ROAMING FREE LIKE A DEER:
BUDDHISM AND THE NATURAL WORLD

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Forthcoming from Cornell University Press

_Actual contents of this version include the introduction, conclusion, and glossary._
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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATIONS

Words that have entered the English language, such as nirvana, karma, samsara, and ahimsa, are treated as English language words. Pāli and Sanskrit have been rendered into standard International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration formats. For the sake of coherence and textual beauty, some Buddhist concepts are employed according to context, so that the Pāli-language “Dhamma,” or Buddhist religion, of Thailand becomes the Sanskrit-language “Dharma” of Japan. Sinhalese appears in Government of Sri Lanka transliterations whenever possible. The transliteration of Thai follows the Royal Thai General System of Transcription whenever possible. Chinese appears in the Pinyin standard while Japanese manifests in the revised Hepburn standard whenever possible. Tibetan poses a special challenge, since the pronunciations of terms in Wylie transliteration often remain opaque to nonspeakers of the language despite the literary precision of these terms. Therefore, in the main text I have relied on phonetic transliterations following the Tibetan and Himalayan Library Simplified Phonetic system, while when relevant I also supply the Wylie term either on first usage in the text or in the notes. Exceptions to these rules may be found regarding the self-referred names of Buddhists, to whom I have deferred. Further, I follow the Oxford Dictionary convention of leaving the names of famous people in the forms that they are best known, so that I render Thích Nhất Hạnh’s name with the more familiar spelling of Thich Nhat Hanh. Likewise, familiar places whose names remain commonly known without diacritical marks, like Tokyo, appear without diacritical marks.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am most grateful to Mr. James Lance, my Editor at Cornell University Press, who offered excellent aid that improved the text, steadiness, and guidance while patiently tolerating my eccentricities. I am appreciative as well for an Aubrey Keith and Ella Ginn Lucas Endowment for Faculty Excellence Award through the University of Southern Mississippi, which generously supported some useful field work and in so doing made the presentation better. Finally, anonymous reviewers for Cornell University Press provided welcome help that improved the text, although the errors that remain are mine.
Introduction: Conversing with Tree Spirits

Because of his compassion for nonhuman creatures, the Chinese Buddhist master Zhuhong (1535-1615 CE) regularly practiced and strongly encouraged others to practice the Buddhist ritual of fangsheng, or animal release. In this custom animals otherwise destined for harm lovingly receive liberation into what are thought to be more beneficial conditions. Zhuhong and his followers, for instance, purchased live fishes from human food markets and then, while chanting Buddhist scriptures, released them unharmed into rivers rather than eating them. In freeing animals like this, Zhuhong followed a couple of strategies. First, at the market Zhuhong would buy as many captive animals as he could afford. In addition, according to Zhuhong the deed of releasing is more fundamental than the size or number of animals released, preventing attachment to counting the animals freed.\(^1\) Based on these policies, the Buddhist teacher Zhuhong enthusiastically insisted on performing such animal releases because, in his words, “As a human values her or his life, so do animals love theirs.”\(^2\)

Zhuhong obviously intended his animal release practices to benefit the animals themselves, thus bringing a greater sense of sustainability to his environment. In today’s world such an intention may be most welcome, given the ecological troubles that beset us so vividly that they almost require no recounting. Temperatures across our globe currently are rising problematically, and, as a result, so are water levels from lost glaciers. The air is so polluted in many cities that citizens wear masks over their mouths for this reason alone. Giant patches of nonbiodegradable plastic clog our world’s oceans. Along with ills like these, we are losing animal and plant species at alarming rates.

Ecologically concerned as he was, perhaps if the Buddhist master Zhuhong were with us at present he could help us with some of our environmental travails. Certainly he would seem to
fit in well with many contemporary animal rights or environmentalist organizations. Sadly, though, problems lurked even in his own ecological world. For instance, a couple of his followers liberated 10,000 eels from harm. But they did so believing that the accrued virtue helped them to pass their civil service exams early, leading to a suspicion (which can never be proven) that these followers were motivated more by their own economic benefit than they were for the welfare of eels.\(^3\) Also, as I examine more fully in Chapter Eight of this book, animal liberation practices like Zhuhong’s at times have resulted in struggles with invasive species, mismatches between comfortable habitats and actual release sites, as well as counterproductive market arrangements. Zhuhong’s Buddhist example therefore instructs us that even such an apparently innocuous activity as freeing animals from human dinner bowls can produce ecologically troublesome results.

This book is about environmental tensions like the problems that can arise while freeing fishes even if one is compassionately motivated. Today more than ever we need a robust set of environmental ethics that can steer us in positive directions, and Buddhism, with its practices like Zhuhong’s animal release rituals, can provide us with at least some of the moral ecological guidance that we require. Yet, like with all systems of ethics, Buddhist environmental ethics sometimes do not lead to the most satisfying results. Hence, a synthetic analysis of how Buddhism may help us to move forward appropriately in the climate change age as well as a clear-sighted understanding of the limits of Buddhist environmental ethics may provide great ecological value. Over the rest of this book I pursue precisely such value while I explore a comprehensive, critical, and analytical investigation of the theory, practice, and real-world ecological performance of Buddhist environmental ethics. I begin this examination by turning to some Buddhist environmental ethical voices in order to gain greater context.
A Critical Examination of Buddhist Environmentalism

Many environmentalists like the motivational factor that religiosity can provide, and therefore there exists plenty of discussion of Buddhism as a religion that supports twenty-first century ecological initiatives. In fact, because Buddhism describes the universe as dependent arising (in the scriptural language of Pāli: \textit{paṭicca-samuppāda}), or cosmically interconnected across time and space, and emphasizes the importance of compassion for nonhumans in ways unlike some other religions, Buddhism makes a popular choice for religion-based environmentalist discussions. But, to date, there remain some significant shortcomings within this fertile field of enquiry. First, a great number of environmentalist pieces investigate Buddhist approaches to nonhuman nature primarily in terms of the ideals of the tradition, thereby overlooking some rather serious real-world limitations. In addition, many environmentalist pieces are not set in fruitful critical dialogue nor are they subjected to synthetic analysis, leading to confusion and perhaps limiting beneficial actions. Let me further explore these two shortcomings so that my reader can more clearly see the place of this book.

As for existing environmental literature regarding Buddhist values, it remains in no way difficult to find paeans to Buddhist nature-friendliness. A common argument of this literature holds that extending compassion through an interconnected universe, as Buddhism asks one to do, makes Buddhism an intrinsically environmentalist religion, with the occasional rejoinder that simply following the Buddhist path automatically makes one more ecofriendly. Because of this perceived environmentalist potency, Buddhism quite often is acclaimed as the form of religion most likely to aid the pursuit of a more sustainable human future. The scholar of Buddhism Grace G. Burford, for instance, states that the Buddhist precept against intoxicants, when applied
metaphorically to intoxicating consumerism, could diminish resource needs in a sustainable way. Ethicists David E. Cooper and Simon P. James argue that Buddhism is an environmentally-friendly religion because of the virtues of humility, self-mastery, equanimity, solicitude, nonviolence, and sense of responsibility that Buddhism engenders. Peter Harvey characterizes Buddhism’s ideals of relationship with the natural world as embodying “harmonious cooperation,” a view echoed by Francis H. Cook with his claim that Buddhism possesses a “cosmic ecology.” The founder of the Deep Ecology movement, the ecophilosopher Arne Naess, lauds Buddhism for its denial of the idea that entities possess abiding and independent essences as well as for its emphasis on the importance of self-realization. Finally, Leslie E. Sponsel and Poranee Natadecha-Sponsel assert that “some of the basic principles of Buddhism parallel those of ecology.”

Unfortunately, despite many praises of Buddhist ecofriendliness, Buddhism sometimes fails to deliver in terms of practical realities rather than philosophical ones. When one steps back from Buddhist ideals and examines the material lives of Buddhists, one finds sometimes severe problems in realizing Buddhism’s many supportive ecofriendly endorsements. As the scholar of Buddhism Duncan Ryūken Williams states, “When one reviews the history of the interface of Buddhism and environmentalism, the overwhelming tendency has been to define the Buddhist contribution to environmentalism in terms of the most idealized notion of what Buddhism is,” while ignoring real-world difficulties. For Buddhists, therefore, “the belief in harmony with nature at the philosophical level is no blueprint for creating and maintaining such harmony on a day-to-day level,” like Williams claims.

In light of Williams’ argument, consider the 12 substantially Buddhist countries studied by Yale University’s Center for Environmental Law and Policy (YCELP): Bhutan, Burma...
(Myanmar), Cambodia, China (Tibet appears as a part of China in these data), Japan, Laos, Mongolia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. According to YCELP, these countries struggle to maintain positive environmental records. In 2020 YCELP ranked 180 countries regarding their ecofriendliness in terms of ecosystems protection and human health issues, using 32 indicators in eleven categories to produce an Environmental Performance Index (EPI) for each country. Of the 12 substantially Buddhist countries, impressive Japan and South Korea scored highest at numbers 12 and 28 in the world, respectively, or in the top 16th percentile of the 180 countries. Surprisingly to some perhaps, among substantially Buddhist nations only Taiwan and Thailand joined Japan and South Korea in performing in the top half of all countries. Burma brought up the Buddhist rear, finishing a miserable 179th out of 180 countries, with Vietnam at 141 out of all countries and Mongolia’s earning of 147th place. The average substantially Buddhist country in these data ranked 102 out of 180 countries, scoring in the bottom 43rd percentile overall, meaning that in terms of environmental difficulties the average substantially Buddhist country appears to be a bit worse than the world’s average. While these environmental records could be more dismal, they seem far from justifying many of the environmentalist praises that have been heaped upon Buddhism.

Of course, many factors play roles in creating problematic environmental performances like these and some of these forces have little or nothing to do with Buddhism. Among them, environmental performance is impossible to quantify without subjective elements. Additionally, not all of the people living in the countries YCELP listed are Buddhists. Further, actions with environmental impact in Buddhist realms often stem from social, economic, or political dynamisms rather than religious ones. For example, both Galen Rowell and Liu Jianqiang darkly
describe how the massive loss of wildlife on the Tibetan plateau in recent decades has occurred precisely against the protests of some Buddhists.\textsuperscript{13}

Despite these limitations, however, significant numbers of Buddhist actors helped to create YCELP’s unpleasant numbers, which do not appear to support the notion that Buddhism fundamentally remains a religion that leads to acceptable 21\textsuperscript{st} century sustainability. Therefore, we need to understand more clearly the real world, rather than simply ideal, roles that Buddhism can play in shaping the environmental politics, social dynamics, and private practices that may lead to outcomes like those found in YCELP’s study. It is worth looking more deeply into the lived world of Buddhism in order to determine exactly what positive and negative roles the Buddhist religion may or may not be playing, along with a host of other factors, in fostering both healthy and harmful ecological situations. Over the rest of this book I therefore will maintain a primary focus on the environmental valences of material Buddhist lifeworlds.

\textit{Synthetic Analyses}

In addition to an inattention to real world results, as I mentioned another shortcoming of the literature concerning Buddhism and environmentalism stems from a lack of shared presumptions and conclusions across Buddhist worlds. This situation frequently leaves Buddhist environmentalists talking past each other and inhibits any sense of a critical, comparative Buddhist environmental ethical framework upon which either academic scholars or Buddhists from varying pedigrees can agree. For environmental thinkers and actors, there problematically exists a “plurality of views and lack of consensus among scholars working in the area of Buddhist environmental ethics,” in the words of the researcher Pragati Sahni.\textsuperscript{14}
Let me offer just one example of what I mean: in the excellent collection of essays *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, one finds separate writings from respected Buddhist environmental leaders, including Thich Nhat Hanh from Vietnam, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama from Tibet, and Sulak Sivaraksa from Thailand. Nhat Hanh premises his fine contribution to the volume on the scriptural *Diamond Sūtra* and its collapsing of the distinction between animate and inanimate beings. Yet the Dalai Lama does not collapse distinctions in this way, implicitly grounding his presentation instead in Tibetan Buddhist texts in which collapsing this distinction is not a concern. For his part, Sulak produces a searing indictment of consumerism but does so by invoking Thai customs that are not a part of the worlds of Nhat Hanh or the Dalai Lama. Therefore, one finds three intelligent, stimulating, and provocative environmental works in the same volume, yet there is no synergy, resonance, or necessary basis for agreement between their voices.

While this outcome in itself is to be expected given the acceptable yet disparate Buddhist presumptions of these pieces, currently we lack a context-providing apparatus that enables environmental ethicists critically to sort through the similarities and differences of works like these. By extension, a critical, comparative basis for Buddhist environmental actions that might influence all Buddhists also appears absent, and this latter, practical point remains crucial, since positive environmental action often mandates concerted, coordinated responses. Human-influenced global warming, for example, cannot be arrested by the green actions of just one person and instead requires relatively coherent counteractions from huge numbers of humans from different nations, races, languages, and cultures – like one finds looking across the Buddhist world. Hence, there exists serious pragmatic value in the warning of the scholar Seth Devere Clippard that “if each individual settles on her own interpretation of what an ecoBuddhist
life requires, there is no assurance that any specific environmental problem will be attended to by a large enough population to make a difference.”\textsuperscript{18} Alternatively, in theory, we realize a more sustainable environment if varied Buddhists can identify their horizons for dialogic agreement as well as disagreement, because, as the environmental ethicist Roger S. Gottlieb wrote, “Cooperation among different types of people is often the key to success in environmental struggles.”\textsuperscript{19}

In response to this set of circumstances, in this book I seek to bring diverse voices together with a critical, comparative approach, so that one can better see how different ecological presumptions and outcomes of varying Buddhists can be either be appreciated for being in unison, properly conceived as irreconcilable, or understood in some other relationship, whatever the case may be. By critically and comparatively examining diverse Buddhist environmental viewpoints in a monographic conversation, it becomes easier to separate more universal perspectives and their meanings from more idiosyncratic ones. This allows scholars and Buddhists themselves to advance toward the emergence of a clearer picture of the relationships between varying Buddhist environmental ethics and ecological actions.

Based on the critical orientation of my ethical dialogue, the comparative and synthetic approach employed in this book allows a measure of appreciation for why Buddhist material realities do not always live up to the religion’s reputation for engendering a sustainable environment. For instance, as I will explore throughout the book, generally Buddhism encourages the extension of compassion to individual humans and animals. Some American Buddhists, in fact, have chosen to offer compassion even to potential microbes as far away as Mars.\textsuperscript{20} This compassion fosters an animal-friendly dynamic within the tradition and Buddhism can provide a relatively solid basis for efforts to improve the welfares of individual animals,
especially those that are not used for human food. Such compassion remains important in the work of the animal studies scholar Marc Bekoff in undoing “the alienation and fragmentation that currently defines our damaged relationship to the natural world.”

However, despite Buddhism’s portrayal of a broadly interconnected universe, because of beliefs in reincarnation Buddhists tend to extend this compassion to humans and animals but very rarely also to plants, minerals, and water, these latter being considered unavailable for rebirth. The targeting of Buddhist compassion almost solely to humans and animals in this way results, with exceptions, in a limited biocentric approach to the natural world, meaning that Buddhism ethically values humans and animals but substantially does not value other entities in the natural world similarly. This limited biocentric attitude lacks what a viable environmental ethic demands, which is some sense of an ecocentric orientation, this being an orientation which places substantial ethical value on plants, minerals, and water. In the words of the foundational ecologist Aldo Leopold, a viable environmental ethic must enlarge “the boundaries of the community to include soils, water, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land,” and Buddhism often fails to achieve this aside from some welcome attention to animals.

While Buddhism needs a more ecocentric orientation to support a viable environmental ethic, Buddhism itself does not lack some ecocentric voices that extend some ethical value to plants, minerals, and water, as I will show. However, these voices historically remain somewhat marginalized. Additionally, 21st century environmental problems like the Fukushima nuclear spill that has fouled an entire ocean with radioactivity were not things that ecocentric Buddhists like Japan’s Dōgen (1200-1253 CE) considered. Through no fault of their own the voices of many ecocentric Buddhists like Dōgen thereby cannot contend very well with the inevitable issues of choice of what to preserve that arise with contemporary ecological actions and ethics,
limiting the potential impacts of their outlooks in the present day. If we must value everything because everything is interconnected, as ecocentric Buddhists like Dōgen appear to assert in Chapter Seven, then we must protect ocean radioactivity as well as dolphins, atmospheric carbon as well as parrots, and anthrax as well as human probiotics. Because of this weakness, Buddhism’s concepts of an interconnected, dependent arising universe do not, in themselves, provide an environmentalist magic pill despite commonly-found portrayals to the contrary. As the environmental philosopher Arne Naess put it, “‘All things hang together’ is a good slogan, but it does not bring us far if we do not form some notions of how things hang together.”

Another problem arises regarding Buddhist compassion which, through its focus on individuals, struggles in application to complicated ecosystems in which a multitude of beings rely on constant predation on each other for survival. The scholar of Buddhism Ian Harris emphasizes this point in writing, “Compassion for the fate of individual members of the animal kingdom is not the same as the more general concern for the destiny of species characteristic of much environmentalist literature,” so that for Harris, “Buddhism cannot uphold a self-consciously ‘environmentalist’ ethic.”

Therefore, my analysis throughout this book suggests that the animal-friendly elements that contribute to Buddhist credentials for green living also provide obstacles to the development of full environmental thinking and action from within the tradition itself despite its assertion of an interconnected universe. As my reader will see, Buddhism deserves some of its nature-friendly reputation in terms of providing a nice home for animals that humans do not fancy eating but struggles to establish sustainability when it comes to broader ecosystem welfare and maintenance.
Having briefly surveyed Buddhism’s environmental strengths and weaknesses, I must now answer a question: What measure do I use to delineate what is a strength and what is a weakness? After all, what may be perceived as tragic deforestation by one person may be another person’s lovely pasture. I answer this question with the concept of a sustainable biosphere.

*Sustainable Biosphere*

In this book when I describe something as an environmental strength, I mean it operationally fulfills the definition of a “sustainable biosphere” as delineated by the leading environmental ethicist Holmes Rolston. In reflecting concepts found in the work of the foundational ecologist Aldo Leopold, Rolston describes a sustainable biosphere as “a baseline quality of environment” founded on the ecocentric notion of “land as community,” this community’s broadly including organic beings as well as inorganic entities such as stones, rivers, and atmospheric constituents.26 Holistically Rolston asserts, “The bottom line, transcultural and nonnegotiable, is a sustainable biosphere...[of] the full Earth,” since “our integrity is inseparable from Earth integrity.”27 With this statement, Rolston eschews more narrow concepts of sustainable development, because with a sustainable biosphere the biospheric environment takes precedence as a concern over economics.28 The full biosphere, according to Rolston, must be ecocentrically sustainable in terms of meeting the needs of both humans and nonhumans today while not sacrificing their systemic ecological needs of tomorrow.

Given that the standard that we use to analyze data colors the outcomes that we perceive, Rolston’s sustainable biosphere concept requires some contextualization. In contrast to the oft-found goal of sustainable development, for instance, Rolston substantially agrees with the
environmental economist E. F. Schumacher, who led a generation of ecologists in emphasizing that sustainable development is itself an unsustainable strategy. The finite resources of a finite planet eventually will run out if development is endless. Hence, Schumacher wrote, we must all “question” “the idea of unlimited economic growth.” In reflecting this thread of Schumacher’s thought, Rolston claims, “The fundamental flaw in sustainable development is that it typically sees the Earth only as resource.”

Additionally, despite its explicit concern with biology Rolston’s sustainable biosphere concept embodies an ecocentric, rather than a strictly biocentric or anthropocentric, circle of ecological concern. With intention and for their own sakes Rolston extends ethical value to abiotic elements of the environment such as gases, water bodies, and stones as a part of enhancing total ecosystem health. This outlook remains important, since the environmental scientist Andrew Balmford, among many others, stresses how positive environmental healing and relative ecological stability can arise by attending foremost to abiotic, rather than animal, realities.

Such ecocentrism appears to be a required weapon within our environmental ethical arsenal for battling global warming, since in this struggle we must attend to our ethical valuations, or lack thereof, of atmospheric gases and stones. Climate change results in part from a broken carbon cycle, in which carbon that was underground as a mineral has been quickly released into the atmosphere as a gas instead, so that in the climate change era we must consider the circumspect ecological care not just of animals but also of gases. Finding ethical value for some, but not too much, carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, for instance, must be a part of our global warming moral toolbox.
Moreover, a number of global warming mitigation strategies like those involved with carbon capture attempt to transform atmospheric carbon dioxide into stone formations, so that responsible climate change strategies must attend to the possible ethical values of stones, too. A number of environmental thinkers such as the geologist Murray Gray in fact emphasize the interconnected realities of global warming and stony geosystems health. Reflecting this need to value abiotic entities like stones and gases along with biotic beings, the environmental ethicist Katie McShane states that we need “to learn how to talk about ecosystemic welfare directly” by embracing ecocentrism in fighting climate change. Thus, although other perspectives exist, I employ Rolston’s sustainable biosphere concept specifically because it has an ecocentric orientation that the global warming era seems to require.

I therefore utilize Rolston’s sustainable biosphere concept as a standard throughout this book to assess environmental data from the Buddhist world. As statistical researchers know, though, data first must be formatted before it can be analyzed. One cannot randomly throw numbers into statistical software and expect a cogent analysis to result, since the computer works with data that are ordered in specific ways. Likewise, in this book I cannot simply start producing random Buddhist stories and see where we go. If we are to get anywhere meaningful, I must order the data. The way that I order the data is distinctive to this book, since I follow the innovative method of relational animism. Now I must briefly describe the method of relational animism, beginning with a vibrant tale that brilliantly illuminates the essence of the method.

_Buddhist Relational Animism_

We can discover relational animism illustrated in a fascinating story about how the Buddha interacted with trees. During the time of the Buddha around 500 BCE there existed
some monks at Ālavī in India who cut down trees to build huts, since it remained common for the Buddha’s disciples to construct simple housing. Reflecting beliefs found in ancient India, the resident spirit of one of these trees pleaded with a monk to stop. The monk paid no heed to the tree spirit’s request and in fact struck the tree spirit’s son with his axe. The tree spirit, now incensed, pondered killing the monk, but eventually decided to seek the counsel of the Buddha. The Buddha compassionately listened to the tree spirit’s case and directed the spirit to a vacant tree as a new home.

In the meantime, however, word had spread regarding the monks’ actions, with lay people and clerics speaking badly about the monastics. The Buddha responded by chastising the tree-cutting monks for being “foolish” and making the Buddhist order look uncaring in the eyes of the people. He then issued a new monastic rule, Pācittiya 11, which forbids the unreasonable destruction of plants.35

In conversationally expressing concern for its home and family as well as respect for the Buddha, the tree spirit in this story appears as a person, by which I mean, following the anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell, a perceived subject with whom one interacts socially in linguistic, ritual, or other ways, rather than an object.36 Throughout this book there will appear many more instances in which physical animals, plants, and other nonhuman natural beings, or, in this case, a spirit who is closely identified with an empirical natural entity, appear as persons in this sense. Although to date the personhoods of nonhuman natural beings in the Buddhist world have been little discussed, from this story of a frustrated tree spirit that appears within a set of canonical rules for nuns and monks, one can already appreciate that this is an important topic if one is to understand Buddhism fully.37
While the Buddha encountered a tree spirit, elephants as persons aided the Buddha’s two chief disciples, Sāriputta and Moggallāna. At one time Sāriputta fell ill with a fever and needed lotus stalk soup for medication, causing Moggallāna to visit the fabled Mandākinī lotus pond of the Himalayas. There he asked two elephants for lotus stalks. One of the elephants bounded into the lake, used his trunk to pull up lotus stalks by their roots, and thereafter rinsed mud off of the stalks with lake water. These stalks then reverentially were offered by the elephants to Moggallāna, who quickly returned to Sāriputta’s side. Moggallāna prepared Sāriputta’s medicine, and, having taken it, Sāriputta’s health improved. In this way Sāriputta’s recovery intrinsically included a couple of affable pachyderm chemists who piously sought to reduce the suffering of one of the Buddha’s disciples, therefore in a sense practicing devotional Buddhism.

Besides faithful elephants, in this story about lotuses and animals one discovers that the monastic precept against unreasonable plant use that I mentioned previously does not prevent all uses of plants. Moreover, in this story the elephants received treatment as persons but the lotus stalks did not, a point that is instructive in fully comprehending Buddhist approaches to the nonhuman realm. Such differentials in attributed personhood appear in numerous other contexts across the Buddhist world and bear ramifications at least for Buddhist environmental habits, dietary propensities, ethics, notions of the character of the enlightenment experience of nirvana, and philosophical conceptions of the web of relationships that the Buddha claimed comprises our phenomenal universe. As such, convergences and divergences in Buddhist attributed personhoods form the bedrock of analysis in this book.

Throughout this work I investigate instances in which Buddhists attribute or decline to attribute personhood to nonhuman beings as a grid for organizing and understanding data. On occasions when elephants but not lotus stalks appear as persons, we learn a great deal about
some Buddhist environmental attitudes, for the elephants clearly enjoy greater ecological respect than do the plants.

Such differentials in the ascribed personhoods of natural beings propel the interdisciplinary method that I use during the course of the study, a new model called relational animism. I describe this method, which arises from insights in animal studies, botany, anthropology, and philosophy, in much greater detail in Chapter Two. Put briefly for now, relational animism consists of a form of belief and/or practice in which nonhuman entities are experienced as persons in their own rights, with respect accorded to their specific agencies through linguistic, ritual, or other interactions. With relational animism animals, plants, and even stones and bodies of water receive positive human regard for their perceived subjective agencies.

In this light, many of my readers have had moments in which they verbally treated a pet, an automobile, or a computer not unlike a human person; relational animism extends such experienced personhood, albeit in a manner perhaps more respectful than the unfettered cursing of a recalcitrant computer, to various entities in the nonhuman environment. However, as we already have seen with elephants and lotus stalks, sometimes humans experience relational animism while at other times they do not, and these divergences can teach us a great deal about how humans interact with the nonhuman natural world. Used as a method, relational animism pointedly attends to such differentials in outcomes in terms of respectful personhood (non)attributions as well as the effects of these attributions and thereby provides outstanding benefits to our understanding of Buddhism as well as to our environmental ethics.

In terms of Buddhist studies gains, experiences with nonhuman nature like the ones I just recounted often are called “animism” by scholars. Any visitor to a primarily Buddhist country
today almost certainly has encountered such animism within Buddhist realities, from houses for local spirits within Thai Buddhist monasteries to reverence for boulders at some Japanese Buddhist temples. Although some scholars ascribe this nature religion simply to the influences of local traditions, actually things remain more complex, since everywhere in the Buddhist world one finds local religions thoroughly admixed with, rather than simply coexisting with, Buddhist realities. Religion scholar Geoffrey Samuel describes an instance of this by ably probing how indigenous traditions work in tandem with Buddhist ones to create what Tibetans experience as an integrated religiosity, and there exist many other examples. This blending of Buddhism with other religious forms prompts questioning about how Buddhism may participate from its own side in generating the numerous nature religious phenomena found not just in Buddhist Asia but in the Buddhist West, too. Therefore we need to explore nature religion in Buddhist universes more fully, as I do here.

In order to engage in this exploration, in this book I expand the investigative purview beyond the world of humans so that we may appreciate more effectively the roles of nonhumans in Buddhism. In theater terms, I turn up the stage lights so that one may better witness more of the on-stage nonhuman actors, not just those human-only actors previously in the spotlight. While I attend as much as I can to economic, political, psychological, and historical contexts so that we may comprehend more clearly the actions of Buddhists, my focus is on Buddhist personhood relationships with nonhumans, or notable lacks of them, in whatever contexts they may appear. In examining representative samples of approaches to nature from India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, Japan, Tibet, and the contemporary West, I intentionally look broadly across the Buddhist world to reveal that personhood relationships with nature pervade the tradition and are not just the province of specific Buddhists at specific times and in specific places, although
they vary significantly according to conditions. I do this because we learn much about Buddhist
philosophy, practice, and environmental behavior from observing moments when personhood is
attributed to nonhuman entities as well as when it is not so attributed.

Following my relational animist method, though, does more than enrich Buddhist studies,
for it additionally advances crucial discussions in environmental ethics. For instance, the
environmental philosopher Eric Katz skillfully describes how personhood-focused ethical
discussions like mine here aid the development of healthier environmental outlooks and
practices, such as those that may lead to the sustainable biosphere ideal of Holmes Rolston.41
Indeed, personhood principles already have been successfully employed in some
environmentalist legal causes such as the preservation of the Whanganui River in New
Zealand.42 Explicitly bringing similar personhood attitudes into the Buddhist fold, the American
Buddhist teacher and scholar David R. Loy asserts that ecologically applying personhood
principles initiates successes by overcoming social obstacles to action while beneficially
resacralizing the landscape.43

Thus, in the ways that I have described, the relational animist method used in this book
organizes data while it also advances Buddhist studies and empowers environmental ethical
decision making. These contributions become visible especially in terms of three themes, which
I now delineate.

Three Comparative Ecological Touchpoints

In the course of utilizing relational animism, from within the data three touchpoints for
ecological comparison emerge: Buddhist vegetarianism, the alleged practice of religion by
animals and other natural beings, and nature mysticism. These ecological touchpoints supply a
framework for developing comparative Buddhist environmental ethics conversations by helpfully directing our attention to active and salient issues, so they arise repeatedly throughout the book and deserve some explanation now.

Regarding dietary habits, meat eating remains at least somewhat permissible according to the Theravāda Buddhist scriptures, with Theravāda representing one of the three great sects of Buddhism along with Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism. As a result of this allowance, meat consumption commonly persists in predominantly Theravāda countries like Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia, although sometimes followers of Theravāda traditions abjure meat for reasons of personal piety. Conversely, there remain Buddhist outlooks, especially in the Mahāyāna Buddhism that emerges from China and exists throughout the Buddhist east Asian worlds of Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, in which vegetarianism, and sometimes veganism, exist as fundamental Buddhist commitments. However, meat eating within these lineages remains hardly unknown. Thus, in the Buddhist world carnivores may live next door to vegetarians despite the fact that they presumably follow the same teachings on proper diet. Reflecting this complex situation, in the West one commonly finds a cliché that all Buddhists are vegetarians. But while a greater vegetarian sensibility does mark Western Buddhism, as I will describe in Chapter Nine, this vegetarian stereotype still experiences constant debunking from the existence of numerous carnivorous Buddhists in the West and elsewhere.

Although many factors that I will describe contribute to this complicated situation regarding Buddhist eating habits, one gains traction in understanding if one probes Buddhist relational animism, since often (but not always) humans shrink from eating beings that they consider to be persons, such as family pets.44 As I will explore as one comparative touchpoint throughout the rest of the book, perceptions of which nonhuman beings count as persons and
why helps to determine whether Buddhists eat or do not eat certain nonhuman entities. For instance, more than do Theravāda scriptures, some Mahāyāna scriptures, such as the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, place greater emphasis on not eating animals because animals are perceived as persons, even kin persons like our mothers, and this outlook helps to stimulate the more energetic vegetarian impulses that may be found in Mahāyāna worlds.

In addition to this culinary comparative ecological touchpoint, the tale of a tree spirit’s reverencing the Buddha that we saw previously, or, in other words, a nonhuman being as a person practicing religion, represents the second touchpoint for ecological comparison that I will investigate. As this book progresses, at times snakes will venerate the Buddha, a horse will mourn the Buddha’s leaving, tigers will show devotion to monks, and plants will realize nirvana, among numerous other examples. These phenomena show that in Buddhism, nonhuman beings sometimes may express their own personhoods through perceived religious agency.

Investigating the occurrences in which animals, plants, and even stones and wind are experienced as religious practitioners in their own rights enables a new appreciation of the textures of social relationships in the Buddhist world as well as a stirring way of philosophically understanding the interconnected universe that Buddhism portrays.

Enriching the importance of these moments, and perhaps astonishing my reader, scholars such as the religion specialist Donovan O. Schaefer, the cognitive anthropologist Stewart Guthrie, and the chimpanzee expert Jane Goodall each have speculated that animals may be religious in their own, nonhuman, ways. Goodall observed what she considered a possibly religious “dance of awe” among chimpanzees, and primatology offers other intriguing possible incidents of the practice of nonhuman religion. For example, a group of primatologists has observed wild chimpanzees in four separate locations in western Africa ritually creating...
apparently functionless piles of stones around trees and have compared this behavior to that of the erection of religious rock cairns, such as the *la tsé* holy stone piles of Tibet, by humans.\(^{46}\) Even more provocative, the baboon behavior specialist Barbara Smuts observed wild baboons on rare occasions sitting as if, in her words, in quiet Buddhist meditation as they gazed into pools of water for 30 minute stints.\(^{47}\) The entire baboon troop, even the youngsters, became uncharacteristically still, noiseless, and solemn, while they appeared to use the spots of water as their objects of focus. Given what to Smuts seemed to be contemplative practices by nonhuman beings, it pays to examine Buddhist examples relevant to scholarly claims of potential religious behavior in animals, and this is what I will do. However, throughout this book I personally remain descriptive and critical in probing Buddhist contentions regarding nonhuman religiosity, making no claims of my own on this issue. <insert fig. 1 about here>

As for the third comparative ecological touchpoint of this book, nature mysticism, let me first describe what I mean by this phrase. Perhaps the fullest presentation of the theory of nature mysticism belongs to the scholar of religion R. C. Zaehner in his book, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*. In Zaehner’s terms, two diagnostic marks apply to discern nature mysticism. First, there must be a powerful experience of oneness of the human and the nonhuman, a “panenhenic” experience in which “without and within are one” in an altered state of consciousness experience that transcends both time and space.\(^{48}\) Zaehner further states that the essentially sensual aspect of the experience is “different in kind from ordinary sense experience.”\(^{49}\)

Another scholar of mysticism, W. T. Stace, describes nature mysticism as belonging to the “extrovertive” type of mysticism. For Stace, extrovertive mysticism such as nature mysticism entails experiences of the oneness of the universe while possessing a “feeling of blessedness, joy, happiness, satisfaction, etc.”\(^{50}\) Stace interestingly contrasts this with the
“introvertive” character of Buddhist meditation. In Stace’s view, introvertive mysticism enjoins a consciousness in which “all the multiplicity of sensuous or conceptual or other empirical content has been excluded,” a description that is difficult to apply to nature mysticism.51

While these criteria of Zaehner and Stace for the most part offer handy academic tools, their emphases on an experience of oneness with nature may offend Buddhist philosophers, who sometimes shy from notions of oneness in deference to models of interconnection. But if one describes the experience as “nondual with nature” instead, one appears to preserve the meaning of the criteria provided by Zaehner and Stace while also pleasing Buddhists. Integrating these ideas, I will treat nature mysticism as a powerful altered state of consciousness experience of human nonduality specifically with a nonhuman natural entity within a physical human habitat, an experience that significantly lacks dimensions of time and space and has a sensory or emotive quality, although perhaps unlike ordinary senses and emotions.

Armed with this definition of nature mysticism, we can begin to locate the place of nature mystical practice in Buddhism. Remembering that the Buddha spoke against ancient Indian preBuddhist Brahmanic rites, including rites for sacred natural beings, there existed a sense in early Buddhism as portrayed by the scriptures to steer away self-consciously from any practices that might involve nature worship or nature mysticism.52 This relative resistance against nature worship and nature mysticism thereby exists in the scriptures across all three great sects, so that expressions of it repeat throughout the chapters in this book. At the same time, some Buddhists have found it difficult to renounce nature mystical experiences and perspectives. Thus, in chapters to come we still discover some Buddhist nature mystical practices, especially in the realms affected by Vajrayāna Buddhism, where mountains can become holy mandala residences of Buddhist deities. In these Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, and Tibetan alpine
practices, traversing a sacred mountain becomes understood as an inner journey of consciousness to nirvana, thus producing Buddhist nature mystical phenomena.

Conclusion

The rest of the book highlights the presence of attitudes within Buddhism that emphasize treating nonhuman beings like animals as persons as well as examines some of the empirical outcomes of these attitudes. These empirical outcomes from India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, Japan, Tibet, and the contemporary West lead to a new understanding that Buddhist environmental ethical strengths in protecting animals fascinatingly often also instigate Buddhism’s own weaknesses in dealing with larger ecosystems. By providing a more powerful environmental ethics methodology to uncover previously unappreciated real-world dynamics, this book provides a strong understanding of the multifaceted ways in which Buddhist humans interact with their nonhuman surroundings ecologically for both good and ill.

The next chapter, “Some Methods in Buddhist Environmental Ethics,” provides scholars with a description of the relational animist method that I apply throughout the text. It also defines essential Buddhist terms and concepts regarding the characters of human and nonhuman environments. While I strongly recommend this material for focused academic researchers, other readers may wish to skip ahead to Chapter Three, where they encounter vibrant personhood relationships in the biography of the founder of the tradition, Gautama Buddha.


6 David E. Cooper and Simon P. James, Buddhism, Virtue, and Environment (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 106.


9 Leslie E. Sponsel and Poranee Natadecha-Sponsel, “A Theoretical Analysis of the Potential Contribution of the Monastic Community in Promoting a Green Society in Thailand,” in


Environmental ethicists debate what roles anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism should play in a viable environmental ethic, so here I speak in terms of relative orientations. At least some measure of ecocentrism appears to be required.


34 Along with Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, Theravāda represents one of the Buddhist Three Vehicles or major divisions. Theravāda stresses adherence to the Pāli canon and relatively emphasizes a human-like Buddha and the high place of monastics compared to some other Buddhist systems. Although Theravāda may be discovered globally, concentrations of Theravāda Buddhists can be found in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia.


37 In his studies of Buddhist bioethics Damien Keown asserts that the notion of ethical personhood “would be rejected by Buddhism in that it involves a narrowing of the moral universe, whereas the Buddhist inclination is to expand it.” But Keown’s statement applies only given his philosophical premise that the paradigm for the concept of personhood be a “rational human adult.” This premise fails to recognize the numerous times when Buddhists precisely

38 Horner, 1706-1707.


49 Zaehner, 34. Italics his.


51 Stace, 110.

**Concluding Canines**

The ancient Buddhist tradition of India existed for about 1,500 years before the religion mostly disappeared from the subcontinent due to its own lethargy, Hindu competition, and the arrival of Islam. During this period of a millennium and a half, Buddhism evolved over time into what are recognized as the Three Vehicles or great sects of Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna. Vajrayāna, or Tantric Buddhism, appeared last among these sects, taking recognizable form in perhaps the fourth century CE. It constituted the most influential form of Buddhism through the religion’s final ancient Indian phase, which witnessed the transmission of Vajrayāna Buddhism from India to Tibet.

An Indian practitioner named Kukkuripa, who lived in the region where the Buddha spent his childhood, was a follower of this late Indian Vajrayāna Buddhism, according to Abhayadatta’s Sanskrit hagiography, *Caturaśītisiddhaprarvṛtti*. As a part of his saintly practice, Kukkuripa would roam free like a deer through northern India, just like many other Buddhist adepts. On one occasion, Kukkuripa came across a sad and hungry puppy in the road and decided to care for her. Gathering provisions, Kukkuripa found a cave and established it as a new domicile for the two. The pair then spent the next twelve years developing a close friendship, during which time Kukkuripa’s meditation practice deepened. In response to Kukkuripa’s advancement in practice, one day a group of gods appeared at the cave and invited Kukkuripa to join them in the joyful Heaven of the Thirty-Three (Trāyastriṃśa). Kukkuripa accepted the invitation, thereafter rising in the sky to cavort with gods in their blissful realm. In the meantime, the dog, back on Earth, somehow found food and water by digging in the cave and so stayed there, alone.
In heaven Kukkuripa fondly remembered his dog friend and, missing her, began to return to Earth. The gods implored him stay, repeatedly telling him that worries about a dog were beneath his new position among the deities, and he decided to remain in heaven. Eventually, however, Kukkuripa longed for his canine pal so much that he decided not to listen to his divine comrades, thereafter returning to his cave. When he patted the dog in greeting upon his homecoming, she shape-shifted to reveal that she was a ḍākinī, a Vajrayāna Buddhist feminine celestial spirit of goodness and wisdom. She praised Kukkuripa for refusing the sidetrack to spiritual progress that heaven represented, telling him that “you have purified your wrong views,” and then gave him advanced Buddhist teachings. Following these teachings, Kukkuripa reached the highest stages of the practice. According to the biography of the Tibetan translator Marpa, Kukkuripa even acquired his consort’s theriomorphic shape-shifting skills, since Kukkuripa once appeared to Marpa as a large bird, complete with feathers.

The heartwarming tale of Kukkuripa and the dog arises from different streams of attitudes toward the nonhuman world, thus expressing some trends found throughout the Buddhist tradition as a whole. Seen positively, the overall tenor of the story is that kindness to animals remains more spiritually rewarding than a place among the gods. This reflects a strength of the Buddhist tradition in terms of its general concern for animal welfare, especially for animals that are not used for human food. As an outcome of this strength, Kukkuripa finds that attending to empirical natural phenomena, rather than heavenly concerns, spiritually pays.

At the same time, though, the story embodies nature-friendly limits in terms of realizing Rolston’s sustainable biosphere. The dog in the tale is not an ordinary canine, the type that does not abruptly shape-shift into goddess form, so that the holy and wise dog in the story does not really elevate the positions of nonmagical dogs. Moreover, the component in which Kukkuripa
reaps benefit for himself, while not overtly a problem in this story, can be troublesome in other Buddhist venues, such as with those who carelessly release animals more for themselves than for the sakes of animals, as we have seen.

   Environmental tensions like these that are found in the tale of Kukkuripa encapsulate some of the ecological dilemmas that we have found throughout the Buddhist tradition. As I will describe more fully in this final chapter, multivalent Buddhist interactions with the nonhuman natural world especially influence Buddhist relationships with natural beings, environmental limitations in the climate change era, dietary propensities, spiritual experiences, and speculations about the possible religious talents of nonhuman beings.

Natural Persons in Buddhism

   A common feature of these diverse streams of attitudes toward nature, both in the story of Kukkuripa as well as in the larger Buddhist tradition, involves the extension of respectful personhood to nonhumans. Attending to these personhood moments reveals how nature religious elements, while sometimes arising from local religions, also percolate from within Buddhism itself, thus scuttling the old model of animism that held Buddhism and nature religion separate from each other.

   Reflecting this, personhood elements proliferate throughout the Buddha’s previous and final lives in terms of his friendly relationships with many beings such as elephants, lions, swans, nāgas, and trees. Attempting to emulate this example of the Buddha in various ways, in Sri Lanka Buddhists extend personhood reverence to trees, mountains, and a rice goddess as expressions of devotion, while forest monastics send lovingkindness to the snake and bear persons whom they feel need it. In Thailand trees become symbolic monks, and Buddhist
leaders compassionately traffic and beautify buffaloes, while dangerous undomesticated animals are tamed specifically through the extension of respectful personhood. Natural persons in China emerge as holy mountains, enlightened plants, or in the animal forms of Shaolin martial arts practice. Japanese Buddhists like Kūkai and Dōgen extend personhood respect so broadly that, for them, the entire natural world acts as a Buddhist preacher. Tibetans do not respect just their local mountain protector god, a practicing Buddhist, but also Tantric power mountain deities, while they share consciousness elements with a variety of nonhuman persons. Personhood relationships also drive concern for animals for Western Buddhists such as Bhikkhu Nyanasobhano and Philip Kapleau Roshi while they propel more ecocentric attitudes for Buddhists such as Stephanie Kaza and Gary Snyder.

Hence, this book’s examination of the world of Buddhism and nonhuman nature reveals that personhood elements within the Buddha’s biography later help to incite personhood nature religious impulses in the tradition as a whole, with these malleable impulses expressing themselves in a variety of canonical and noncanonical ways. Given the numerous respectful friendships that the Buddha shared with nonhuman persons, such manifestations of relational animism, although not always directly prescribed by the scriptures, make sense in a Buddhist universe when looked at from a personhood point of view. Hence one can appreciate the dynamic effectiveness of using a personhood-based relational animist model for investigating Buddhist relationships with nonhuman nature.

_Buddhist Environmentalism_  

Of course, sometimes Buddhists do not extend personhood respect to nonhumans and in these moments Buddhists may be at their least sustainable. While animal releases gone bad,
disappearing elephants in China, or clear-cut forests in Japan could provide examples of this point, perhaps most surprising along these lines to many readers of this book may be the practice of animal sacrifice, which appears in many places in the Buddhist world albeit on the margins of everyday practice. Animals to be sacrificed may be treated quite well while living, since one wants to offer the sacred the happiest and healthiest gift possible. But at the moment of sacrifice itself Buddhist sacrificers do not extend personhood respect to animals, or, if they do, the sense of personhood is not compelling in a way that admonishes adherence to the ahimsa precept.

In the case of animal sacrifices, an argument could be made that sacrificers commonly eat the meat, rendering animal sacrifice functionally no more animal-unfriendly than the routine slaughter for human food that occurs daily throughout much of the Buddhist universe. But this slaughter for the sakes of humans still provides a sharp limit to claims that can be made regarding Buddhism’s concern for animal welfare. Especial trouble arises in those moments that appear when the merging of slaughter and ahimsa go terribly wrong, such as with the distressingly slow killing of animals by suffocation enacted by Thai fishers, Tibetan pastoralists, and other Buddhists.

However, leaving the realities of sacrifices and human food sources aside, the tradition otherwise significantly provides a rather strong platform for animal welfare efforts. Sri Lankan Buddhism possesses a movement seeking the positive treatment of protected cattle, Thai Buddhists protect and beautify buffaloes, and by precept Chinese Buddhists may abjure eating animals. In Japan, Buddhists release animals with accompanying wishes for their happiness, while some Tibetans save animals from slaughter and a number of Western Buddhists attempt to follow suit. This Buddhist concern for animals, which is stronger than in some other religious traditions, arises from the ethic of ahimsa. But it arises as well from calls to extend compassion
and lovingkindness to animals, with these calls often being driven by personhood, even kin
personhood, sentiments. After all, numerous Buddhists from across sects insist that we must
treat animals, our loving family members from previous lifetimes, with kindness.

The compassionate concern for animals that sponsors Buddhist actions for animal
welfare, however, also imposes a limit on the tradition in terms of supporting a sustainable
biosphere, given that this attitude cannot, as it is, result in a viable environmental ethic that
attends to the complexities of ecosystems with many preying individuals. For most Buddhists,
notions of reincarnation result in the targeting of compassion toward animals but not toward
plants, minerals, or water, resulting in a limited biocentric orientation as a complementary
addition to Buddhism’s erstwhile anthropocentrism. This limited biocentric attitude substantially
lacks the ecocentric elements required by a full environmental ethic, which must recognize that
plant, mineral, and water resources, too, need to be valued in order to create ecosystem health, as
the environmentalist Arne Naess has written. 3

Moreover, despite the religion’s depiction of a broadly interconnected universe, Buddhist
compassion remains directed at individuals, creating difficulties when it comes to addressing
compassionate nonharm to the complexities of ecosystems which persist through constant
predation of some type. In this light the environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott states that
within genuine environmental ethics, it is foolish to conceive of organisms “apart from the field,
the matrix of which they are modes,” so that Buddhism’s almost exclusive attention to individual
animals within an ecosystem, rather than the ecosystem itself, fails to muster the resources of a
viable environmental ethic. 4 Due to its focus on individual animals, the same animal-friendly
components that may draw attention to Buddhism as a ecofriendly way of life also provide
obstacles to the development of full environmental thinking from within Buddhism itself despite
the doctrine of dependent arising. Perhaps this is why deforestation woes appear in every chapter of this book: it is not because Buddhism encourages animosity toward trees, but because Buddhism contains an implicit, if limited, admiration for agriculture and at the same time offers trees little defense against the economic desires of humans because of its limited biocentric approach, which focuses more on individual animals than it does on the habitats in which they reside.

Therefore, while Buddhism maintains many beautiful thoughts and practices that may lead to a sustainable biosphere, in order to produce an environmental ethic that is capable of responding to 21st century woes of ecosystems Buddhism needs help or must change. Buddhist notions of compassion will need to be refashioned to work beyond their individual-only focus, which means setting aside some customary precedents in thought and practice. Further, from the standpoint of many Buddhist systems, there is no point in extending compassion to or even considering much the realities of plants, minerals, and water. In response, to become more ecologically potent in itself, Buddhism requires a more ecocentric, less limited biocentric, focus.

Of course, as we have seen, ecocentric voices such as those of Dōgen do occur in the tradition. Nonetheless, a problem arises from the fact that ecocentric Buddhist formulations like Dōgen’s, based on the concept of dependent arising, often do not aid the navigation of difficult ecological choices, since they lead one to value everything equally. If everything must be valued because everything is connected to everything else, then we must value not just dogs and dolphins but also toxic waste and oil spills. That is, keeping a clean environment requires difficult choices, and a worldview that values all existents equally provides an unsteady platform for making these value-laden choices. Or, put differently, explicit and implicit claims that Buddhism represents an essentially ecological religion solely because of its stress on dependent
arising have been belied throughout this book. Instead, we find more evidence supporting a current environmental studies contention that when it comes to ecology, “knowledge and values alone do not prompt action,” and many Buddhist environmentalists, being overreliant on the doctrine of dependent arising, may fail to recognize this.5

When accomplished in a way that facilitates choices, though, ecocentric Buddhism could maintain its relatively animal-friendly voices while it broadens the environmental reach of Buddhist thought and practice. With the inspiration of the current generation of ecologically-minded Buddhists, perhaps the religion can adapt to overcome some of its environmental shortcomings. For instance, traditional notions of rebirth result in an ontological split between humans and animals on one side and the rest of the natural world on the other, thus leading to a worldview that is tilted more toward limited biocentrism than it is toward ecocentrism. But if Buddhism lessened its grip on traditional rebirth worldviews and instead adopted a more naturalistic approach, Buddhism could become more ecocentric and hence more capable when dealing with ecosystems.

Consider, for instance, that in traditional Buddhist rebirth beliefs, I cannot be reborn as a mineral. Looked at naturalistically, though, things appear differently. No matter the method of disposal of my corpse, the molecules in my bones and flesh eventually will recombine into other forms, including mineral formations, meaning that, naturalistically, I will in fact physically reincarnate, in a way, as minerals. Perspectives like this naturalism could inspire changes that result in the extension of positive Buddhist personhood sentiments much more broadly across the nonhuman world than to just humans and animals, perhaps leading in the direction of more universal senses of compassionate kinship, even with supposedly inanimate elements, expressed not just in theory but also in practice.
The essential Buddhist concept of dependent arising, for instance, can be enhanced with alternate mindfulness, intention, and flexibility so that it embraces human interactions with abiotic elements as robustly as it does human interactions with humans and other animals. Given that battling global warming means directing some ethical value to abiotic entities like gases and stones, Buddhism remains more environmentally potent in the climate change era if it can help us to value and navigate difficult decisions regarding abiotic ecologies. Hence, as with other religious environmental ethics, the future of Buddhist ethics involves the development of more wholesome ethical outlooks regarding beings considered to be nonliving. For instance, recently some American Buddhists have extended attitudes of nonharm specifically to abiotic landscapes on Mars, thereby opening the door for the tradition to innovate in terms of the greater valuation of abiotic ecologies within a dependent arising outlook.\(^6\)

Otherwise another part of the problem with the development of a sustainable Buddhist biosphere arises with the tradition’s myriad, and sometimes conflicting, conceptual approaches to the nonhuman world. For one example, animal sacrifice remains forbidden as evil but is not always beyond the pale if one must express one’s disaffections or keep a mountain god contented. Further, some Buddhist monastics stand practically side-by-side with others, with one group arguing for felling trees in the name of Buddhist development while the others petition against chopping trees, also for Buddhist reasons.

In order to slice through the theoretical conundrums residing within examples such as these, the scholar Seth Devere Clippard asserts that perhaps Buddhists would be more ecofriendly if they relatively deemphasized theory in developing ecoBuddhism and instead returned to the ground and focused on the practical. In exploring the world of Thai tree ordinations, Clippard states that tree ordination practitioners who begin with specific problems in designated
communities build a kind of ecofriendly Buddhist speech through empirical action and in so doing enjoy greater environmental success than do humans who follow more purely textual or doctrinal approaches.⁷ Stressing hands-on activities in concert with the nonhuman world, Clippard says, “The mixture of symbolism, rhetoric, and activism coming together in the ritual of ordination [of trees] makes the emergent discourse more effective in establishing a meaningful Buddhist environmental ethic.”⁸

Of course, a danger of Clippard’s practice-first approach involves a loss of anchor within Buddhism itself, in that nonBuddhist ideals and practices in Buddhist wrapping eventually may become fobbed off as the real coin. This is a serious obstacle, since a few of the best-known figures in today’s Buddhist environmentalism, both in Asia and in the West, have been deemed by some Buddhists as not sufficiently authentic, their Buddhism being considered diminished through admixture with other, nonBuddhist environmentalist elements. As a result, their voices sometimes sing beautifully to a small environmentalist choir but not to a wider Buddhist audience, perhaps with a concomitant loss of helpful lessons. Clippard recognizes this danger, saying that within practice-first approaches the scriptures still have a function in terms of theoretical guidance, thereby supplying a reliable anchorage in the teachings.⁹

Naturally, Clippard’s practice-first approach represents just one option, and one would think that Buddhists moving forward might develop other potentially positive strategies, too. Like all religions, Buddhism struggles to support consistent, wholesome human relationships with the natural world, but the tradition retains some useful tools and has the potential to develop new ones. Thus, even if not a full-scale ecofriendly religion today in terms of establishing a sustainable biosphere, Buddhism provides some possible resources for environmentalists everywhere. As the Buddhist environmental ethics scholar John J. Holder said, Buddhism “has
some important ideas to contribute to the current conversations on environmental ethics – especially among the scientific community where naturalism (not theism) is a common conceptual framework.\textsuperscript{10}

*Vegetarianism, Religious Practice, and Nature Mysticism*

Along with exploring some of Buddhism’s sustainability credentials, throughout this book I have probed three touchpoints for comparison: Buddhist vegetarianism, the practice of religion by animals and other natural beings, and nature mysticism. As for the vegetarian comparative touchpoint, the Buddhist personhood approaches that aid the creation of some sustainable practices, especially toward animals, also help to determine vegetarianism, or a lack of it, in the Buddhist world. In the Theravāda Buddhist universe, for example, it is easy to argue on the basis of personhood that one should not eat animals, since they were our kin in previous lives, and some Theravāda Buddhists make this argument. However, Theravāda scriptures do not deliver this plea as substantially as some Mahāyāna texts do. Instead, the Pāli scriptural Buddha and his disciples took meat-eating for granted, leaving meat a standard ingredient in many Theravāda Buddhist diets. Due to historical changes in Indian culture, however, some authoritative Mahāyāna sources that appeared later than the Theravāda texts, such as the *Nirvāṇa, Śūraṅgama,* and *Śikṣāsamuccaya Sūtras,* do make strong pleas for Buddhist vegetarianism based on a variety of factors, especially including personhood arguments. Perhaps the most influential among these is the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra,* which, in personhood fashion, implores Buddhists to avoid eating animals in part because they embody our parents from previous lives.
Indian Mahāyāna scriptural personhood arguments such as those of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra seem to have proven themselves insufficient in establishing much vegetarianism. For instance, they exist in Tibetan literature, yet to date they have affected only a minority of Tibetan vegetarians. Instead, in creating the greater vegetarian atmosphere that marks the world of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism and its offshoots, the role of the Chinese text Fanwangjing, with its own kin personhood arguments for vegetarianism, remains crucial. Armed with this document, the sixth century Chinese king Wu of Liang mandated vegetarianism among Buddhist monastics by government decree rather than decision by the religious community, and this ethic continues to reverberate throughout the East Asian Buddhism that stems from China. Wu of Liang’s vegetarian mandate therefore makes him one of the more influential Buddhists in history, even if his decree did not necessarily affect nonmonastics and perhaps has become a bit forgotten in China-influenced Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

The personhoods of natural entities that fuel some vegetarian pleas also lead in a different direction in which animals or other natural beings, in their own species-specific ways, are said to practice Buddhism. Of course, the mainstream of the tradition denies the ability of any being other than a human to practice Buddhism, like we saw clearly in Tibet’s Mani Kabum. However, numerous stories from across the Buddhist world including Tibet nonetheless indicate the spurious practice of religion by a broad array of natural entities. Animals frequently practice religion in jātaka tales and even winds, the moon, trees, and the earth expressed devotional grief at the Buddha’s passing. Buddhism was not established in Sri Lanka without the help of a sambar deer, a couple of holy elephants, and some rather remarkable pious trees. A variety of nonhuman spirits remain Buddhist practitioners themselves in Thailand, where insightful elephants may found monasteries and personally serve Buddhist monastics. Even plants practice
religion, according to the Chinese masters Jizang and Zhanran, as they do for the Japanese masters who think that all of nature constantly preaches like a monastic. Tibetan natural entities share souls with enlightened beings, and liberated animals receive teachings for the sakes of their future lives. Moreover, for ecocentric Western Buddhists like Kaza and Snyder, all beings in nature, even fictional natural beings like Smokey the Bear, practice religion like a Buddha. These instances in themselves, of course, do not establish rigorously that nonhuman beings practice Buddhism, deriving as they do from folk stories, scriptural proclamations, and philosophic speculations which sometimes complicate things by including anthropomorphic impulses. Nonetheless, with interest in the possible practice of religion by animals growing within the academic community, these examples could provoke further research.

As for the third comparative touchpoint of nature mysticism, those who describe Buddhism as essentially a form of nature mysticism may be disappointed by the results of this book, since nature mysticism may exist in many places in the Buddhist world but it does so at best on the margins. Buddhist nature mysticism seems to thrive particularly in China, where religious forms blend so much that it would be surprising if Buddhism did not team with some homegrown Chinese nature mysticism. Including but also beyond China, nature mysticism further appears in the imposition on the landscape of Vajrayāna scriptures and their associated mandalas, which represent the spiritual utopias and truths of deities. Although frequently found in two dimensions, mandalas inherently embody three-dimensional spiritual paradises, which Buddhists in China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, and other places affected by Vajrayāna Buddhism project onto revered mountains. In this way mountains become incarnate divine persons of sorts, and in communing with and traversing mountains, Buddhist practitioners attempt to directly experience Buddhist realities through nonhuman forms. Thus, Buddhist
nature mysticism appears to shine especially brightly in the light of Vajrayāna practices that
mandalize a landscape. Moon and Morning Star meditations add to this nature mystical mix in
Japan’s Shingon Buddhism and Shugendō, with these practices having arisen in combination
with some nonBuddhist Daoist and indigenous Japanese elements.

Interestingly, like we see with Kaza’s mystical experiences with trees, the contemporary
West provides another location for active Buddhist nature mysticism, one that does not
necessarily rely on Vajrayāna mandalization of the landscape. Perhaps this element of
sometimes vibrant nature mysticism, which helps to distinguish Western Buddhism from other
forms of the tradition, results from fewer traditional boundaries to thought and practice in the
West, where Buddhists have enjoyed some freedom to refashion the cultural clothing that
Buddhism wears. For example, the Transcendentalist writers of the nineteenth century such as
Thoreau and Emerson helped to integrate Buddhism culturally, and in their works Buddhism and
nature mysticism are not always held conceptually separate.

The notable presence of nature mysticism in Western Buddhism allows us to close the
circle on our exploration of Buddhism and nature. Nature mysticism involves a powerful,
extraordinary experience of nonduality with a nonhuman, and Shalipa, a later Indian Buddhist
saint, may have sought such an experience in a quite unusual way. Being of low caste, Shalipa
lived near a cemetery, and the howling of wolves in the home of the dead caused him
tremendous fear and anxiety. One day he met a Buddhist monk and Shalipa requested a practice
to generate fearlessness. The monk asked if Shalipa feared the sorrows of samsara, and Shalipa
replied that everyone fears samsara, but his own personal problem concerned his terror of
howling wolves. The monk then urged Shalipa to move to the center of the cemetery and to
“meditate unceasingly on the fact that all the various sounds of the world are identical to the
howl of a wolf.” Shalipa followed the monk’s advice and practiced for some time. Eventually he became free of his fear of wolf howls when “he realized that all sounds were inseparable from emptiness,” thereby producing “an unbroken state of great joy.” Meditating more until he realized full enlightenment, the eccentric Buddhist thereafter carried a wolf on his shoulders, earning him the name Shalipa, or Wolf-man.11

Luckily the Buddha did not prescribe the wearing of wolves like Shalipa donned, so that Buddhists can overlook that part of Shalipa’s example in favor of his greater lesson. Shalipa, deeply mired in what Buddhism considers to be false views regarding the natural world at first embodies a profoundly negative attitude toward wolves. Then, with the help of Buddhist practices he enriches his consciousness regarding the character of the universe and especially of wolves. In this way his negative attitude toward natural beings disappears, thus dramatically shifting the consciousness that he inhabits and sponsoring for him a sense of intimacy with wolves. Although Abhayadatta’s version of the story does not give a reason for Shalipa’s wearing of a wolf, one may imagine that he did so to cement his new-found sense of spiritual identity with wolves, not unlike some Native American usages of spirit animal talismans. But whether this last speculation is true or not, Shalipa shows Buddhists that even quite strong-rooted and problematic approaches to nonhuman nature can be overcome, perhaps inspiring Buddhists to look both within and outside of themselves in order to help to create worlds that remain more sustainable and friendly to humans and nonhumans alike.


8 Clippard, 217.

9 Clippard, 233-234.


11 Robinson, 96-97.
Ahimsa: Ahimsa represents the ethic of nonharm that appears in one form or another in all religions born in India. In Buddhism ahimsa marks the first of the Five Precepts. The ethic of ahimsa counsels the avoidance of physical, verbal, or emotional harm to or killing of other beings, including humans, animals, and, in the eyes of some Buddhists, perhaps other entities.

Anthropocentrism: Among the approaches to nature including biocentrism and ecocentrism, anthropocentrism provides a human-centered approach to nonhuman nature. With strong anthropocentrism, only humanity retains intrinsic value, and the rest of the natural world retains value only instrumentally, or in terms of its use for humans. Weak anthropocentrism intrinsically values humans and only instrumentally values other entities, with some exceptions, such as family pets.

Biocentrism: Among the approaches to nature including anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, biocentrism provides an approach to nonhuman nature that focuses on supposed living beings, such as animals and/or plants along with humans. With biocentrism, living beings retain intrinsic value, while entities perceived as nonliving remain valued only instrumentally. A great deal of animal rights discourse, which typically extends intrinsic value to animals, reflects biocentric perspectives. Plants often mark the border between limited biocentrism and full biocentrism, since sometimes plants are valued intrinsically as living beings (full biocentrism) while at other times they are not (limited biocentrism).
Bodhisattva: The bodhisattva ideal exists in all forms of Buddhism, although it is most emphasized in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna worlds. Bodhisattvas seek spiritual attainments not just for themselves, but also so that they may lead all others to nirvana first. In postponing their own nirvanic departure from samsara, bodhisattvas sacrifice themselves for the good of others, so their hallmark is compassion. Although ordinary humans may take the vow to become a bodhisattva, especially powerful bodhisattvas appear as mahāsattva celestial deities, such as the well-known Mahāyāna Pure Land deity Amitābha.

Buddha-nature: Found in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism, the doctrine of Buddha-nature asserts that existents such as humans, and perhaps animals, plants, or stones, already enjoy the qualities and capacities of a Buddha, with this ever-present spark of Buddhahood being known as tathāgata-garbha or Buddha-nature. Following this way of thinking, Buddhists conceptualize the religious path less as adding something to the practitioner and more as uncovering innate positive spiritual realities that currently remain hidden.

Dependent arising (Pāli: paṭicca-samuppāda, Sanskrit: pratītya-samutpāda): A fundamental doctrine of the Buddhist tradition, dependent arising describes a universe in which every existent remains interconnected with every other existent across time and space. Since all things arise as effects from one or more causes, and in turn become causes, nothing exists independently in either time or space, and all things thereby form a vast web of interrelations.
Dhamma (Pāli) or Dharma (Sanskrit): This multifaceted term is used in this book to refer to Buddhist teachings and practices, or to the Buddhist religion as a whole, much as Buddhists themselves may employ it at times. Following scriptural preferences, the Pāli form “Dhamma” arises more commonly in Theravāda universes, while the Sanskrit form “Dharma” finds employment in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna realms.

_Dukkha_: The Buddha taught that _dukkha_ represents one of the fundamental characteristics of the physical universe, along with _anicca_ (impermanence) and _anatta_ (no-self). Although it is often translated into English simply as “suffering,” _dukkha_ actually possesses a much broader meaning, since _dukkha_ encompasses ideas of imperfection, meaningless, instability, and suboptimality in all of their manifestations.

Ecocentrism: Among the approaches to nature including anthropocentrism and biocentrism, ecocentrism provides an approach to nonhuman nature that focuses value on an entire ecosystem, including existents that remain perceived both as animate and inanimate. With ecocentrism the entire natural world, including minerals and water, enjoys intrinsic value, and in its fullest version, nothing is valued only in terms of instrumental use by humans. A great deal of environmentalist discourse reflects ecocentric perspectives.

Five Precepts: These are fundamental injunctions against harming living beings (the ahimsa precept), taking what is not given, engaging in uncompassionate sexual behavior, false speech, and consuming intoxicants. In theory, all Buddhists, both lay and monastic, should adhere to the Five Precepts.
Jātakas: The jātakas represent a genre of Buddhist canonical literature that relates stories of the previous lives of the Buddha before his enlightenment, during which time he took birth in a variety of human and other animal bodies. Jātaka tales are often used in the Buddhist world to educate people about the religion, especially in terms of ethical ideals. Although they appear in a number of scriptures, most jātaka stories are collected together into 547 tales in the Khuddaka Nikāya section of the Pāli canon or 34 stories in Āryaśūra’s Sanskrit work Jātakamālā that is influential in the Mahāyāna world.

Mādhyamaka: Along with the Yogācāra school, the Mādhyamaka school represents one of the fundamental divisions of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy. Emerging from the work of the second century Indian writer Nāgārjuna, principles of this school include an emphasis on overcoming all forms of dualism. This results in a world view in which all existents are considered to be śūnya, or “empty,” meaning that all things, no matter how tangible or intangible, lack an abiding or individual essence.

Mahāsattva: A mahāsattva is an advanced bodhisattva who has accrued significant spiritual power despite remaining in samsara. The prominent deities of Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as the spirit of compassion Avalokiteśvara, are mahāsattvas.

Mahāyāna: Along with Theravāda and Vajrayāna, Mahāyāna represents one of the Three Vehicles, or major divisions, of Buddhism. The roots of Mahāyāna Buddhism may be traced to the last few centuries BCE in India, while Mahāyāna itself became a self-conscious movement,
based principally on Sanskrit language scriptures, in the early centuries CE. Mahāyāna approaches generally include greater emphasis on the bodhisattva ideal, the practice of Buddhism by lay people, and a more cosmic and less purely human understanding of the Buddha. Although global in reach today, Mahāyāna Buddhism can be most easily found in China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

Mandala: Used especially in Vajrayāna Buddhist worlds but also in Mahāyāna Buddhism, mandalas are two- or three-dimensional artistic representations of three-dimensional spiritual utopias, such as the abodes of various divine beings. Mandalas typically appear ornate, intricate, and colorful so that they may most effectively be employed by meditators, who intentionally contemplate their own presences in the sacred places that are depicted.

Mantra: A mantra is a holy phrase, usually derived from scriptures, that encapsulates holy power. By repeating the phrase over and over, you train your mind in the quality, such as compassion, represented by the sacred phrase. Further, there exists some belief that chanting mantras karmically can alter happenings in the phenomenal world, so that, for instance, chanting mantras for compassion can increase compassionate outcomes.

Mettā: One of the four brahmavihāras, or Four Immeasurables, of Buddhist teachings. Mettā, or lovingkindness, represents the sincere wish to bring happiness to others and should be radiated to all humans and other animals, all living beings including plants, or all existents, depending on who is preaching. Mettā is said to be able to dispel anger and hate both within oneself and within others.
Nāga: A being who is at once a serpent, a shape-shifter with serpentine default form, and a spiritual charismatic. Nāgas appear in the Indian scriptures of all three great sects of Buddhism while they also possess rough counterparts in the pre-Buddhist folk traditions of many Buddhist locations, like one finds with the dragons of China. Frequently understood to be humanlike in many ways and often artistically represented as such, nāgas in Indian Buddhism often were renowned for their spiritual accomplishments, genuine devotion to the Buddha and his teachings, associations with hidden treasures, and abilities to bring rain.

Nature mysticism: A powerful altered state of consciousness experience of human nonduality specifically with a nonhuman natural entity within a physical human habitat, with this experience significantly lacking in dimensions of time and space and possessing a sensory or emotive quality, although perhaps unlike ordinary senses and emotions.

Nirvana (Pāli: nibbāna, Sanskrit: nirvāṇa): This is the goal experience of Buddhism as described by the Third Noble Truth. Meaning something like “extinction,” nirvana denotes the eradication of the three poisons of attachment, aversion, and ignorance, and thus, the end of dukkha unsatisfactoriness. Nirvana may also be understood as the direct experience of no-self or the deepest experience of dependent arising.

No-self (Pāli: anatta, Sanskrit: anātman): One of the three fundamental characteristics of the universe along with impermanence and dukkha, the notion of no-self denies that humans (and perhaps other existents) possess selves that are continuous in time or separate in space. Ordinary
forms of experienced selfhood deceive, since they imply an abiding essence that in Buddhism does not exist. Because of the essenceless nature of things, Buddhism generally rejects soul concepts, although due to various conditions such concepts nonetheless sometimes still manifest in universes in which Buddhism appears.

Pāli scriptural canon: Also known as the Tipiṭaka or Three Baskets, the Pāli canon represents the essential scriptural resource that is shared more or less the same across the Theravāda Buddhist realm. Three sections divide the canon into the Vinaya-piṭaka, or rules for monastics; the Sutta-piṭaka, or sermons of the Buddha; and the Abhidhamma-piṭaka, or philosophical discourses. The Tipiṭaka was composed in Pāli in the last few centuries BCE.

Refuge in the Three Jewels: The ritual of refuge often is taken to indicate formal acceptance of Buddhism and entry into the tradition. In this ritual, one expresses taking refuge in the person of the Buddha; in the collection of his teachings, or Dharma; and in the community of Buddhists, or sangha. Hence the Buddha, Dharma, and sangha remain known collectively as the Triratna, which may be translated as something like Three Jewels or Triple Gem.

Relational animism: Relational animism consists of a form of belief and/or practice in which nonhuman entities relationally are experienced as persons in their own rights, with respect accorded to their specific agencies through linguistic, ritual, or other interactions.

Samsara: Samsara represents the Buddhist universe in which rebirth takes place. Realms of rebirth appear on a spectrum from the highest realm, the god or deva realm, manifesting the least
suffering, to the lowest realm, hell or niraya, which presents the most suffering. Above hell in ascending order exist rebirths as a ghost or peta (Sanskrit: preta), an animal, a human, and, in some common six-tier systems, a fighting demi-god (asura) world just above the human realm and below the highest realm, that of the pleasure-enjoying deva gods.

Sangha: One of the Three Refuges along with the Buddha and his teachings, the sangha consists of the community of monastics or the community of all Buddhists, depending on context.

Sanskrit scriptural canon: Also known as the Tripitaka or Three Baskets, the Sanskrit canon represents the essential scriptural resource for the Mahāyāna Buddhist realm as well as a scriptural resource for Vajrayāna Buddhism, which grew out of Mahāyāna circles. Although Sanskrit scriptures contain much of the material that is found in the Pāli scriptures of Theravāda Buddhism, for various reasons the Sanskrit scriptures further offer some alternative doctrines from the Pāli scriptures, such as tathāgata-garbha Buddha-nature theory. Different Mahāyāna Buddhist locations possess varying collections of texts, or, in the cases of ubiquitous scriptures like the Lotus and Laṅkāvatāra Sūtras, emphasize textual alternatives in varying fashions. The Tripitaka was composed in Sanskrit starting perhaps in the last century BCE.

Tantra: Please see the glossary entry for Vajrayāna.

Theravāda: Along with Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, Theravāda represents one of the Buddhist Three Vehicles or major divisions. Theravāda stresses adherence to the Pāli canon and relatively emphasizes a human-like Buddha and the high place of monastics compared to some other
Buddhist systems. Although Theravāda may be discovered globally, concentrations of Theravāda Buddhists can be found in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia.

_Trikāya:_ The _trikāya_ or Three Body theory of Mahāyāna Buddhism asserts that the phenomenal universe, or alternatively the Buddha, may be regarded from three points of view that are simultaneously true. A _nirmānakāya_ appearance emerges as a physical form body, like the material body of the Buddha who lived in India 2,500 years ago. From another point of view, the _dharmakāya_, the universe manifests as ultimate reality, nirvana, or empty of inherent existence. The _sambhoghakāya_ body mediates the two other perspectives in blurring form and ultimate truth while it provides the point of view from which humans regard powerful _mahāsattva_ beings like the bodhisattva of wisdom Mañjuśrī.

_Vajrayāna:_ One of the Buddhist Three Vehicles or major divisions, Vajrayāna, also known as Tantra, exhibits Mahāyāna influences while supplying a path to nirvana that is said to be quicker. Based on scriptures called _tantras_ as well as the Mahāyāna Sanskrit scriptural canon, Vajrayāna was the last of the three great sects to develop in India and today can be found most centrally in Tibet and Mongolia, although Vajrayāna outposts exist in many places worldwide, including within Kūkai’s Japanese Shingon Buddhism of Chapter Six.

_Vinaya:_ Existing in many versions that differ according to time and place, the _Vinaya_ provides the essential ethical, practical, and living codes for Buddhist monastics.
Yogācāra: One of the most important schools of Mahāyāna philosophy, Yogācāra systematizes meditative experiences into a view in which phenomenal reality arises as a perception of mind. Empirical existents lack solidity in this view since they are created by the mind on the basis of various predispositions.