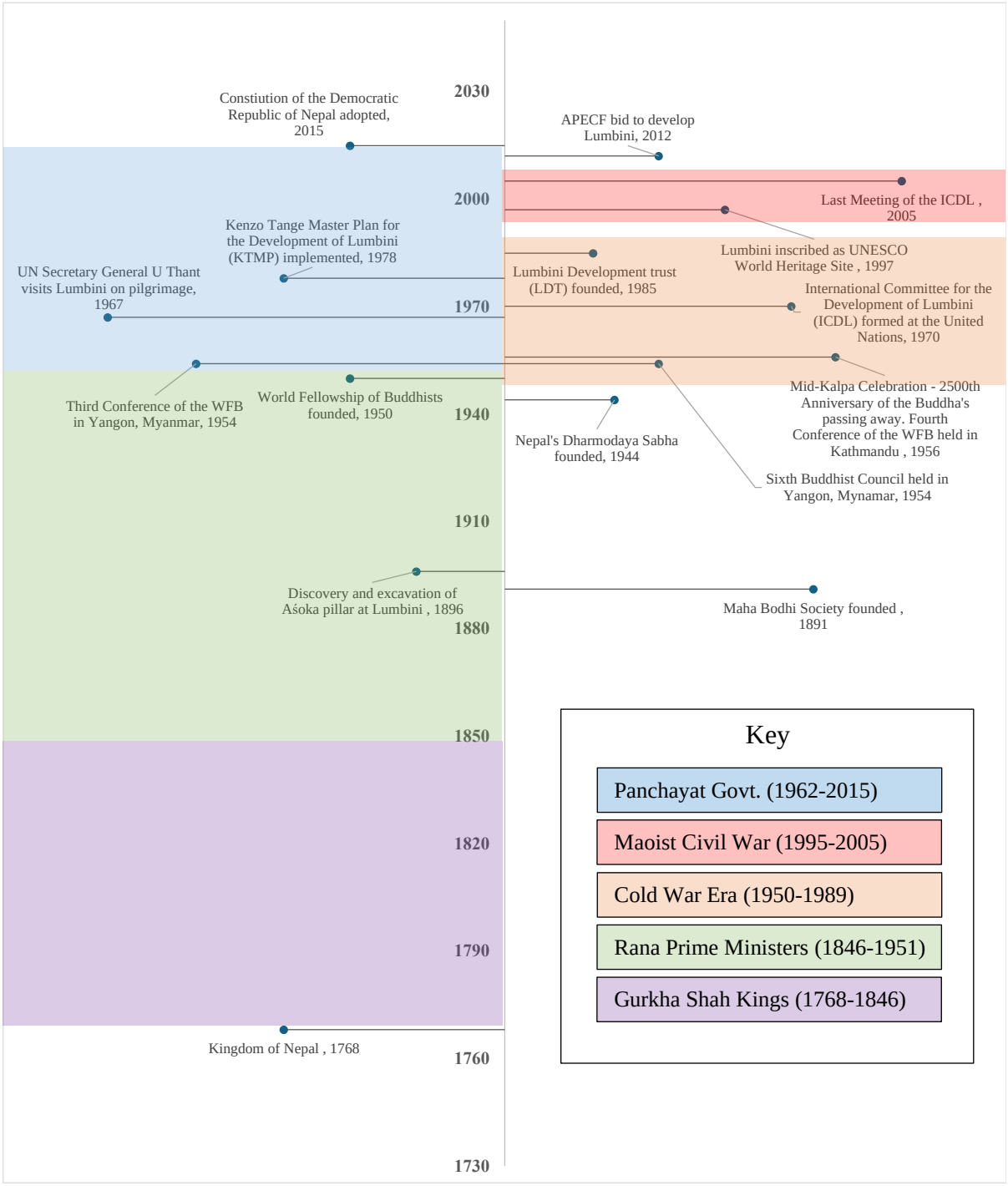
APPENDIX I
TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS AND SOCIO-POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS



APPENDIX II
KENZO TANGE MASTER PLAN FOR LUMBINI