

Inherited Buddhists and Acquired Buddhists

Suwanda H.J. Sugunasiri

*Suwanda H.J.
Sugunasiri*

Abstract

The face of Buddhism in the West has come to be diverse and complex, going beyond the traditional geographic and/or ethnocultural boundaries. Pointing out the 'descriptive inadequacy' of the current labeling such as, e.g., 'Ethnic Buddhist' and 'Western Buddhist', this paper suggests an alternative terminology, 'Inherited Buddhist' and 'Acquired Buddhist', using four criteria: choice, exposure, knowledge and motivation. In addition to Buddhism, it draws upon studies in language acquisition, intelligence and spirituality. It is suggested that if the proposed terminology may be applicable to other lands and other times in relation to Buddhism, it may also be applicable to other religious communities.

*Nalanda College
of Buddhist
Studies; University
of Toronto*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Who is an "ethnic Buddhist"? This is the label that has come to be used most commonly in academic circles and in everyday discourse to designate those among North American Buddhists residing in the U.S. and Canada who have emigrated from Asian lands. Distinct from them are native-born North Americans who have embraced Buddhism and have come to be called variously "Euro-Buddhists" (Prebish, 1998), "White Buddhists" (Fields, 1986), "Western Buddhists" (*Tricycle*), "(North) American converts," "New Buddhists," and the like.

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It is this terminology used to identify and label Buddhists that we intend to explore in this paper, primarily in the context of North America, but with possible applications elsewhere in the English-speaking world. We shall examine how the present labeling falls short in terms of what may be called *descriptive inadequacy*. A rose by any other name may still smell sweet, but “slippery” concepts like religion, with its vague, abstract and variable meanings, call for more precision. Hence the attempt here to work out a more suitable terminology.¹

The first part (section 2) of the paper will be devoted to an exploration of the inadequacy of the prevailing terminology, “ethnic” and “Euro-Buddhists”; the next part (section 3) to the formulation of a proposed alternative terminology; and the following (section 4) to an application of the new nomenclature to the two types of Buddhists, the so-called “ethnic” and “Euro-Buddhists.”

2. A BASIC TYPOLOGY OF NORTH AMERICAN BUDDHISTS

We begin by seeking to understand just who it is that falls under the label “North American Buddhist.” To aid us in our exploration we provide a broad typology under three headings: Geographic Heritage, Spiritual Heritage and Cultural Heritage.

	I	II	III
TYPE	GEOGRAPHIC HERITAGE	SPIRITUAL HERITAGE	CULTURAL HERITAGE
X 1	East Asia	Buddhism	Sinic
2	Central Asia	Buddhism	Indo-Sinic
3	South Asia	Buddhism	Indic
4	Southeast Asia	Buddhism	Sinic
Y 1	North America	Christianity, H/ACR	Euro-American
2	North America	Christianity, H/ACR	Afro-American
3	North America	Judaism, H/ACR	Mid. Eastern-Euro-Am
4	North America	Native spirituality, H/ACR	Native-American

Chart 1: A Basic Typology of North American Buddhists along Geographic, Spiritual and Cultural Heritages

Types X and Y in the first column of the Chart broadly stand for respectively Ethnic-Buddhists² and Euro-Buddhists. We use the term “heritage” in its literal meaning: what one inherits by, or at, birth.³ The term “Cultural Heritage”—what one inherits culturally—is already part of our everyday and academic vocabulary. “Geographic Heritage” is an extension of this concept, simply the place of one’s birth, but again, inherited.

“Spiritual Heritage” is a further extension, the idea here being that, as in the case of language (for example, mother tongue), one is born

into the religion or the spirituality of the parents. This is independent of whether one is initiated into the religion formally (for example, through baptism in Christianity) or not at all (for example, in Buddhism). It is applicable as well regardless of any subsequent change in one's religion/spirituality.

We prefer "Spiritual Heritage" to "Religious Heritage" in order to be more inclusive of two additional groups that do not usually come under the latter label: those of a religious or spiritual orientation who may have dropped out of formal religion,⁴ and those of a secular spirituality, such as non-atheistic Humanism (H) or what Robert Bellah calls, in the context of the U.S., the "American Civil Religion" (ACR) (see lines Y1 to Y4). But we would resist the argument that they are for that reason not "spiritual."

The order of the listing of 1 to 4 within Type X (East, Central, South and Southeast Asia), under heading I (Geographic Heritage), roughly reflects the chronological order in which Buddhism arrived in, and/or impacted upon, North America.⁵ Under heading III (Cultural Heritage), Sinic (Type X1): for example, stands for East Asian Buddhism geographically speaking, with religio-cultural roots in China. But in the context of North America, it is represented by Japanese Zen Buddhism, the very first variety to make its entry into the U.S., through Hawaii, beginning in the 1850s (Fields), and Jodo Shin-shu in Canada at the turn of the century (Burnet; Watada⁶), even though today Chinese Buddhism, which made its entry much later (around the late sixties in Canada, for example),⁷ far outweighs Japanese Buddhism of all varieties (for example, Zen, Jodo Shin-shu, Soka Gakkai⁸).⁹ We may note that this variety also includes Korean Zen Buddhism, especially in Canada.

Indo-Sinic (X2, characteristic III) stands for Tibetan Buddhism (of the Central Asian Geographic Heritage),¹⁰ which began to take hold in the U.S. around the 1960s as Tibetan teachers arrived in the United States and Canada in significant numbers,¹¹ following the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1950. Today, of course, it has, *as a practice*, overtaken Zen Buddhism in North America, even though Buddhists of Tibetan origin in North America continue to be very few in number.

Indic (X3) stands for Indian, or early Buddhism, but the Geographic Heritage is shown here as South Asia, not only because there is no Buddhism as such to speak of in India,¹² since its annihilation by Islamic invaders (6th-11th centuries,¹³ but also because there are several other countries in the region in which Buddhism continues to be a living tradition, Sinhalese Buddhism (Sri Lanka), of course, being the most

representative.¹⁴ Indian, Bangla Deshi and Nepali Buddhist traditions round out the Indic geographic group.

Line X4 stands for North American Buddhists whose Geographic Heritage is Southeast Asia, which includes the major communities of Burmese, Campuchians, Laotians and Thai, all having arrived in North America in the 1980s.¹⁵ Their Buddhism being primarily of the Theravada tradition, rather than the Mahayana, even though their Cultural Heritage is Sinic, calls for a separate listing.

Unlike Type X Buddhists who all share a common Spiritual Heritage, Type Y Buddhists hail from three different Spiritual Heritages, not counting the common Humanist/American Civil Religionist association. These are the Christian, Jewish and Native American traditions. The distinction between Y1 and Y2 is based on the divergent cultural heritages (Euro- compared to Afro-). Historically speaking, while Type Y1 has been associated with Buddhism for over a century and a half, it is only in the last decade or so that Type Y2 has been associated with Buddhism. Their most visible presence is in Sokka Gakkai International, itself new in North America in its present manifestation.

Y3 represents Jewish-Buddhists, or Jubu's as they are fondly called (Kamanetz, 1994), who are particularly well represented in leadership roles in North American Buddhism.¹⁶ They are also different from type Y1 Buddhists in an important respect since, even though they have eschewed their Judaic Spiritual Heritage, they mostly retain their Jewish¹⁷ Cultural Heritage.¹⁸

Y4 stands for North American Buddhists of a Native Spiritual Heritage, and/or a mixed Native-Christian (and/or again ACR/Humanist), as for example, Latin-Americans in the U.S.

It is to be noted that the chart portrays a *basic* typology, for there are other "mixed" types of North American Buddhists (to be referred to later). However, among them are all those who walk a dual path—for example, those who call themselves "Christian-Buddhist," (or "Buddhist-Christian"),¹⁹ Buddhism, as a colleague would put it,²⁰ for "inner peace," and a Christianity for "social action." Another example of this mixed type would be Native-Buddhists.²¹ These mixed types are different from Jewish Buddhists because one comes to retain *both* the spiritual and the cultural dimensions of *both* of the influencing religions. Then there are the offspring of Type X Buddhists who, like Type Y, would have not only an inherited North American Geographic Heritage but also a mixed (North Americanized) European Cultural Heritage.

With this understanding of who North American Buddhists are, we can now look at the terms "Ethnic" and "Euro-" as applied to

Buddhists living in North America.

3. DESCRIPTIVE INADEQUACY

3.1 *The Descriptive Inadequacy of “Ethnic-Buddhist”*

Before we come to the more formalized meaning of the term “ethnic,” we need to look at three informal or associative definitions, which are, as we shall see, all rooted in its formal denotation. They are *non-native* to the geographic region (i.e., immigrant, see characteristic I of our chart), *non-majority* (i.e., minority), and by implication (*non-white*) *non-European* (characteristic III).²²

Putting these three criteria together in the chart, we can arrive at a preliminary definition of an “Ethnic-Buddhist” in the North American context: in *negative* terms, an “Ethnic-Buddhist” is *someone of a non-majority community of a non-native Geographic Heritage and non-European Cultural Heritage*. Or in *positive* terms, an “Ethnic-Buddhist” is *someone of a minority immigrant community who is of an Asian Cultural Heritage*.

Either of these definitions would have had a tight fit prior to 1893, when Charles T. Strauss, a New York Jewish businessman, became the first North American “to be admitted to the Buddhist fold on American soil.”²³ However, as we shall see, neither definition can do justice to the present day reality of the North American Buddhist.

“**Non-native**” (negatively), or “immigrant” (positively), for example, aptly characterizes any of Type X (lines 1-4) Buddhists of Sinic, Indo-Sinic and Indic Cultural Heritages. But at least two other types would be immediately excluded. First is type Y4, for these persons would fall under the characteristic of “ethnic” by both of the other two criteria (Native spiritual and Cultural Heritages), but not the immigrant criterion. Then there is the mixed type (and hence not shown in the chart). This latter would be the offspring of Type X Buddhists, who would also qualify as “ethnic” under criterion III, but, being born in North America, would not under characterization I. It may even be that their Cultural Heritage is not exclusively that of their parents, but would also be of the (North Americanized) European. They may, under peer and social pressure in a secular society, not even own up to their Spiritual Heritage of Buddhism (II), but may recover it as adults. In this regard they would not be distinguished from Type Y Buddhists of Euro-Spiritual Heritage who come to Buddhism in their adult life by conscious choice. These two types, then, would not clearly qualify as “ethnic” under the criterion of non-native/immigrant.

The designation of ethnic as “**minority**” would be an accurate

characterization of all Type X (1-4) Buddhists relative to the total North American population, taking Canada and the U.S. separately or together. All of them put together constitute a mere fraction of the population.²⁴ So would Y4 (Native American) Buddhists. But what do we do with Type Y2 Buddhists—Afro-American Cultural Heritage—who, like their Y1 (Euro-American) counterparts, come from a Christian and/or ACR/Humanist Spiritual Heritage, but are also a minority in comparison with the Y1 type? They, too, then, would be “ethnic” not only because they are a minority numerically, more so in Canada than in the U.S.²⁵ in respect to the majority Euro-population, but also because their numbers are few even within the Buddhist community.

But Type Y1 (Buddhists of Christian (ACR/H) Spiritual Heritage) itself poses problems. They, as Buddhists, are a minority not only in relation to the total North American population, but also the Type X (1 to 4) Buddhists, who, all told, is estimated to be higher than the number of Y1 Buddhists in the U.S.²⁶ Canada²⁷ put together. Would not such a minority status render them “ethnic” too?

Categorizing Y3 Buddhists, of a Judaic Spiritual Heritage, poses a similar issue. Jews, even counting the two types – those who have embraced a Buddhist Spiritual Heritage fully and those who have retained their original Judaic one—are a minority not only in the U.S. but worldwide. So Jewish Buddhists, as a minority, would squarely qualify as ethnics, even though in our chart, they are designated “Euro-Buddhists.”

Finally, even though Type X Buddhists are a minority in North America, that is hardly the case globally where Asians, of which Type X Buddhists are a sub-category, far outnumber Europeans. Even if Buddhists, Asian or otherwise, are fewer in number than Christians globally, they are certainly more numerous than those of a Judaic Spiritual Heritage, that is, Type Y2 Buddhists.²⁸

So for the above reasons, Type Y1 and Y3 Buddhists too would indeed be “Ethnic-Buddhists” in the informal sense of a minority.

The final informal meaning of ethnic as “[non-White] **non-European**” also would fit Type X1-4 Buddhists by virtue of their socio-cultural heritage. But so would Type Y4 (Native American). Yet by virtue of their Geographic Heritage they do not qualify as “ethnics.”

Y3 has its own array of problems. If in the future there were to be a “North American Afro-Jew”²⁹ who would become Buddhist, then we would be faced with the same theoretical problem: would s/he be ethnic because of the cultural heritage (African) and minority status, or Euro-because of the Judaic spiritual and North American Euro- Cultural Heritage? Further, would we not have to consider that Judaic spirituality is as much Middle Eastern as it is European?

So taken in its three informal senses, “Ethnic-Buddhists” is problematic because it both excludes and includes, and thus obfuscates, rendering it virtually useless as a descriptive term.

But how does a more formalized understanding of the term “ethnic” fare? The 1964 edition of *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, for example, defines it in the following words: “[of nations or]... groups that are neither Christian nor Jewish.”³⁰ While, as we shall see, this indeed comes to be modified in later editions, this historical understanding throws much light on our discussion, since, it clearly reflects the view held by both scholarship and the body politic of the time (of both the “New World” and the “Old World”), before the complexities discussed in this paper emerged. It may be surmised that this is a view that continues to be held by the average North American, particularly the conservative and the rural.”³¹

On the surface, the definition looks clean. Type X Buddhists are “neither Christian nor Jewish” in terms of their Spiritual Heritage. But we are faced with a problem when we come to Type Y1 to Y3 Buddhists. Although they are, for sure, of an *original* Christian or Jewish Spiritual Heritage, they are no longer such after becoming Buddhist, partially or totally!

Embracing Buddhism means not a mere switching of allegiance, say from Christ or Moses to the Buddha, nor a mere adopting of different rituals, say from “praying” to “paying homage,”³² but a change in one’s very belief system, view of the universe, view of reality, life-style and outlook. Instead of praying to the Christian Trinity, for example, one begins to pay homage to the Triple Gem of the Buddha, Dhamma (Teachings) and Sangha,³³ and/or practice meditation. In terms of a worldview, there is no belief that one was created by God, any more than the universe was created (singularly). The linearity and uni-causality of Judeo-Christianity, beginning with a first cause, is replaced by a “conditioned co-origination” (*paticca samuppāda*) causality, which explains the existence of any phenomenon in terms of, not a first cause, but the presence of a multiplicity of co-arising conditions.³⁴ Compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*paññā*), for example, guide the outlook and way of life, deepening, replacing or overriding (Christian) love (*agape*).

The same point can be made in relation to Type Y3 Buddhists (Jewish Cultural Heritage). The designation “Jewish” may mean to Jewish scholars, rabbis and even to the average Jew on the street *both* a spiritual and a cultural heritage, and “once a Jew, always a Jew,” may be an appealing political slogan. But Jewish-Buddhists will tell us that they are every inch (fibre, cell) Buddhist, not Judaic by *Spiritual Heritage*, though certainly Jewish by *Cultural Heritage*. And their leadership roles

in North America Buddhism have already been noted (above).³⁵ So, since they have also embraced significant elements of Buddhist culture (again by definition), they are at least “Buddhist-Jewish” (“Jubu” capturing this well), and not purely Jewish, even culturally.

In all these, then, a North American of a Christian Spiritual Heritage (Afro- or Euro-), or Jewish heritage, upon becoming Buddhist, is all too similar to Type X Buddhists, spiritually and psychologically, if not also sociologically.³⁶ This then literally means that Type Y1 to 3 are no longer “of a group that [is] neither Christian nor Jewish”.

In other words, they come to be, by definition, ethnic!

But what about Buddhist-Christians or Christian-Buddhists, the mixed type not in the chart? Again, they too come to adopt, if only partially, what someone who has totally “gone over” to another spirituality has³⁷.

To reiterate, then, descriptively the label “ethnic Buddhist,” under the historical definition, fails by both excluding and including.

We have now seen that the term “ethnic” is applicable to both X and Y type Buddhists. This in fact is precisely how the term is defined in sociological literature. The sociologist Isajiw (1970), for example, defines an ethnic group simply as “an involuntary group of people who share the same culture”³⁸—a definition also confirmed by more recent dictionaries.³⁹ Reflecting this sociological characterization, *Webster’s* gives a second definition, expanding upon the term “culture”: “...any of the basic divisions or groups of mankind distinguished by customs, characteristics, *language*, etc.”⁴⁰

We have argued how Type Y Buddhists share with Type X Buddhists “customs” and “characteristics,” understood in terms of ritual, belief system, view of the universe, view of reality, etc. If they do not share a “language,” the final component in the definition, as their only tongue or mother tongue, some, if not most, do begin to learn and use one or more of the “languages of Buddhism”—classical ones such as Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese or Tibetan, or living ones such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Sinhalese, Thai, Tibetan, etc.—for any number of reasons. Some simply want to get into their chosen variety of Buddhism more deeply, even becoming, as noted, teachers and/or scholars themselves, in North America or other western countries. Then there are the others who choose to live among Buddhists in an Asian setting, such as in Dharmasala (Tibetan), India, Japan, Sri Lanka or Thailand. They often become so adept in the language and culture, that they end up as translators to Asian masters, translators of Buddhist texts, and so on.⁴¹ Then there is what Charles Prebish (1998) calls the “silent *sangha*” —academics who *also*

become practitioners, who learn one or more original classical language of Buddhism and become as proficient in the language as their academic/practitioner counterparts of Asian origin.

No longer being “of a group that [is] neither Christian nor Jewish” in terms of customs, characteristics and language, then, Types Y1 to Y3 Buddhists become, both by Isajiw’s and Webster’s definitions, “ethnic Buddhists,” regardless of their original heritage—geographic, spiritual or cultural! With Type X Buddhists also being “ethnic” by the same definitions, we can only conclude that *everybody* is an “Ethnic Buddhist”!⁴² The label therefore must be deemed to be totally inadequate descriptively.

3.2 . *The descriptive inadequacy of “Euro-Buddhist” (and its alternatives)*

If there are problems with the label “ethnic” to identify Type X Buddhists, equally unsatisfactory are the labels used for Type Y Buddhists - “White Buddhists,” “(North) American Buddhists,” “Western Buddhists,” “(North American) converts,” “New Buddhists,” and lastly “Euro-Buddhists.”

What renders “White Buddhist” immediately problematic are Y2 Buddhists. Similar to the Y1 type—North American in Geographic Heritage, and Christian, American Civil Religionist or Humanist in Spiritual Heritage—they are nevertheless of an Afro-American Cultural Heritage, adding also elements of North American European. We would have the same problem with another category, a mixed one (not in the chart): Buddhists of a South American “Latino” heritage (that is, mixed European and Native Indian) who are not necessarily “white,” and would likely be equally small in number as Y2 Buddhists.

“(North) American Buddhist” runs into immediate difficulty, even if we were to expand it to include, as we have defined above, *both* Canadians and Americans. Who exactly do we mean? Only Type Y Buddhists who were born here but became Buddhists in later life? We have already talked about those of the second generation of Type X Buddhists (not in the chart), also born in North America, but of parents born elsewhere, and so well-schooled and enculturated in North America, that talking over the phone, for example, one would never guess they were anything but North American born! To consider them—offspring of Type X Buddhists—to be not “North American” would surely be to fall back on a dated concept of nationality modeled on the Hebraic concept of “one nation, one God, one people.”

The same could be true, however, in relation to the first

generation of Type X Buddhists as well. The conundrum can be shown with an example from a different discipline—literature. Novelists such as Salman Rushdie (of Indian origin) in relation to Britain, Michael Ondaatje (of Sri Lankan origin) and Rohinton Mistry (of Indian origin) as Canadians, and Bharati Mukherjee (of Indian origin) in relation to the U.S., are all of a non-western Cultural Heritage, and hence “ethnic” by the above definitions. But they, literary award winners all, and recipients of national and international acclaim, have come to be recognized as British, Canadian and American writers respectively.⁴³ What nation would, after all, begrudge a little fame? To transpose the point to religion and spirituality, then, would Type X Buddhists who come to gain recognition in their adopted land, not be claimed as North American? Or indeed, how about those who have lived the better part of their adult lives in North America, and perhaps even rediscovered their Buddhist roots only after arriving in North America? Should they not qualify as “North American Buddhists”? After spending the better part of their lives in North America, they, like their offspring, in fact, may have no other land to call their own!

The term “Western Buddhist” would surely run into the same difficulties as its sub-category “North American Buddhist.” As generally understood, the term means those native to a western nation (in the chart, a western Geographic Heritage). But surely Type Y2 (Afro-Buddhists) and second generation Type X Buddhists who know of no other land or culture, nor are of a Euro-heritage, would qualify as well.

The term “convert”—as in “(North American) convert”, “new convert” or “convert to Buddhism”—would be misleading for more than one reason. It is hardly descriptive of the process of becoming Buddhist. Type Y Buddhists have come to Buddhism of their own freewill,⁴⁴ not “converted.” The Buddha puts his dharma on a footing of *ehi passika*, “come and see.” At best, the appropriate label for Type Y Buddhists may be “new-comers,” but a term far too general! To call them “converts” therefore would be both to insult their intelligence and to misrepresent Buddhism. But on another score, if the term is indeed applicable to Type Y Buddhists, it would be equally applicable to Type X Buddhists—the second generation who rediscovers the religion of their parents, and the first generation who may have become Christian in their own land (China, Korea, Vietnam, etc.), but who renounces or forsakes it in North America in favour of Buddhism.

How about the designation “New Buddhist”? This may come closest in terms of objectivity in one sense, if “new” is meant either in the chronological sense or in relation to the Spiritual Heritage of one’s birth.

But this runs into problems when we consider that some Type Y Buddhists may have been Buddhists for well over two or three decades, longer than perhaps some of the second generation Type X Buddhists, who *rediscover* their Buddhism (lost to acculturation on North American soil) later in life. They may even be raising their offspring as Buddhists!

And if raised Buddhist from birth by Type Y Buddhist parents, such offspring can hardly be said to be a “new Buddhist”!

The second generation of Type X Buddhists, that is, those who *rediscover* their Buddhism on North American soil, pose the contrary problem. On the one hand, they would appear to be “New Buddhists” alongside Type Y Buddhists who have been practitioners for decades. On the other hand, it would not be accurate to call this group “new Buddhists,” since they would have been *culturally* Buddhist all their lives, but are merely religiously “new” to Buddhism.⁴⁵ Such complications would then dramatically blur the “Euro-Ethnic” divide again!

There is yet another complication. The term “new” may also suggest a lack of depth of understanding or a lack of commitment on the part of Type Y Buddhists.⁴⁶ Nothing could be further from the truth. Like anyone who has discovered something new, they often bring a deeper and vibrant interest and commitment that would easily surpass that of the average Type X Buddhist, simply born into, but not necessarily deeply Buddhist in their life. We recall again the many Type Y Buddhists who hold leadership positions in North American Buddhism to remind ourselves of their deep commitment, interest and knowledge.

What finally of the “Euro-Buddhist”? This certainly would fit Y1 type Buddhists, but would be limited to such. Closest to them would be Y3 Buddhists, of Judaic Spiritual Heritage. But just as Type Y3 may claim a European heritage, they may and do equally and legitimately claim a Middle Eastern Cultural Heritage as well. While Y2 type Buddhists of an Afro-Geographic Heritage, could lay claim to a Euro-Cultural Heritage, by virtue of their being North Americanized, they (or at least the more historically minded among them) could just as well claim an Afro-heritage, despite being (North) Americanized. Finally, the label Euro-Buddhist does not distinguish between Type Y Buddhists living in a North Americanized Euro-culture, and those in an exclusive “mother” Euro-culture of a European Geographic Heritage (that is, those actually living in Europe)—say, the UK. “Euro-Buddhist” may suggest a people of a European Geographic Heritage, while the population in question is unquestionably of North American origin.

As our exploration indicates, then, the label “Euro-Buddhist,” and its alternatives, with respect to Type Y Buddhists, suffer from

descriptive inadequacy, just as much as “ethnic- Buddhist,” in relation to Type X Buddhists.

**4. INHERITED BUDDHISTS AND ACQUIRED BUDDHISTS:
AN ALTERNATIVE TERMINOLOGY**

4.1 Characterization

If there is one characteristic that marks Type X Buddhists, it is that they all have *inherited* their Buddhism. Like their mother tongue, culture, or perhaps even economic status, they had no say in the matter! So they could simply be called “Inherited Buddhists” (IB’s hereafter). This would well fall within Isajiw’s (sociological) definition of ethnicity (cited above) as an “involuntary group.” By contrast, Type Y Buddhists can be said to have *acquired* their Buddhism voluntarily, by conscious choice.⁴⁷ They have acquired it much like wealth, status, or position, through conscious effort. So it would be appropriate to call them “Acquired Buddhists” (AB’s). To understand the distinction by way of a preliminary analogy, in the case of an IB, Buddhism would be a fruit that fell on the lap of someone simply sitting under a tree, while an AB would be one who looks for it, and even goes up the tree in search of it!

But to explore the distinction further, we outline below (Chart II), quite tentatively pending further research,⁴⁸ four criteria that seem to help distinguish Inherited Buddhists (Type X in our earlier schema) from Acquired Buddhists (Type Y): *choice, exposure, knowledge* and *motivation*.

We begin with **choice**, as perhaps the most distinguishing feature that separates an IB from an AB. Type X Buddhists, as noted, have all *inherited* their Buddhism, at/by birth/conception. But this would be more as in the case of one’s mother tongue than one’s ethnicity, a point we shall consider in relation to religion in general before applying to Buddhism.

While inherited physiological markers of ethnicity, such as skin colour and facial features, are there to stay throughout one’s life (plastic surgery notwithstanding!), a mother tongue, also inherited, may not necessarily be so. Indeed, it is entirely possible that the language first spoken by a child may be other than the one inherited from the parents (as

		INHERITED BUDDHIST	ACQUIRED BUDDHIST
1	CHOICE	involuntary	voluntary
2	EXPOSURE	natural	accidental
3	KNOWLEDGE	oral/aural, affective	literary, cognitive
4	MOTIVATION	integral	instrumental

Chart 2: Some contrastive characteristics of Inherited Buddhists and Acquired Buddhists

for example, in the case of an orphaned or adopted child). In later life, living in a different cultural milieu, one may even lose one's mother tongue entirely, lose a measure of competence in it, or acquire one or more other languages (as is common for example, in India or Europe). However, unless there is some such intervention, it is the (inherited) mother tongue that one uses to navigate through life, as the individual also comes to be influenced by the socio-cultural and professional terrain covered and the personal path traveled.

The case is similar, we would argue, with respect to one's religion—formal (Buddhism, Christianity, etc.), non-formal (Native Religions, African Religions), or informal (American Civil Religion). Unless it is changed consciously by oneself (as in Type Y), or forced upon by a missionary, it is the religion of the parents (assuming both are of the same religion) that comes to be one's religion. It is in this sense that a religion is "inherited": while one is simply born into a religion, it is not indelible. One may lose it or consciously forsake it.⁴⁹

It is not, however, that an individual is a *tabula rasa* when it comes to religion, any more than it is so in relation to language, or for that matter, intelligence. Human beings come with the *potential* for language, a given language being a *manifestation* of that potential in the context of a given geopolitical and sociocultural context. Intelligence, in the private domain, may not be as readily visible as is language in the social domain, or as sharply distinguishable as between the inborn potency and the realized manifestation. Piaget's studies tell us how intelligence, too, comes to manifest itself in stages, taking form in an individual through conditioning by one's learning environment.⁵⁰

This distinction between "manifestation" and "potential" may be even less clear when it comes to religion, but paralleling language and intelligence, we may understand *religion* as the *manifestation* of an in-born human *spirituality*, defining spirituality as a "*genetic potential for the purification of the mind.*"⁵¹ The underlying idea here, to present a Buddhism-instructed perspective, is that all humans are born with both (a potential for) "good" and "bad," inherited from the parents.⁵² While what constitutes good and bad at a *societal* level may differ from culture to culture, it is not difficult to argue that the concepts may be understood in universalistic terms at a personal level. Whatever brings pain to an individual, in physiological and medical sense, and/or stress and unhappiness in a psychological sense,⁵³ can be defined as bad, and whatever brings happiness and physical comfort as good.⁵⁴

Human beings cannot come to be good and bad in life unless the potential is contained in the very first cell itself, resulting from the union

of a sperm and an egg, the same way that an apple would not grow out of an apple seed unless “appleness” were inherent to the seed. That goodness and badness are inherent is no different from saying that wellness and illness are inherent to the sentient condition, wellness being the proper functioning of the psycho-physiological system, and illness the malfunctioning⁵⁵

The attempt by different socio-cultural and intellectual contexts to shape this inborn, genetic potential of spirituality, then, can be seen as what constitutes religion. To give an example from Buddhism, all aspects of the Eightfold Path (*aṭṭhaṅgika magga*) are characterized as being “noble” or “excellent” (*sammā*), for their intention is clearly to cultivate goodness, under-developing badness, meaning to strengthen the former through the weakening of the latter in the same process.⁵⁶ Prayer in theistic religions may be explained in theological terms as being in union, or being at one, with the Divinity, but clearly, at the moment of prayer, what manifests in the individual is the goodness, dispelling for the duration of the prayer, at least minimally, badness, with an expectation, of course, that the goodness will prevail over badness for as long as it can. Mother Theresa comes to be seen as an embodiment of Christianity, for example, precisely for her goodness, the same way the Dalai Lama, or “Master of Love and Mercy” Cheng Yen, founder of the Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation⁵⁷, is in Buddhism. So religion may be seen as the conscious attempt by a given socio-cultural and intellectual context to help a community, or an individual, maintain goodness over badness, with the resulting in psychophysical harmony (see fn. 51) perhaps as an intended or unintended consequence. It is to capture this social dimension of the manifestation of spirituality that we have come to label a religion elsewhere as a “sociospirituality”.

The manifestation of spirituality in a given individual, then, may be said to be shaped by the community one is born into or grows in (Christian if born or grown up in Europe, Hindu if in India, Jewish if in Israel, etc.); in other words, inherited. That is, of course, unless it comes to be changed or modified through intervention, from within or without. In this wider sense, too, one’s religion can be said to be inherited. There may not be any specific physical apparatus relating to religion as for producing language, or ways of measuring intelligence,⁵⁸ but the multiplicity and the variability of religions in the human population should leave us little doubt about the conditioned manifestation of spirituality.

The dictionary defines “inheritance” as “legacy,” or “any characteristic passed on by heredity” and / or “bequest.” This last in

particular, in its verb form “bequeathing,” captures the sense and essence intended here: “hand down: as, he bequeathed his talent to his son” (Webster’s). A religion, then, is inherited more in the sense of talent (less tangible and not easily describable) than, for example, wealth.

Studies in language learning help us further in understanding the process of inheritance, and manifestation, of a religion. A child begins to discriminate among the different sounds she hears around her,⁵⁹ before beginning to make her first sounds.⁶⁰ By age six (that is, the *end* of Piaget’s second stage of intelligence), a child is a “linguistic adult” (having mastered the *total* phonological and the *basic* grammatical structures of the inherited language), though the wider vocabulary, and the complex grammatical structures and language nuances (simile, metaphor, etc.), are to come later.

Let us now examine this language- and intelligence-like process of inheriting a religion more closely in relation to Buddhism.

A baby growing up in a Buddhist home, for example, would smell the incense wafting from the home altar, and hear the sounds of mom and dad chanting, and see the parents paying homage to the Buddha every evening. Of course, not that the baby has a clue as to what the smells, sounds and sights are, any more than she has of the linguistic sounds she hears. But over time, a pattern begins to develop and take hold in the consciousness. Taken to the temple, she hears the temple gongs, sees devotees prostrating in front of a Buddha or Kwan Yin figure, hears a temple-specific language, and observes a culture of respect (for example, laity prostrating at the feet of the *bhikkhu* / *bhikkhunis*) and gender parity (as for example, men and women co-mingling, as opposed to sitting separately, in the altar-room). Growing older, the chants also begin to find entry into memory, in the mother tongue or a classical language (Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese or Tibetan), and the rituals and the belief structure(s) take hold in the psyche as well, enough to participate in “Buddhist” activities along with the parents. As in the case of language, we may hypothesize that what may be called “basic Buddhism”⁶¹ comes to be a meaningful, *experiential*, part of the child around the age of six⁶². This “meaningfulness,” of course, may be nothing more than the limited “meaningfulness” of the parents’ Buddhism, conditioned further by the particular variety of (ethnocultural) Buddhism practiced. This “basic Buddhism” may also not attain the level of “cognitive” basic Buddhism, that is, the Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path, Conditioned Co-origination, etc. Indeed, one may or may not understand those teachings even later in life, given that religion for the average practitioner is more practice than knowing about and understanding—that is, an area of

discrete (scholarly or experiential) knowledge. This would be even truer in the case of Buddhism where Nibbana, the *summum bonum* of Buddhism, is an experience “to be realized within oneself” (*paccattam veditabbo*).

Continuing to grow in “Buddhism,” and with increasing maturity, and perhaps more formal study (at home, Sunday school or other), the young adept comes to hear terms and concepts in the cultural language such as *dukkha* (suffering), *anicca* (impermanence), *dāna* (sharing), *mettā* (friendliness / lovingkindness), etc. as part of a regular vocabulary. At a funeral, she hears a sermon on the naturalness of death and the reality of impermanence, and at a sermon (in the temple, home or public place) the absence of a Creator God, and comes to sense the reality of karma when a seemingly good person suddenly dies or falls incurably sick. The more intelligent and/or the karmically-inclined⁶³ may even now begin to get a deeper understanding of the Buddha’s teachings, at least according to one’s own cultural tradition. The mother tongue itself may have helped determine her conceptual Buddhist world, as the Sapir hypothesis that language determines our perceptual world would have it.⁶⁴

As with language and intelligence, so with religion, we may hypothesize that “Buddhism” is well *internalized* by the age of puberty—just as one is “set” in one’s language by this ‘formal operational’ stage (Piaget) of intellectual development.⁶⁵ “Buddhism” is in quotes here as a caution that what passes for it may include elements of the local culture that have come to be integrated into it (as for example, Shinto in Japan or Taoism/Confucianism in China). That is to say that, unlike in the acquisition of language and intelligence, “internalization” of religion (Buddhism in our case) by the age of puberty may be attended by little understanding.⁶⁶ Indeed, it may even be an attitude of rejection through ignorance of it, or perhaps of uncritically buying into the secular view as well of all religion being dysfunctional to contemporary life.⁶⁷

Whatever the depth, we could say in summary that a child born to Buddhist parents⁶⁸ would come to be “Buddhist” (as in any other faith—Christian, Jewish, Hindu, etc.), both affectively and cognitively, through osmosis—subtle, automatic and gradual.⁶⁹ What is significant to note here is that both cognition and affection have been “handed down” and come to the individual *involuntarily*. It is this involuntary nature, that is, non-choice, like one’s ethnicity, then, that primarily characterizes an Inherited Buddhist.

By contrast, a *Type Y* Buddhist is one who comes to Buddhism by *conscious choice*, that is, *voluntarily*, and can be thus said to have “acquired” it, giving us the label, “Acquired Buddhist.” To “acquire,” in

the dictionary definition (Webster's), is "to get or gain by one's own efforts or actions."

The terms "effort" and "action" in the definition may even have a particularly Buddhist ring to them, both "featured" in the Noble Eightfold Path. "Right Action" (*sammā kammanta*) is characterized as "abstaining from" (1) taking life, (2) taking what is not given, and (3) sexual misbehaviour, these being three of the training principles (*sikkhāpada*) a Buddhist practitioner is enjoined to commit oneself to.⁷⁰ "Excellent Effort" (*sammā viriya*) is characterized in the Noble Eightfold Path along four dimensions: avoiding the arising of unarisen bad / unwholesome, overcoming the existing bad / unwholesome, arousing the good / wholesome not yet arisen, and maintaining the already arisen good / wholesome.⁷¹

But acquired is, to repeat a point made earlier, not only a discipline (*sīla*) as in effort and action, but also a different view of reality, a "Right View" (*sammā diṭṭhi*), the "beginning" spoke of the Noble Eightfold Path.⁷² Instead of seeing a created world (*micchā diṭṭhi* "false view"), for example, the AB comes to recognize and see a natural world, where everything is subject to change (*anicca*), and in which suffering (*dukkha*) and asoulity⁷³ (*anatta*) are the reality. It may not even be the case that the particular concepts are initially understood in their deepest canonical sense, but it is that one has now come to see the plausibility of the concepts, at whatever surface level. It is of course possible that an AB may have even come across such, or similar, concepts in other contexts (such as in science, or even in their previous religion / spirituality), though there they were never part of one's commitment, a personal guiding view, but merely as a form of knowledge with no implications for oneself or the religious life. These are now understood as aspects of the newly acquired Buddhism.⁷⁴

"Acquire" also has, in addition to its common meaning, the secondary meanings of "capture" and "contract." An AB could then be said to have "captured the basics" (if not the essence) of Buddhism, in making a conscious choice. The term "contract" may even be more telling. It comes close to the idea of a "covenant," not, of course, with God as in Judaism, but with the *dhmma*. The label "Acquired Buddhist," then, indicates that one has somehow "acquired" Buddhism in some or all of the above senses.

The term "acquire" may need some further probing. Does its association with wealth, as for example in "acquiring wealth", evoke an unsavoury association of materiality? At first blush, it may debase an AB by association—for having an acquisitiveness, even for reasons of

spirituality, leading to “grasping” (*upādāna*), an unwholesome characteristic vis-à-vis liberation. But we may note that the Buddha speaks of wealth in positive terms, as for example, “the happiness of having / possession” (*atthi sukha*).⁷⁵ Happiness is also not only the greatest “wealth” (*dhana*),⁷⁶ but a state of mind indicative of spiritual maturity.⁷⁷ So given then that wealth is a valued quality in Buddhist thought,⁷⁸ “acquiring” needs to be understood with its connotation of being spiritual-friendly as well.

Presumably, then, an AB could be taken, again in its *ideal* sense, as one who consciously commits oneself to a new view of reality and code of behaviour, making as well an effort at incorporate the teachings into one’s life. To what extent this happens will be a function of the individual’s personal characteristics in the context of community.

In bringing this discussion on *choice* in our chart to closure, it is important to note that, be it “voluntary” or “involuntary”, the sense of “volition” entailed here needs to be understood, not in any absolute sense of a complete autonomy, but as being *conditioned*. It is obvious that several conditions may have prevailed upon a given individual (or a collectivity) to “bring” him or her to Buddhism (or for that matter, to any other religion).⁷⁹ For an IB these conditions would be the culture one was born into, the person’s life history, the community and/or peers, age, education, intelligence, etc., to name but a few; and in the case of an AB, the very religious experience in the *inherited* religion / spirituality (that has now been passed over). Conditionality can be said to prevail in the “involuntariness” of an inherited Buddhist as well, the primary one, of course, being born to parents whose religion happens to be Buddhism. The invisible hand of *karma*—outcome of thoughts or actions from a past or present life—is another condition that affects both types.

Exposure, in Chart II, refers to three aspects. The first is the *manner* in which one comes to be exposed to Buddhism. Unlike the case of an IB where exposure to Buddhism is *natural* (by the simple fact of being born to Buddhist parents and culture), for the AB it would be *accidental*. It may come about variously:

- via a circuitous route of searching for an alternative spirituality,
 - emanating from a dissatisfaction with one’s received spirituality (primarily Christianity or Judaism, but possibly Humanism, too⁸⁰;
 - as a result of a personal life crisis (illness, marital relations, death in the family, etc.);
- encountering a Buddhist at work, play or other public life;
- a failure to find happiness in materialism (economically),

- secularism (socially) or positivism (philosophically, where emotion has been shut out in a world of exclusive rationality⁸¹; or
- simply out of a general feeling of the “emptiness” of life.⁸²

Related to the manner of exposure is the *age* at which one comes to be a Buddhist, through self- or other-recognition.⁸³ While, as noted, an IB may inherit Buddhism at conception/birth, one’s *consciousness* of being Buddhist comes about only in childhood, through osmosis (see above), that is, religious acculturation, under the influence of the parents, family and community, and in stages.⁸⁴ By contrast, it is most likely that an AB in North America (and possibly in the west generally) acquires Buddhism, whether in stages or instantaneously, in adulthood (or adolescence).⁸⁵

Exposure, thirdly, refers to the number of manifestations of spirituality, and religious culture, to which one has access.⁸⁶ Here, an AB can be said to be privy to a minimum of two and an IB generally a single one.⁸⁷ While this may suggest a mere quantitative distinction, it is equally a qualitative one insofar as the individual / group that acquires Buddhism comes to be richer both *cognitively* (a wider and comparative worldview), and *experientially* (from the religious and cultural life of two religions). This latter in itself, in turn, serves as a condition for a wider cognition.⁸⁸

Turning to **Knowledge** in Chart II, we differentiate it under four topics: *medium, context, criticality*⁸⁹ and *communication*.

In terms of knowledge of Buddhism, whether or not initial exposure to Buddhism for an AB was informal or accidental, there is little doubt that, once encountered, any further acquisition may most likely come through reading and/or formal study, through association with a teacher, temple or practicing group, or indeed in the solitary confines of one’s bedroom if not the library. To this extent, the *medium* of (continuing) knowledge can be said to be *literary*.⁹⁰ By contrast, while an IB may deepen one’s knowledge through formal study (out of curiosity or towards academic credentials), the *average* IB is likely to have acquired knowledge of Buddhism *orally-aurally*—that is, through what one hears from a teacher or family and friends or participating in religious activity or talking about it.⁹¹

The medium of knowledge, as well as the age of initial exposure, contributes to the *context* of knowledge. While an IB comes by the initial knowledge from *within* one’s own ethno-culture, be it formal or informal, an AB comes to it by stepping *out*, so to speak, of one’s own *inherited*

ethno-culture. What an AB had cognitively and experientially gained in *his/her* culture may indeed be the very opposite of what he/she comes to acquire in Buddhism.

In terms of *criticality*, Not only would an AB have access to a wider and comparative worldview, s/he may well be influenced by the spirit of the western Enlightenment. And so the Acquired Buddhist, most likely formally educated,⁹² may have been attracted to the *cognitive* dimension of the Teachings—to their systematicity (as for example, of the Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path, etc.), their rationality and objectivity,⁹³ and perhaps above all, to the principle of free enquiry.⁹⁴ This is not to say that *affective* values in the Teachings—friendliness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), etc.—would have had no impact. Rather, it suggests that an AB would, more than an IB, begin with a more *critical attitude*. An IB on the other hand may be more inclined to accept *unquestioningly*, or less questioningly,⁹⁵ the interpretations and the practices of her ethno-cultural Buddhism.⁹⁶

That IB's and AB's are strung on a continuum along the affective-cognitive domain in general, however, does not mean that an AB would *necessarily* bring the questioning attitude to one's own practice, especially if an AB were to begin to practice a given *cultural* Buddhism, this particularly in a community setting, rather than as a personal and private practice⁹⁷.

To use cognition and affection as markers that distinguish between IB and AB may appear to fly in the face of the fact that the central practice of Buddhism is meditation, very much in the affective and experiential domain, even though it entails a resulting knowledge of reality, very much in the cognitive domain.⁹⁸ However, we need to note that not all Buddhists practice meditation, and even those who do, have to go about dealing with the world in their daily living without much consciousness of the cognitive claims.

Both the critical attitude and the availability of access to a wider world may have relevance when it comes to *communication* as well, in relation to the dhamma. For one thing, growing up in a Buddhist culture, not only would an AB have no reason to learn about their Buddhism formally (even though some may), neither would it be necessary to explain their beliefs or practices to anybody else. Everyone in their community, by definition, comes from the same religio-cultural milieu. By contrast, an IB has had to “explain” the dharma to oneself if only to convince oneself why one should go over to, and acquire, the new religion. This may place such an IB in a better position when it comes to communication *in relation to dhamma*.⁹⁹ The fact that an AB comes to

acquire Buddhism at chronological maturity, and in a Western milieu that encourages communication, may be additional supportive factors.

So *knowledge*, then, in its multiple dimensions—of medium, context, “criticality” and communication—may serve as a distinguishing marker between IB and AB.

Finally, as we suggest in the chart, **motivation** is a marker between the two types, with an AB having an “instrumental motivation,”¹⁰⁰ at least initially. When a North American (of whatever ethno-cultural background) comes to Buddhism, it is indicative of a personal crisis, spiritual maturation (sudden or as the culmination of a long journey), etc. So one comes to Buddhism with a specific goal in mind, using Buddhism as an *instrument*, a tool, to deal with whatever it is that pushes one to it.

A case in point may be meditation, which many a North American, Buddhist or other, seeks out and practices, with or without “coming over” to Buddhism. Over time an AB might come to integrate Buddhism into one’s life partially or fully, but until then, what drives an AB would be an instrumental motivation. Even if the teachings come to be integrated into one’s life, the ethno-cultural dimension of the variety of Buddhism chosen would remain largely outside of one’s experience, and perhaps beyond one’s reach, given the “disadvantage” of not having been born in the culture—even though some of its external aspects may come to be incorporated into one’s life-style.¹⁰¹

By contrast, an IB comes *already integrated* into Buddhism (by virtue of birth), as part and parcel of the inherited cultural baggage, including a language determining one’s worldview. Thus, an IB can be said to have an “integral motivation,” even if all one is motivated to do, however unconsciously, is simply to follow tradition, keep the parents happy, or not want to rock the boat. An IB could also be characterized as being of a “sentimental motivation,” the religion, language and culture all contributing to psychological comfort.

Having sought to distinguish between IB and AB in terms of Choice, Source, Knowledge and Motivation as in Chart II, it must be emphasized that there is no suggestion here that one or more of the specific characteristics associated with either category (IB or AB) is privileged over the other in terms of the *liberative potential*. Being higher on the affective scale (associated with IB), for example, may not earn “respectability” in Western thought, while being higher on the cognitive scale (associated with AB) may raise questions in the mind of the Buddhist practitioner, Easterner or Westerner. It is significant to note here that liberation may be attained in more than one way: through mind (*cetovimutta*), faith (*saddhāvimutta*) (both in the affective domain), wisdom (*paññāvimutta*) (in the cognitive domain), or through both

affection and cognition (*ubhatobhāgavimutta*).¹⁰² While all Buddhists would thus be *equal* when it comes to the potential gained by being Buddhist, the manifestation of this potential, or the level of spiritual maturity gained at any given point in time would, of course, be a function of how well-based one is in discipline (*sīla*) and the quality of and commitment to meditative practice.

Finally, while the terms “inherited” and “acquired” have their independent semantic meaning, it is to be noted that the meaning (or use) of each in our context comes to be strengthened by each other, contrastively. This means that, as with voluntary / involuntary, or any other pairs such as day and night, black and white, tall and short or the Chinese binary concepts of yin-yang, or indeed the Buddhist concepts *kusala* “skilled” / *akusala* “unskilled,” the pair needs to be seen as being inter-related, very much in keeping with the Buddhist understanding entailed in “conditioned co-origination” (*paticca samuppāda*). This interrelationship is based in sharing the common *genus* we may call “Buddhist”—just as, for example, in the case of black and white with respect to “colour.”

In closing this discussion, it is important to recognize that “acquiring” or “inheriting” is, like all sentient activity, mere *process*, an action without an agent, as in the theory of asoulity (*anatta*).¹⁰³

4.2 Application

Perhaps there is no better way of testing the validity and the efficacy of the proposed alternate labeling and typology than by seeking to identify who, in fact, would qualify under each type. To this we now turn to a third chart:

Category 1 under IB shows that the first generation of Buddhists of Asian Cultural Heritage, born in Asia (Geographic Heritage), but residing in North America (Type X under Chart 1), would earn the label IB. So indeed would the second generation of Type X Buddhists (category 2), “North American” like those of category 3, due to birth and residence, but Asian like their parents of category 1 by Cultural Heritage. IB Category 3 would be self-evident—North American by Cultural Heritage, birth and residence.

By contrast, looking at line 1 under AB (leaving aside lines 4 and 5 under IB for now), while the first generation of Type Y Buddhists—North American Cultural Heritage—born in and living in North America or elsewhere (NA/E)¹⁰⁴ would qualify as AB, so would the second generation of Type X Buddhists (line 2): the latter, born and residing in

North America, may have rejected the Buddhism of their parents (due perhaps to peer pressure, to being caught up in North American secularism or the American Civil Religion, or to conversion to Christianity),¹⁰⁵ seek out Buddhism in their adult life, again through a spiritual search, or even by way of a fad.¹⁰⁶ The label would also be

	GENERATION	CULTURAL HERITAGE	BIRTH	RESIDENCE
INHERITED BUDDHISTS				
1	1 st	Asian	Asian	NA
2	2 nd	Asian	NA	NA
3	2 nd	NA Euro-	NA	NA
4	2 nd	NA Euro-	?	E
5	2 nd	Asian	?	E
ACQUIRED BUDDHISTS				
6	1 st	NA Euro-	NA	NA/E
7	2 nd	Asian	NA	NA
8	2 nd	NA Euro-	NA	NA
9	1 st	Asian	Asian	NA/E
10	1 st	Asian	Asian	E

Chart 3: A characterization of who qualifies for the labels “Inherited Buddhists” and “Acquired Buddhists”

applicable to the second generation of Type Y Buddhists (line 3), who, like their Type X counterparts, would have given up their inherited religion (for example, Christianity, Judaism) altogether, but later (re-)discovered Buddhism,¹⁰⁷ as their own parents may have done a generation earlier.

An interesting example of AB, as line 4 shows, would be the first generation of Type X Buddhists, living in North America or elsewhere, the best case perhaps being the Ambedkar Buddhists from India.¹⁰⁸ Another example would be the Chinese from Taiwan, Hong Kong and the People’s Republic of China, whose Spiritual Heritage may have been Christian, or a combination of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, or no religion at all, but who have now, once in North America, “discovered” Buddhism.

An advantage of our terminology is that it can be applied with descriptive efficiency to *other geo-political regions*. Returning to IB, line 4 shows the second generation of Type Y Buddhists, who, regardless of their place of birth (hence the question mark), now lives in other lands (Elsewhere (E)), as for example, Dharmasala, Sri Lanka, Thailand, etc., having taken up permanent residence, become deeply enculturated and/or

committed to Buddhist practice.¹⁰⁹ Their parents, by contrast, also living in other lands (“E” in AB line 1), i.e., the same lands as their children, would earn the label AB (line 1).

Our proposed typology could be equally applicable to *other times*. While the first generation of Type X Buddhists living in an “elsewhere” setting (that is, European or other) would fall under AB type (line 5), their offspring (the second generation) would qualify as IB (line 5). Some historical examples include the Ambedkar Buddhists before arriving in North America (20th century), Tibetans at the time of the introduction of Buddhism (6-7th century), and the very first Sinhalese when they first embraced Buddhism (3rd century BCE).¹¹⁰

An interesting application of our labels, not shown in the chart, may be the *offspring* of the Ambedkar Buddhists, who live in North America. They would be IB if they were to continue their parents’ newly acquired Buddhism, or AB if they had rejected the Buddhism of their parents while growing up in North America, but returned to it in later life. Another application may be the offspring of a mixed marriage (say, one Christian, the other Buddhist), who as parents decide to give their child the benefit of both their spiritual expressions. The child would be both an “inherited Christian,” and an “inherited Buddhist” (or “inherited Christian-Buddhist”) at birth; but if s/he were to give up one and adopt the other, then s/he could become an “acquired (Christian/ Buddhist)” since a conscious decision would have been involved.¹¹¹

5. A FEW CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, we have sought to establish the descriptive inadequacy of the terms “Ethnic” and “Euro-” (and its alternatives) to characterize “North American Buddhists.” Our labels, Inherited Buddhist and Acquired Buddhist, are on the other hand seem to be comprehensive in that they do not exclude anyone—according to ethnocultural origin, generation, or religion. Rather, they allow us to include anyone of whatever background into one or the other category, neatly, solely on the basis of their contact with Buddhism.

While the proposed terminology can be said to serve as well across time and space, we may note that the current ones, ethnic- and Euro-, with connotations as understood in relation to North America and the West, cannot. For example, would a “White Buddhist” of North American Geographic and Judeo-Christian Spiritual Heritages, who has made permanent residence in an Asian country, be an “Ethnic Buddhist” due to minority status or “Euro-Buddhist” due to Cultural Heritage? Would an Ambedkar Buddhist living in India be an “Ethnic Buddhist” due to her/his minority status vis-a-vis the majority Hindu population,

even though they may now constitute the majority of Buddhists in the land? What about Tibetan Buddhists living in Dharmasala and elsewhere in India? Would they be ethnics because of their immigrant status, and if so, would this mean that Ambedkar Buddhists, being native to the soil, would no longer be considered ethnic? Whatever the answer, the term “Euro-” certainly would have no applicability at all, rendering it descriptively dysfunctional within a global context. By contrast, the terms “inherited” and “acquired” can be said to have much broader and efficacious applicability.

Our alternative terminology has several other advantages as well. Most significantly, involuntary characteristics of a Buddhist, such as Cultural Heritage, Geographic Heritage (i.e., birthplace), Spiritual Heritage, minority status and the like, some of which may even involve value judgments, and which certainly obfuscate the boundaries under the “Ethnic” and “Euro-” labeling, do not enter the picture. This allows us to maintain a respectable level of objectivity, also avoiding the trap of “ethnic” stereotyping, that may perhaps be offensive, *de facto* or *de jure*, to one or more types of Buddhist, or to any other minority religious practitioner.

It is not unreasonable or unrealistic to expect as well that the proposed labels may be adopted for general discourse. The terms “inherited” and “acquired” are not distant from the vocabulary of the average educated citizen, and thus are not daunting nor smack of jargon, as technical terms sometimes tend to be.

Finally, regardless of the acceptance or otherwise of the proposed terminology, it is hoped that the paper at least provides a somewhat comprehensive understanding of the make-up of the collective called “North American Buddhist”—just who it is that falls under this rubric.

We have noted above how the proposed labels are applicable to other lands and other times. Since this was explored only in relation to Buddhists, we now presume to suggest that the proposed terminology *may be* applicable to *other religious* communities as well.

Christianity has undergone the same expansion as Buddhism, spreading far and wide, under colonialism and forced conversions—though in the opposite direction to that of Buddhism—from Europe to Asia and Africa (and the Americas). So, for example, an Asian who had converted to Christianity (say, under the Catholic practice of requiring conversion of the non-Christian spouse in the case of a mixed marriage)¹¹² would be an Acquired Christian, their offspring would be an Inherited Christian, just as the Christian parent. There would be no confusion whether the parent in question should be called “Ethnic” because of minority status in relation to the (Asian) country, or “Euro-”

because of his/her Geographic and Spiritual Heritage. Both offspring and parent would be Inherited Christians while the parent who converted would be an Acquired Christian. Nor would a Rasta Farian Christian of Ethiopia, nor a Martoma Christian of South India, have to wonder whether s/he is ethnic because of his/her skin colour, or Euro- because her/his Judeo-Christian spiritual heritage.

The typology can just as easily apply to Muslims, who, through conquest, colonialism and/or peaceful conversion, have come to live in a variety of geographic settings. The first generation would be Acquired Muslims,¹¹³ while the offspring would be Inherited Muslims.

While the typology may be less valid in relation to Judaism, which insists on maternal inheritance in Orthodox and Conservative Judaism, rendering most Inherited Jews—long lost Jews of China, India or Africa, or a partner who comes to Judaism following a marriage, or by conviction, would readily be designated Acquired Jews. So would the offspring of Jewish parents who reject their parental religion, but return to it later in life, particularly in the context of marriage, or the Bar- and Bat-mitzvahs of their children.

Finally, even a small and a relatively recent spiritual expression such as Baha'i could benefit from the proposed typology. While a newly embraced Baha'i follower would be an Acquired Baha'i, the offspring of such a one would be an Inherited Baha'i.

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NOTES

- ¹ We are here not unaware of the Buddha's caution not to be caught up in the linguistic trap of labels that can lead to attachment (*taṇhā*) through grasping (*upādāna*). He points out that what is called *pāti* "vessel" may be called *pattaṃ* "bowl" elsewhere, or *vitthaṃ* "cup," or *sarāvaṃ* "goblet." See K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 314, for a fuller discussion. What prompts us in this exploration, however, is not only that good communication demands precise terminology, but also that language determines our perceptual world (see Sapir, *Language*), even though, of course, the reverse holds true as well. (On this reciprocal determination or causality, see Sugunasiri, *Humanistic Nationism*, "Conditioned Co-origination hypothesis.")
- ² Departing from linguistic convention, we capitalize the "E" here to recognize this group of human beings as on a par, in terms of respect, with "Euro-Buddhists."
- ³ We should perhaps more accurately say here not "birth," but "conception," given the Buddhist understanding that life, and hence consciousness, begins at conception: "conditioned by consciousness is mindbody" (*viññāṇa paccayā nāmarūpa*). For elucidation see Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 107 ff., and Sugunasiri, "The Whole Body, not Heart, as 'seat of consciousness,': the Buddha's View."
- ⁴ Numerically, in fact, this is the more significant group in Canada. For example, in 2001 a mere 20% of Canadians attended a religious service in a typical week, and 31% attended regularly (at least monthly). See Warren Clark, "Pockets of belief: religious attendance patterns in Canada," 2.
- ⁵ See Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, in relation to the U.S.; and McLellan, "Religion and Ethnicity: The Role of Buddhism in Maintaining Ethnic Identity among Tibetans in Lindsay, Ontario," and *Many Petals of the Lotus*, and Sugunasiri, "*Buddhism in Metropolitan Toronto*," in relation to Canada.
- ⁶ Burnet, *Coming Canadians*, 132; Watada, *Bukkyo Tozen*.
- ⁷ Even though there were as many as 6,000 to 7,000 Chinese in Canada by the early 1860s, working on the Canadian Railway, by the turn of the century there was no formal Buddhism publicly practiced as such among them (Burnet, *Coming Canadians*, 21). The very first Chinese temple in Toronto opened after the arrival of Sing Hung Fa-shih in June 1967 (See my forthcoming biographical study of Buddhist leaders in the eighties, including Sing Hung Fa-shih, as part of the *Nalanda Buddhism in Toronto History Project*.)
- ⁸ See Metraux, *The Lotus and the Maple Leaf*, for a study of this variety of Buddhism.

- 9 The relative figures are: Chinese Buddhists, 163,570; Japanese Buddhists, 13,380 (Stats Can, 2001).
- 10 Buddhism entered Tibet, both from India and China, and was heavily influenced from both directions—hence “Indo-Sinic.”
- 11 The first Tibetan group to arrive in Canada was in 1971 (McLellan, *Many Petals of the Lotus*, 82).
- 12 A recent exception is the Ambedkar Buddhists, to be discussed later.
- 13 See Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 502 ff.
- 14 Not only does Sinhalese Buddhism have the longest unbroken tradition of this early variety (or for that matter, any variety of Buddhism anywhere in the world), since its introduction in the 3rd century BCE, it constitutes over 75% of the Sri Lankan population. The Sinhalese were among the earliest South Asian Buddhists to arrive in North America as well, in the late 1960s.
- 15 McLellan notes (*Many Petals of the Lotus*, 140), “between 1980 and 1992, Canada accepted 18,602 Cambodians.”
- 16 This is particularly true of temples or centres of the Tibetan heritage.
- 17 We make the distinction between “Judaic” and “Jewish” to separate spirituality from culture as a heuristic device, but also to facilitate discussion of those who have given up their religion (Judaism) but retain their ethnicity (Jewish).
- 18 Some even encourage bar- and bat-mitzvahs for their children, perhaps falling back on the Buddhist tradition of allowing for free choice until the children could decide for themselves. (Personal communication.)
- 19 A little known example perhaps would be Phil Jackson, long-time basketball coach (e.g., Chicago Bulls). See *Tricycle*, Summer 1994, for an interview.
- 20 Sallie King, James Madison University, U.S.A. (Personal communication.)
- 21 Dhyani Ywahoo, a native woman who incorporates Buddhism into her spiritual practice, would be an example (see Boucher, *Turning the Wheel*, for a biography).
- 22 An exception here, in the North American context, is the Native People, “native” replacing “ethnic.”
- 23 Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, 129. We should perhaps say “to be admitted formally,” since there were others before him, such as Thoreau who, though observed to be “not, in any sense of the word, a convert” (Fields, 63), nevertheless refers to “my Buddha.” Fields quotes Thoreau: “I know that some will have hard thoughts of me, when they hear their Christ named beside my Buddha.” Olcott and Madame Blavatsky are two others who had also taken to

Buddhism in some form or other.

- 24 Although community counts put the figure much higher (see Sugunasiri, "Buddhism in Metropolitan Toronto: a preliminary survey"), the Stats Can (2001) figure is 300,345, or 0.6 % of the total population. According to the 2001 U.S. Census .5% of the U.S. population self-describes themselves as Buddhist. Based on the current 2006 population of 300 million that puts the Buddhist population of the U.S. at 1.5 million. (But see fn 24).
- 25 The situation is different in the two countries. In the U.S. neither academic nor popular discourse refers to them as a minority. In Canada they are categorized as a "visible minority," along with Indic and Sinic populations.
- 26 Charles Prebish, a scholar of American Buddhism, estimates Type Y Buddhists to be 2 million and Type X 1 million (Seminar, Trinity College, University of Toronto, March 30, 1998), a number likely to have gone up since then.
- 27 Even though no figures are available for Type Y Buddhists (to use my label here) in Canada, we make this claim on the basis of personal observation of attendance at temples and Buddhist events, such as Wesak.
- 28 Quantifying religious populations on a global scale is complex and hazardous. How, for instance, are Christian, Jew, Buddhist to be defined? However, as a rough guide, we have the website www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html, based principally on data published in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *World Christian Encyclopedia*, that puts the number of Christians world-wide at 2.1 billion, Buddhists at 324 million, and Jews at 14 million.
- 29 An example would be an Ethiopian Jew, having migrated to Israel, arriving to live in North America. An offspring of such a parent would make the case even stronger.
- 30 In similar fashion the 1971 edition of *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* defines ethnic as "pertaining to nations not Christian or Jewish," adding for good measure, "Gentile, heathen, pagan."
- 31 While it may be comforting to feel, and think, otherwise, this statement may not be untrue even in multicultural Canada outside of the urban centres, a position that can, of course, be disproved or otherwise only through research.
- 32 Even though one might hear a Buddhist (Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese or Vietnamese, for example) use the term "pray" to explain what they do at the altar, what in fact many a Buddhist is doing is not relating to a Creator, but paying respect or homage to the Buddha. The exception may be Pure Land and Soka Gakkai Buddhists who, in

addition to paying homage to the Buddha, call out the name of Amida Buddha (*amidabutsu*).

- 33 Even though in North America today *saṅgha* is taken to mean the totality of the four groups—ordained monks and nuns, and lay women and men—in its early understanding, it referred only to the “noble collectivity” (*ariya saṅgha*), meaning only those of past, present or future, who come by the spiritual attainment of, minimally, streamwinning (*sotāpanna*).
- 34 See Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory*, and Bharuca, *Buddhist Theory of Causation and Einstein’s theory of Relativity*, for comparative views.
- 35 We have in mind here Type Y Buddhists (lines Y1 and 3 in particular), both women and men, who have ended up in spiritual leadership positions in many traditions—Roshis or Zen masters of the Japanese tradition, dharma teachers in the Tibetan tradition, meditation teachers in the Theravada tradition—in North America. (See Friedman, *Meetings with Remarkable Women*, and Boucher, *Turning the Wheel*, regarding women teachers; and Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, in general).
- 36 Here we fall back on the sociologist’s definition of culture as relating to behaviour, which also, of course, includes thought. The Buddha’s term *nāmarūpa*, “mindbody,” amply suggests this.
- 37 There may also be others whose spiritual mixture is more complex, as for example, a colleague that confesses to having “a great difficulty” telling whether he is “Christian, non-Christian, Buddhist, Taoist, agnostic, secular or anti-secular”!
- 38 Here, it may be noted that while Type Y Buddhists did become Buddhists by conscious choice, they automatically, that is, involuntarily, become “Buddhist” once that decision is made.
- 39 For example, *Webster’s* 1983 edition captures this sense in the words, “of or pertaining to a group of people of the same race or nationality sharing common and distinctive cultural characteristics,” a sense echoed in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (1995).
- 40 Italics added. See next.
- 41 A few examples: Glen Mullin, author of several books on Tibetan Buddhism; Peter Skilling, working on Palm Leaf manuscript in Thailand; Gareth Sparham, translator of Tibetan works, but now teaching in the United States; the nun Ayya Khema and the Ven. Nyanaponika (both deceased), in Sri Lanka.
- 42 It may be relevant to note a linguist’s observation, “Everyone speaks one dialect or another” (Hockett, *A Course in Modern Linguistics*, 322).
- 43 See Sugunasiri, “Step Down Shakespeare, the Stone Angel is Here,”

for a model that helps deal with the issue theoretically.

- 44 This is only to speak in terms of “conventional truth” (*sammuti sacca*); the Buddhist theory of knowledge distinguishes it from the “absolute truth” (*paramattha sacca*). (See Jayatilke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, for a discussion.) We are all, as in the Buddhian (that is, “of the Buddha,” as in “Einsteinian”) theory of “conditioned co-origination” (*paticca samuppāda*), conditioned and interconnected, and so, there can be no “freewill” in the western sense of absolute individualism.
- 45 Contrast this to Jewish-Buddhists who are ethno-culturally Jewish, but religiously “new” to Buddhism.
- 45 Indeed, this is the sense non-Buddhists often seem to carry in their head, though decreasingly so over time, when they look for a “real Buddhist” to be invited to speak to their group.
- 47 This could be said of even a whole population or a sub-group, who come to be “converted” to Buddhism, not necessarily through a personal conviction, but simply by following the lead of their ruler who adopts Buddhism. A historical example would be the Sinhalese in the 3rd c. BCE (de Silva, 1981:9), when King Devanampiyatissa took the precepts from Mahinda Thero, son of King Asoka of India. For the king, the Queen and the people, it was a new experience, taken on voluntarily, even though collectively. A more recent case is the “Dalits” in India embracing Buddhism after their leader, Dr. Ambedkar (Bhole, in Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, xiii).
- 48 If part of the proposed terminology is theoretically based, it is readily conceded that it is also experientially based, the author having worked in the field of Canadian Buddhism for over a quarter of a century.
- 49 With no formal required initiation, it would, for example, not be uncommon for a Buddhist to say, “I was born a Buddhist.” Likewise for a Jew who would be able to say, “I was born Jewish,” for being Jewish is by definition to be in a covenant relationship with God who creates you. The same could apply to a Christian, even if it is baptism that formally initiates one into the religion.
- 50 Piaget’s theory divides intellectual development into four major periods: *sensorimotor* (birth to 2 years), *pre-operational* (2 to 7 years), *concrete operational* (7 to 11 years) and *formal operational* (11 years and up). See the many influential studies of Jean Piaget (1896-1980) on the stages of cognitive and moral development in children.
- 51 This definition is slightly different from an earlier characterization of *spirituality*, by us, as “the genetic potential of a given sentient being for psychophysical/biochemical harmony” (see Sugunasiri,

“Religion and the Science of Spirituality,” 317). “Psychophysical/biochemical harmony” we now see as an *outcome* of the practice of spirituality. “Sentient being” has been dropped from the definition since the term includes animals. While the concept of “psychophysical/biochemical harmony” could still apply to them, the “purification of the mind” cannot, in that it requires a more sophisticated volitional activity that we do not believe animals possess.

⁵² A particularistic Buddhist / Hindu addition here might be, “brought by oneself from past lives as well.” For studies on rebirth, see *Twenty Cases Suggestive of the Re-incarnation Type* by the US psychiatrist Ian Stevenson; *Life Between Life* by Canadian “past-life therapy” physician Joel Whitton who acknowledges that “reincarnation is part of my religious tradition” (xi) (identified as “Hasidism...and the Kabbala, Christian Neoplatonism, the Tibetan form of Buddhism, and the mysticism of the twentieth century...”), and based in several case studies, but “only cases wherein a hypothesis of past lives is the only valid one” (xii); and *Many Lives, Many Masters*, by U.S. physician, Brian Weiss, who admits that “[n]othing in my background had prepared me for this” (p. 10), and based on an extensive single case study.

⁵³ In a strict Buddhian sense, this, of course, would be *dukkha*, covering both the psychological and the physical. See Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, for details.

⁵⁴ I am inspired here by the terms *pīti* (rapture) and *sukha* (joy, happiness, ease), experienced by a meditator in *jhānic* states (see Nyanaponika, *Heart of Meditation*, 130 ff.). *Sukha*, translated by Nyanaponika as “joy,” I take to relate to the body (see Davids & Steed, *Pali-English Dictionary*, under *sukha*, 716)

⁵⁵ Here, as well as in relation to the next two paragraphs, see Sugunasiri, “Religion and the Science of Spirituality,” 317 ff, for the fuller discussion.

⁵⁶ Frank, “The Development of Underdevelopment.”

⁵⁷ Of Taiwanese origin, and with a Canadian Head Office in Vancouver, the Foundation (est. 1966) works closely with communities, nationally and internationally, in several identified areas: charity, medicine, education, culture, international relief, bone marrow donation, community volunteerism and environmental protection, “helping the poor and educating the rich” (See next note). Master Cheng Yen was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award (Asian equivalent of the Nobel Prize) in 1991. (See also Ching, *Master of Love and Mercy: Cheng Yen*.)

⁵⁸ But see Sugunasiri, “Religion and the Science of Spirituality,” for the possibility of a “spirituality gene.”

⁵⁹ An interesting parallel here is how the mother likewise begins to

recognize the different cries of the baby —hungry, wet, need to be cozy, etc.

⁶⁰ These are usually bilabials (for example, /mmmmm/, /ma/, etc.).

⁶¹ This could well be “basic Christianity,” “basic Shamanism,” etc.

⁶² We would hesitate to say that a child is a “spiritual adult” by this age, the way language studies say she would be a “linguistic adult.”

⁶³ The thinking here is that a Buddhist practitioner may have brought the “spiritual skills” to this life, just as Beethoven, composing at age six, may be thought of as having brought a musical skill from a past life.

⁶⁴ See footnote 1. It may be useful to note that the process characterized here assumes that the child has not come under the influence of any other manifestation of spirituality or culture.

⁶⁵ See Wilber, in Wilber et al, *Transformations of Consciousness*, for a more comprehensive treatment of the relationship between age, development and spiritual maturity.

⁶⁶ It may be noted that in the case of language, meaning is intrinsic to the structure, whereas in the case of religion, there is no inalienable connection between content (that is, meaning) and structure. A given ritual or religious practice, for example, may be based in Buddha’s teachings, the particular culture or the preferences of the teacher / master.

⁶⁷ This is based on the observation that young people, in the west in particular, show relatively little interest in religion. But see Beyer, “Buddhism in Canada: A Statistical Overview from Canadian Censuses, 1981-2001”, for a longitudinal study of a changing trend in this regard occurring in the context of Canada.

⁶⁸ There are, of course, variations to the theme in the case of a mixed religious background (where one parent is one and the other of another), or where one or more parents have lapsed in their practice. There may even be cognitive dissonance for an offspring in the case of the former, particular if one parent happens to be Buddhist (with no belief in God) and the other Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Islam or other. The impact of exposure to such a mixed religiosity would be conditioned by several factors, such as the religiosity of one or both parents, child rearing practices of the parents, relationship between the parents, personal intelligence, personality type, and not the least from a Buddhist perspective, the extent and depth of religiosity in past lives. In other words, both nature and nurture play a role.

⁶⁹ Of course all this would be in an ideal sense, since the very characteristic of the spiritually unevolved masses (*puthujjana*) is that they fall in a continuum along, say, each of the aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path, from zero (as in the case of a non-meditator apropos

Right Concentration (*sammā samādhi*) to perhaps 9+ (on a scale of 10), say, in Right Livelihood (*sammā ājiva*).

70 Though a different “spoke” of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Speech (abstaining from lying, tale-bearing, harsh language, cruel talk) could also be counted here by association, “abstaining from wrong speech” being the fourth Training Principle. The fifth, regarding intoxicants, of course, would find a place here as well.

71 See Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words*, 239, for the full text.

72 Though “Right View” is listed first, as in tradition, any of the spokes, of course, could be the beginning point for a practitioner.

73 Our translation of *anatta* as “asoulity” here as elsewhere, is inspired by the distinction in English between *immorality* and *amorality*, the latter being the *absence* (of “morality”), rather than the *opposite*. While *anatta* does have its linguistic opposite in *atta* (Sanskrit *ātman*), what the Buddha is denying is not its sense of “self” or “individual,” such as we find in his last words, *atta dipā viharatha*, “Be a lamp / an island unto oneself” (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, DN II.100). What is being denied is its Brahminic sense of “soul,” divinely created and unchanging, literally, *a(n)*- “absence of” *atta*, “soul.”

74 A parallel in this connection may be the borrowings from another language. Usages in English like *qua-* (Latin), *double entendre* (French), *festschrift* (German), *asweddumize* (Sinhala) may be borrowings, but having entered the language, they come to be every bit “English.”

75 In the same context, we find the Buddha associating the uses of wealth with happiness: “happiness of enjoyment” (*bhoga sukha*), “happiness of being free from debt” (*anaṇa sukha*), and “happiness of blamelessness” (*anavajja sukha*). (See Bodhi, *Buddha's Words*, 127-8.)

76 *santuṭṭhi paramam dhanam* (*Dhammapada*, 204).

77 An epithet for the Buddha is “the smiling one” (*mihita*). Among the qualities that characterize the jhanas are, as noted, “joy” (*pīti*) and “comfort” (*sukha*), the latter interestingly appearing in both secular (see above, *atthi sukha*) and spiritual contexts.

78 We may note in this context that the millionaire Anathapindika and millionairess Visakha, two of Buddha's benefactors, were never required or encouraged to give up acquiring wealth in order to be a disciple. Indeed we find Anathapindika becoming a “stream-entrant” on his death-bed. (See Piyadassi, *Stories of Buddhist India*, I, 39).

79 A further link will be made in the conclusion.

80 As for example the flower children of the sixties. The “hippies” started off with psychedelic experimenting, yogic and other

meditation, and only later with Buddhism. See Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism*, for a discussion of the religious origins of humanism.

- 81 We hypothesize that this may result from an imbalance between the right and the left hemispheres of the brain wherein the former, in which emotions find a home, has been starved off in favour of the latter.
- 82 This listing is based on what the writer has been told from time to time by Acquired Buddhists. It remains to be seen to what extent these assumptions may be confirmed or otherwise by research.
- 83 What constitutes a “Buddhist” has been increasingly difficult to determine, particularly in a North American context. But, as a mere heuristic device, we define a Buddhist simply as one who accepts the Buddha as one’s teacher, whether one takes the full five precepts as in the Theravada tradition (or less as in some Southeast Asian and Sinic traditions), the Bodhisattva vow (to save all sentient beings) or seeks arhanthood (as in *ādiyāna*, early vehicle). See Sugunasiri, “*Ādiyāna*: an alternative to Hīnayāna, Sāvākayāna and Theravāda,” 127, on the case for replacing the pejorative Hīnayāna, small vehicle, with *Ādiyāna*, early vehicle.
- 84 Sing Hung Fa Shih reports (see fn. 6) that he came to be “Buddhist,” perhaps without ever knowing what to call it, under the influence of his father his group that seemed to engage in giving *dana*. He traces this influence to the practice, from childhood on, of paying homage to the Buddha in a home setting, with parental and sibling participation, and with some community, but no temple, influence.
- 85 In personal communication, many North America Buddhists have shared with the writer how they saw in Buddhism an immediate “fit” on their very first encounter.
- 86 This is to allow for the possibility of having had more than one religion / spirituality in one’s lifetime, as for example, an African religionist converted to Christianity, who, in turn, becomes Muslim.
- 87 This is to assume that any given religion can be a given a label such as Buddhism, Christianity, etc. For the reality, of course, is that any such religion has multiple historical overlays within itself. While Theravada Buddhism, for example, is constituted of Buddha’s teachings and Indic culture, Chinese Buddhism can be said to stem from an overlay of Sinic culture, itself the product of Taoism and Confucianism, to list the most conspicuous, over Buddhism (as it had itself changed from the time of the Buddha to the time when it was taken to China). Catholicism and Protestantism, in Christianity, provide a further doctrine-based example, without even having to make the more culture-based distinction between European, African or Asian Christianity.
- 88 We find a parallel in the case of a bilingual speaker. In comparison

to a unilingual one, the bilingual speaker gets the benefit of a wider worldview, given the interrelationship between language and thought.

89 This is my term, to capture the cumbersome phrase “*intellectual-critical perspective*.”

90 This would be the case even if a North American were to “discover” Buddhism in an overseas context (for example, Thailand or Sri Lanka).

91 An exception would be the Sunday school, a likely middle-class phenomenon in certain countries (as for example, Sri Lanka), even basic schooling in many a country being unavailable or not widespread.

92 It is indeed likely that Acquired Buddhists in general may be more educated as a group than are Inherited Buddhists. But this hardly without historical precedent. Many a disciple of the Buddha, including the First Five (*pancavaggiya*), was advanced practitioners of another religion (Brahmin), or of the *kshatriya* (royalty) caste, presumably with a higher education than the masses—Prince Siddhartha himself being known for his skill in the “sixteen arts.”

93 See Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, for a study of the Buddhist view of knowledge, reason and experience.

94 “Yes, Kalamas, it is proper that you have doubt, that you have perplexity...Now, look you Kalamas, do not be led by reports, or tradition, or hearsay. Be not led by the authority of religious texts, nor by mere logic or inference, nor by considering appearance, nor by the delight in speculative opinions, nor by seeming possibilities, nor by the idea: ‘this is our teacher’. But...when you know for yourselves...then accept them and follow them.” (*Kalama Sutta*, quoted in Rahula, “*What the Buddha Taught*,” 2-3)

95 The ready acceptance of the mythical understanding of the Buddha, in whatever tradition, as opposed to, or in addition to, the historical Buddha, would be an example here.

96 It would be interesting to conjecture—to make a Canonical link here—whether an IB may be more associated with *citta*, the “emotional and conative” aspect of mind, while an AB may be more associated with *mano*, “its mental and rational side,” (Davids and Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary*, 266). Along the same lines, it is tempting to wonder whether an IB and an AB intent on meditation might be assigned different objects of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*), since they are related to an individual’s temperament (see Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, 99 (III, 60).

97 The best personal example of an unquestioning attitude, known to the writer, relates to the respected Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche’s addiction to drinking and smoking (Fields, *How the Swans Came to*

the Lake, 309). The matter raised with a disciple, the answer was, “Oh, he’s trying to show by example the dangers of indulgence”! The statement, of course, merely points to the reality of attachment in sentience, AB or IB as in our case, or in relation to any other.

⁹⁸ In *satipaṭṭhāna* a meditator comes to knowledge and understanding in each of the four “foundations of mindfulness”—that is, body, feelings, mind and mind-objects—as an outcome of the meditation itself, “to the extent necessary for knowledge and mindfulness”: “There is a body,” “There are feelings,” “There is mind,” and “There are mind-objects” respectively. (See Nyanaponika, *The Heart of Meditation*, 121 and passim.)

⁹⁹ This would be as in the case of a second language learner who, having come by it through formal study of the phonological, morphological, syntactic and paralinguistic systems, would be better able to articulate them, while a native speaker may be lost in trying to “explain” the language in grammatical terms to another.

¹⁰⁰ We draw upon Kolars, “Bilingualism and Information Processing,” here.

¹⁰¹ An example known to the writer is an AB, of a Euro Cultural Heritage and new to Chinese Buddhism, following the Chinese custom of ancestor worship upon the passing away of a parent without fully understanding the significance of the practice.

¹⁰² See Bodhi, *In the Buddha’s Words*, 375-77, and Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, 181-85, for detailed treatments.

¹⁰³ See Sugunasiri, *You’re What You Sense*, and Epstein, *thoughts without a thinker*, for an elaboration.

¹⁰⁴ This includes countries such as Australia and New Zealand, Asian by Geographic Heritage, but European by Cultural Heritage.

¹⁰⁵ Sponsored by a church group, this may be under subtle or not-so-subtle pressure, or due to reasons of gratitude for providing a safe home away from wars and hunger (Vietnam), etc.

¹⁰⁶ For example, as with the “flower children” of the sixties in the U.S. See Beyer, “Buddhism in Canada: A Statistical Overview from Canadian Censuses, 1981-2001” which suggests an emerging interest in re-discovering Buddhism by the younger generation (of lapsed Buddhists), Buddhism perhaps now coming to be seen as being respectable.

