

The Spiritual Origins of the Freer Gallery of Art: Religious and Aesthetic Inclusivism and the First American Buddhist Vogue, 1879-1907

(フリーア美術館の精神の原点：宗教的・審美的包括主義とアメリカ第一次仏教ブーム
1879-1907 年)

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SUMMARY IN JAPANESE: 近年、アメリカ研究者たちは、これまで以上にトランスナショナリズムに注目するようになってきた。こうした研究により、宗教、芸術作品、習慣、人々の国境を超えた動きが取り上げられてきている。本稿では、スミソニアン博物館フリーア美術館の100周年記念にあたり、チャールズ・ラング・フリーア(1854-1919)に着目する。その宗教観、審美観、さらに芸術品収集の実践を歴史的コンテキストの中で位置づけることにより、日米文化交流の一事例について考察する。フリーアは、1906年、収集した芸術作品の多くを、合衆国政府に寄贈した。現代のアメリカにおける仏教ブーム、そしてヴィクトリア朝期末における仏教の流行について言及したうえで、本稿では、フリーアの宗教観、審美的傾向、芸術品収集の実践が、信仰の危機からの救いを芸術に求めた同時代のエリート階級アメリカ人のそれと連動していたことを指摘する。東アジアの芸術作品、および、日本の影響を受けたアメリカ芸術作品を主要な所蔵とするフリーア美術館コレクションは、仏教へロマン主義的関心とヴィクトリア朝末期の宗教的、審美的包括主義への賛同の一表現であったことを提言したい。

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In recent years, transnationalism has emerged as a major theme in American Studies. So much so that some have claimed that there has been a “transnational turn” in the field.¹ American Studies specialists have urged the “internationalization” of the field and pondered the methodological implications of “globalization.”² Taking the boundary crossing still farther, some scholars have advocated a “post-nationalist American Studies.”³ Sympathetic with these developments, I have called for “translocative” studies that follow multi-directional cultural flows across spatial boundaries and, in the process, reconsider both the periodization and spatialization of our historical narratives about the United States.⁴ In this essay, my aims are more modest. I consider one case of transcultural contact between the U.S. and Japan. I focus on Charles Lang Freer (1854-1919) and the art collection—including “arguably the finest collection of East Asian art existing in the Western world”—that he donated to the U.S. government in 1906.⁵

In 2006, the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., celebrated its 100th anniversary, and the museum marked the occasion with lectures, events, and exhibitions. One exhibition, *Pretty Woman: Freer and the Ideal of Feminine Beauty*, marked the milestone by noting that many works Freer bought during his first twelve years as a collector (1884-1896) were images of beautiful women by U.S. artists James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), Abbott Handerson Thayer (1849-1921), and Thomas Wilmer Dewing (1851-1938). The exhibition inquired about the meanings those gendered representations had for the collector, the artists, and the viewers. In this essay, I take a different approach, drawing on my specialization in North American religious history. I ask different questions. As early as 1887, why did Freer not only acquire 26 pieces by Whistler, whose work had been shaped by the Japanese use of line, spacing, and color, but also buy a small seventeenth-century Japanese fan?⁶ Several years later, in 1894, Freer would make the first of four trips to East Asia, where he would begin to study Buddhism in Japan, and by the end of the last trip he had amassed a collection of more than 8,000 Asian works. Why would he travel to Japan, buy East Asian art, and investigate Buddhism? How did a wealthy railroad car manufacturer who had left school at the age of fourteen to escape poverty in a New York town, a former Dutch Protestant colonial center, come to say in a letter written from a secluded house in rural Japan that he cherished the chance to live for two months the “real Japanese life” and have the “opportunity to study its ins and outs, its ups and downs”?⁷ How did he come to say in that 1895 letter that he was “inclined to think” that the Buddhist notion of rebirth was right? Why would he still be

thinking in Buddhist terms more than twenty years later, when in a letter from the Berkshire Mountains he described a garden landscape this way: "I have recently added a little to a small garden spot which came my way about three years ago. The modest site includes a few pine trees, lots of rocks and a view stretching straight to Nirvana."⁸ And what does this interest in Japanese culture and Buddhist religion have to do with the art collection he donated?⁹

I will leave it to specialists on Freer to answer those questions in terms of the twists and turns in his biography. Here I want to suggest why all this does not seem so surprising in terms of the religious history of the period. Offering cultural rather than biographical answers to these questions, then, I want to suggest that Freer's inclusivist religious and aesthetic views—and his collecting and traveling—resonated with other contemporary developments.¹⁰ It was a time when many elites had become disillusioned with Christianity, and some turned to other traditions, including Buddhism, and other cultures, especially Japan. In other words, I want to place the events of 1906, when the United States government formally accepted the gift of Freer's art collection, in historical context.

The Contemporary Buddhist Vogue

Before looking back, however, it might help to quickly survey the contemporary religious landscape. One hundred years after the museum's founding, Christianity is still the predominant faith in the United States, both in terms of personal interest and cultural influence, but Buddhism has surprising, even disproportionate, influence. Islam gets more media coverage, but Buddhism seems to have more influence on popular piety and popular and elite culture.¹¹

Some of that influence can be measured by the number of adherents, those who identify themselves as cradle or convert Buddhists or have connections to Buddhist institutions, probably about 2.3 million Americans.¹² Counting adherents does not reveal the scope of the Buddhist presence, however. There also are many nightstand Buddhists, sympathizers who do not identify fully or exclusively with the tradition but whose meditation manual on the nightstand signals their interest in Buddhist beliefs and practices.¹³ And, as one recent sociological study shows,¹⁴ one American in seven claims to have a fair amount of contact with Buddhists, and one in eight reports that Buddhist teachings or practices "have had an important influence on his or her religion or spirituality."¹⁵ That means

that as many as 25-30 million Americans report contact with Buddhism, and one quarter of the public claims “to be very or somewhat familiar with the teachings of Buddhism.”¹⁶ Further, very few think of Buddhism in negative terms, and a majority say the religion is “tolerant.”¹⁷

These positive perceptions of Buddhism, and reports of influence, seem to have been propelled by the swirl of both supply-side and demand-side forces: since 1945, and especially since the Sixties, attractive representations of Buddhism have been more available in the spiritual marketplace, and more Americans have sought out what is available. That Buddhist presence has been mediated by movements and institutions, including immigrant and converts groups that have brought new religious leaders, texts, artifacts, and practices to the U.S.¹⁸ The New Age Movement—with its retreat centers, regular workshops, and mail-order catalogs—has exposed some Americans to Buddhism.¹⁹ So have university classrooms and martial arts centers as well as the alternative medicine and holistic health care movements. Thich Nhat Hanh, the exiled Vietnamese Buddhist, has led a transnational movement that emphasizes “mindfulness,” the practice of attending fully to each moment, as he notes in this passage from one of his best-selling books:

You’ve got to practice meditation when you walk, stand, lie down, sit, and work, while washing your hands, washing the dishes, sweeping the floor, drinking tea . . . or whatever you are doing. Just as when you’re drinking tea, drinking tea must be the most important thing in your life. When you’re using the toilet, let that be the most important thing in your life. . . . Each act must be carried out in mindfulness.²⁰

This Buddhist principle of mindfulness has been applied in American hospitals, clinics, and therapists’ offices to reduce stress and enhance mental and physical health.²¹ That influence is extended in other ways by Nhat Hanh and other “engaged Buddhists” who emphasize social action to promote benevolence, non-violence, and justice.²² Some engaged Buddhists have visited prisoners, and correctional institutions also are sites where some prisoners have the opportunity to read sacred texts and learn meditation practices. Churches and synagogues also have sponsored meditation workshops, and those worship spaces have been a source of contact. The film, music, fashion, advertising, and television industries also have circulated Buddhist images and represented Buddhist practices—

as with television shows like *My Name is Earl*, which is predicated on the notion that one must do good to avoid bad karma. And an enormous number of how-to books claim to apply the principles of Zen to almost everything—from *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love* to *Zen and the Art of Changing Diapers*.²³ In many ways, then, Buddhism seems to be in vogue. It has a quiet but pervasive influence in U.S. culture, including on American fine art, from the participatory installations of Sanford Biggers to the video art of Bill Viola.²⁴

The Late-Victorian Buddhist Vogue

But, as I argued in *The American Encounter with Buddhism*, Buddhism was in vogue before, between 1879 and 1907, while Freer was amassing his collection and when some elites were reporting a spiritual crisis.²⁵ Consider this typical account of the crisis from the first American woman to convert to Buddhism, Marie de Souza Canavarro, who was known in the press as “Sister Sanghamitta” after she left a privileged life in Hawaii to open a Buddhist school for girls in Ceylon:

An unsatisfying craving for something, I knew not what, pursued me. I sought a solution in many ways. First, I took up philanthropic work, then the study of different sciences. . . . I was overcome by thoughts, too weighty for the moment, and I longed to be out of the stifling atmosphere of pleasure, to be far away from it all, doing some noble, useful, and sacrificing work.²⁶

For Canavarro and others, intellectual forces such as Darwinism, biblical criticism, and comparative religion—which together seemed to challenge the accuracy of the Bible and the uniqueness of Christianity—combined with social forces such as industrialization, urbanization, and immigration to produce that “crisis.”²⁷ Some of the disillusioned left religion altogether; some stayed in the pews, if ambivalently and reluctantly. Some turned to a variety of alternative religious movements—from Spiritualism or Theosophy to Ethical Culture or Christian Science. During the peak of the Buddhist vogue between 1893, when the Parliament of Religions brought Buddhist speakers from Japan and Ceylon to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and 1907, when interest began to wane, several

thousand European-Americans turned to Buddhism. Canavarro, for example, joined the Theosophical Society and found Anagarika Dharmapala, the Sinhalese Buddhist:

I sought kindred spirits, whom I found in the Theosophical Society. Through connection with this fraternity, I came to know a Buddhist from Ceylon. I told him of my long search for truth, and explained that I had not yet found what I had been seeking. He then told me of the Buddha and his long search for truth. . . . The study of Buddhist scriptures satisfied my craving for Truth and led me to embrace that religion. . . .²⁸

Many more expressed personal interest. Americans said they found it appealing because, like Christianity, Buddhism had an impressive founder and admirable ethics, but unlike Christianity it did not embrace theism, the notion of a personal creator of the universe, and so did not have the same intellectual difficulties dealing with Darwinian biology. In other words, it seemed more scientific. As Buddhist advocates never tired of reminding American audiences, it also had less violence in its history and seemed to be more “tolerant.” Some of those who turned east for these reasons were sympathizers who did not give Buddhism their full or final allegiance—the ancestors of contemporary nightstand Buddhists. Others, however, claimed Buddhist identity. And reports of Buddhist interest appeared in the press during these years. *The New York Journal*, for example, claimed in 1893 that “it is no uncommon thing to hear a New Yorker say he is a Buddhist nowadays.”²⁹ One writer for *Atlantic* reported in an 1894 piece that “of the religions of the East, Buddhism is the best known and most popularly appreciated.” Four years later, a Christian who was not too happy about these developments had to admit that “Buddhism has numerous enthusiastic admirers in America.”³⁰ One Christian who worried about the eastward turn was Henry King, a prominent east coast Baptist minister who reflected on all the gushing about Buddhism, especially since the Parliament of Religions and after the visit of a British scholar of Buddhism, and he asked in the title of his 1895 essay, “Shall We All Become Buddhists?”³¹ The Reverend King answered his own question with a decisive no: we should *not* all become Buddhists. But the fact that he felt obliged to ask and answer the question signals how much popularity Buddhism had gained by the mid-1890s, when Freer first traveled to Japan and studied Buddhism.

Tens of thousands of Chinese and Japanese followers lived along the West Coast and in Hawaii, but there were three main types of European American Buddhist sympathizers and adherents at this time: esoterics, rationalists, and romantics.³² First, there were occult or esoteric Buddhists like Canavarro and Henry Steel Olcott, the first European American man to formally embrace Buddhism.³³ Like other esoteric sympathizers and adherents, Olcott and Canavarro emphasized hidden sources of religious truth—the meaning of the term occult is “hidden”—and sought a nonmaterial realm populated by beings, ancestors and masters, who can be contacted by religious practices like séances or by extraordinary states of consciousness. Many of these occult Buddhists had connections to the Theosophical Society, with its mixture of spiritualism and Asian religions. Even though they believed in spiritualist contact with the deceased and talked about the significance of human auras, these occultists wanted to be taken seriously as Buddhists, as Olcott emphasized in his recollection of the ceremony in Ceylon where he and Madame Blavatsky accepted the faith:

On 25th May [1880], H.P.B. and I “took pansil” . . . and were formally acknowledged as Buddhists. . . . HPB knelt before the huge statue of the Buddha, and I kept her company. We had a good deal of trouble in catching the Pali words that we were to repeat after the old monk, and I don’t know how we should have got on if a friend had not taken his place behind us and whispered them. . . . A great crowd was present and made the responses just after us. . . . When we had finished . . . and offered flowers in the customary way, there came a mighty shout to make one’s nerves tingle, and people could not settle themselves down to silence for some minutes to hear the brief discourse which, at the Chief Priest’s request, I delivered. I believe that attempts have been made to suppress this incident . . . and cover up the fact that HPB was as completely accepted a Buddhist as any Sinhalese in the island. . . . Our Buddhism was that of the Master Adept Gautama Buddha, which was identically the Wisdom Religion of the Aryan Upanishads, and the soul of all the ancient world-faiths. Our Buddhism was, in a word, a philosophy, not a creed.³⁴

In this passage, Olcott sounds a little like the rationalists, but rationalist Buddhists, who emphasized the light of reason and not hidden sources of meaning, dismissed esoterics as frauds. As the rationalist Buddhist sympathizer Paul

Carus suggested in an 1896 letter, “If I aid Buddhism, I do it solely in the interest of antagonizing occultism. Genuine Buddhism is no occultism but is the negation of all those superstitions which were introduced by the various [Hindu] Brahman schools.”³⁵ Rationalist Buddhist sympathizers and adherents portrayed themselves, and the faith, as a rejection of all that is superstitious and an affirmation of all that is reasonable. Influenced by Enlightenment rationalism, Auguste Comte’s positivism, and Herbert Spencer’s evolutionism, rationalists focused on reason—and not emotion or revelation—as the means of attaining religious truth. They emphasized the authority of the individual rather than that of texts, officials, or institutions. Religion, which expressed itself most fully in moral action, was above all scientific, as Paul Carus argued in this passage from his 1898 book, *The Dharma*, in which he responded to four of the nine misconceptions of Buddhism repeated by contemporary Christian critics:³⁶

1. Buddhism has no dogmas and is not based upon a revelation. . . . Every Buddhist is free to investigate for himself the facts from which the Buddhist doctrines have been derived. . . .
2. A conflict between religion and science is impossible in Buddhism. According to Buddha’s injunctions we must accept all propositions which have been proved to be true by careful scientific investigation. . . . It is noteworthy that modern psychology . . . confirms Buddha’s doctrine of the soul. . . .
7. Buddhists do not believe that they alone are in possession of truth and hail truth and purity wherever they find it, be it in the prophets of Israel, the New Testament, or in the [Dhammapada]. . . .
8. [Buddhists] gladly recognize many remarkable resemblances of their own faith with other religions; especially the ethics of Christ are truly elevating and remind Buddhists of the noble injunctions of Buddha. . . .

Romantic Buddhists, a third type, also recognized those “resemblances” among religions. For romantic Buddhists like Ernest Fenollosa and William Sturgis Bigelow, who lived in Japan for years and donated their enormous collections of East Asian art to Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, the attraction to Buddhism was shaped by a world view that came from the philosophical and aesthetic influences of Romanticism—German Romantics like Goethe and American Romantics like Emerson, with their emphasis on feeling and on nature. And their faith was part

of an immersion into a Buddhist culture, especially Japanese culture—its art, architecture, music, drama, customs, and literature, as well as its religion. This sort of American Buddhist tended to focus on aesthetic and imaginative rather than rational or occult approaches to religious meaning. They tended to be more privileged and have the means to travel. So Bigelow and Fenollosa, as well as other romantic sympathizers like Henry Adams, John La Farge, Edward Morse, and Lafcadio Hearn, set off for Japan during the 1880s and 1890s. Fenollosa and Bigelow even studied Buddhism formally at a temple in Otsu, Japan, and received the precepts of Tendai Buddhism there in 1885. Fenollosa also had a memorial service, which Freer attended, at that Japanese temple in 1909.³⁷

All three kinds of American Buddhists found resemblances among religions and rejected the prevailing theological views of the relation among religions: *exclusivism*, the view that one religion, Christianity, exhausts all religious truth, and *fulfillment inclusivism*, the view that Christianity completes or fulfills the partial truths of Judaism. Instead, most Buddhist sympathizers in the U.S. embraced other versions of an inclusivist theological position, recognizing truth and value in multiple cultures and religions. They either argued, as the esoteric Olcott did, for an *essence inclusivism*, which proclaimed a common essence of all true religion that is found in varying degrees in contemporary traditions. Or they argued, as did the rationalist Carus, that a future religion of science was emerging at that moment in history, when the best, and most rational, elements of the religions would come together to form the basis for a universal, scientific, and tolerant piety. We might call this understanding of the relation among religions *emergent inclusivism*, and romantic Buddhists like Fenollosa and Bigelow (and Freer) trumpeted some version of this view, too. The religions, and cultures, of the world have more commonalities than is usually recognized, they proposed, and even though they diverged in some ways, those complementary traditions were now coming together, or soon would unite, to bring about something better, more fully developed, a universal faith that would be superior to all that came before.

Bigelow, for example, pondered these questions about the relation among religions in one 1902 letter he wrote from Yokohama to a Japanese Buddhist priest in Kyoto:

I beg you to accept my best thanks for your kindness in answering my letter. . . . The illustration of the “shaku” [the Tendai Buddhist doctrine of the temporal manifestation of the eternal Dharma] . . . is most valuable and

clear. It also corresponds with what I have learned from some Zen priests whom I have met. They tell me that the object or goal of all great religions . . . is the same, namely the expansion of individual consciousness into a larger consciousness. This larger consciousness is called Buddha or enlightenment.³⁸

In this understanding of Buddhism, and the relation among religions, the paths of all religions lead to unity in an enlightened or transcendent state. In this way of seeing it, all religions point toward *nirvana*, the extinction of suffering and the end of rebirths.

And nirvana comes up as a theme again and again in the letters, lectures, and poems of romantic Buddhist sympathizers and adherents. John La Farge, the American artist, reported that he and Henry Adams were moved by the Buddhist art they saw in Japan, and especially by the images of the bodhisattva Kannon “when absorbed in the meditations of Nirvana.”³⁹ Adams was so touched by that Buddhist image that he asked the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens to use it as a model for the famous memorial to his wife, who had committed suicide. George Cabot Lodge, another romantic Buddhist and the elder brother of the Freer Gallery’s first director (John Ellerton Lodge), practiced meditation with Bigelow, his religious mentor, and in 1897 penned a poem called “Nirvana,” which Lodge sent him a letter:⁴⁰

Woof of the scenic sense, large monotone
Where life’s diverse inceptions, Death and Birth,
Where all the gaudy overflow of Earth
Die—they the manifold, and thou the one.
Increate, complete, when the stars are gone
In cinders down the void, when yesterday
No longer spurs desire starvation-gray,
When God grows mortal in men’s hearts of stone;
As each pulsation of the heart divine
Peoples the chaos, or with falling breath
Beggars creation, still the soul is thine!
And still, untortured by the world’s increase,
Thy wide harmonic silences of death,
And last—thy white, uncovered breast of peace!

Lodge's poem ends with the notion that the Buddhist nirvana brings peace. So does Bigelow's 1908 Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard on *Buddhism and Immortality*:⁴¹

There is a Japanese proverb that says, "There are many roads up the mountain, but it is always the same moon seen from the top." The Japanese themselves, with a liberality worthy of imitation, apply this saying to different forms of religious belief. . . . This peak may be accessible by any religion . . . but Buddhism . . . looks beyond. The mountain top is the apotheosis of personal existence . . . a sublime elevation, where many a pilgrim is content to pause. Below him are the kingdoms; above him are the stars; and kingdoms and stars alike are his. But it is not the end. Deeper than the kingdoms, and higher than the stars, is the sky that holds them all. And there alone is peace—that peace that the material world cannot give . . . —infinite and eternal peace, —the peace of limitless consciousness unified with limitless will. That peace is NIRVANA.

Note that the concluding passage of Bigelow's lecture links nirvana with an inclusivist understanding of the relation among cultures and religions. Fenollosa, Freer's good friend and art advisor, does the same in his 1893 poem "East and West."⁴² That long five-part poem begins with the first meeting of East and West in ancient Greece, Alexander's time, chronicles the subsequent isolation of East and West, and then considers their present encounter and future meeting. In the poem's last section, Fenollosa plays with the metaphor of sexual union as he longs for the merging of the force of the masculine West and the love of the feminine East:⁴³

What then shalt thou harmonize?
All that force the Westerns prize;—
Masculinity of measures,
Vigilance of Argus eyes.

Whence shall spring harmonic norms?
From the sun the Eastern warms;—
Loving femininity,
Fertile flower-bed of forms.

Fenollosa's poem ends with the erotic union of East and West, which couple in the blissful silence of nirvana:⁴⁴

O unveiled bride,
Sweet other self at my side,
I ask no wedding bliss
Of passionate external kiss . . .
I breathe thy breath as though my spirit came
A tongue of Pentecostal flame.
No human spouse e'er felt
The culminating fire in which I melt . . .
As when some saint is lifted up and hurled
Out of this mortal world,
This temple transitory
For Nature's unemancipated priest,
Into the silence of Nirwana's glory,
Where there is no more West and no more East.

Freer, Inclusivism, and the Buddhist Vogue

Charles Lang Freer, who never married, claimed to have many blissful unions with women, and, in his own way, he managed to bring together East and West—and the Near and Far East too—in the art collection he donated to the federal government.⁴⁵ His reasons for seeking such cultural unions, and his sympathy for Buddhism and attraction to Japan, I suggest, make sense in the context of U.S. encounters with Buddhism between 1893 and 1907.

In an insightful article, one art historian has interpreted Freer as a religious "agnostic."⁴⁶ That is partly right and partly wrong: right because the Victorian crisis of faith shaped him; wrong because the word *agnostic* implies not knowing, but Freer had some clear opinions about religious matters. Unlike his friend Fenollosa, who despised the Theosophical Society, Freer had some occult impulses. For example, one 1893 letter indicates that Freer bought nine books and pamphlets from a New York periodical associated with the Theosophical Society, including "Gems from the East" by Madame Blavatsky.⁴⁷ He also read some of the respectable Buddhist scholarship of the day, however, including John Ernest

Eitel's *Handbook of Chinese Buddhism*, which included a Sanskrit-Chinese dictionary and a list of Buddhist terms in Pali, Tibetan, and Japanese, a volume he borrowed from a New York acquaintance in 1898.⁴⁸ But, despite some occult impulses, I think it is most useful to see Freer as a romantic Buddhist sympathizer who sought religious truth and aesthetic value in multiple traditions and cultures, as his 1895 letter from Japan to his friend, the New England landscape painter Dwight Tryon (1849-1925), indicates.⁴⁹ Like other late-Victorian romantic Buddhists, Freer found himself drawn aesthetically to the art of Japan, and, though he did not live there as long as Fenollosa or Bigelow, he traveled to Japan four times and tried to immerse himself in local life, even writing that letter "on the floor with a match." He tried to "live in real Japs fashion. No chairs, bed, or table." He explained: "I have taken a beautiful little house (the only one here) for a few days and here is rest—and real Japanese life and opportunity to study its ins and outs, its ups and downs." And studying the "ins and outs" of Japanese culture, especially its ancient art, brought him some joy. That meant both moving toward aesthetic pleasure and getting away from daily routine: "My present trip has brought me one valuable sensation at least, that of a long and welcome escape from high pressure American business life." He continually sought a certain "influence," as Freer put it, and he found that influence best expressed not in the other major cities of the world but in Kyoto, a place with many Buddhist temples and a rich tradition of religious art: "Kioto, Japan's old capital, comes nearest [to the influence I seek] because of its excellent old time art in many forms, beautiful surroundings, and absence of large commercial enterprises."

He reported in his letter that the name of the place he was writing from means "Bridging Heaven," and there were signs in that letter of religious influence, especially Buddhist influence. He and Tryon had been debating the merit of international travel, with Freer defending it. Encounters with other cultures cultivate the imagination, Freer suggested:

I . . . sympathize with your affection for the character of New England scenery, but I think one grows to greater intimacy, keener appreciation of the object he most loves after his memories have been toned by other agreeable impressions. Shadowy recollections of [an] unknown place and glimpses of far away coasts and strange horizons leave a mysterious something which I think in part the basis of what we call the imagination. Of course, to complete the edifice we must add literature, music, all the fine

arts, including also all sensations of human existence. If the Buddhistic idea is correct and I am inclined to think that it is, not one earthly existence alone is sufficient but several are required to develop [sic] an imaginative mind.

What's especially interesting in this passage is not Freer's understanding of the imagination, but his affirmation of the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth, the idea that humans pass through repeated cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. As I have tried to suggest, other elites of this period turned to Japan, and Japanese art in particular, to find aesthetic and religious fulfillment. And, even if he didn't formally declare his full or final allegiance to Buddhism, as his friend Fenollosa did, Freer and others among the spiritually disillusioned found that they were "inclined" to believe in the notion of rebirth and to seek the solace of nirvana, whether Freer imagined that as a temporary "escape" from fast pace commerce or a lasting transcendent peace, a spiritual and aesthetic quietude he sought in gardens in the Berkshires and in temples in Kyoto. To some extent, then, the collection at the Freer Gallery of Art, with its major holdings in both East Asian art and Japanese-influenced American art, is an expression of the romantic interest in Buddhism and an affirmation of late-Victorian religious and aesthetic inclusivism. Freer's important collection, which is a product of transcultural exchange, expresses a vision of the relation among religions and cultures that seeks harmonies across geographical and temporal boundaries and that welcomes insights from multiple times and places.

Notes

- 1 I originally delivered a version of this article as a public lecture at the Smithsonian Institution's Freer Gallery of Art on June 3, 2006, a year when the museum was celebrating its 100th anniversary. In that lecture, I was accompanied by actor Jonathan Watkins, who read extended passages from primary sources that I had selected. In revising this piece for publication, I have retained some of the tone and structure of the original lecture. I want to express my gratitude to the staff of the Freer Gallery of Art for their kind invitation. Robert A. Gross, "The Transnational Turn: Rediscovering American Studies in a Wider World," *Journal of American Studies* [United Kingdom] 34.3 (December 2000): 373-93; Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 12 November 2004," *American Quarterly* [United States] 57.1 (March 2005): 17-57. *The Japanese Journal of American Studies* published an article, originally presented as a conference paper in Kyoto, which documented and celebrated the turn toward "transnational American Studies": Shelley Fisher

- Fishkin, "Asian Crossroads/Transnational American Studies," *Japanese Journal of American Studies* [Japan] 17 (2006): 5-52. See the ample citations in Fishkin's article for more bibliographical suggestions. A special issue of the journal *American Studies* [United States] considered "Globalization, Transnationalism, and the End of the American Century": Norman R. Yetman and David M. Katzman, eds. "Special Issue: Globalization, Transnationalism, and the End of the American Century," *American Studies* 41 (summer/fall 2000). This impulse also is evident in Canadian Studies, by the way. Note, for example, that the *International Journal of Canadian Studies* [Canada] published a thematic issue on "Transculturalisms." In a similar effort among U.S. historians, Thomas Bender led a collaborative effort sponsored by the Organizations of American Historians, the Project on Internationalizing the Study of American History, which brought together seventy-eight scholars in four conferences. That project issued several reports and led to the publication of a collection of essays: Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
- 2 Michael Cowan and Eric Sandeen, "The Internationalization of American Studies," *American Studies Newsletter* 71.4 (June 1994); Heinz Ickstadt, "American Studies in an Age of Globalization," *American Quarterly* 54.4 (December 2002): 543-62.
- 3 John Carlos Rowe, ed., *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
- 4 Thomas A. Tweed, "American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism: Albert J. Edmunds, D.T. Suzuki, and Translocative History," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* [Japan] 32.2 (2005): 249-81; Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 135-38; Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1-28, 171-83.
- 5 The assessment of Freer's collection is from Warren I. Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture: A Study in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 62. On the Freer Gallery of Art's collections see its helpful web page: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2006, available at <<http://www.asia.si.edu/>>, accessed 3 September 2006.
- 6 This aesthetic, with its emphasis on line, spacing, and color, was adopted and advocated by Ernest Fenollosa and Arthur Wesley Dow, and, as Nicholas Clark has argued, it influenced Freer. Nichols Clark, "Charles Lang Freer: An American Aesthete in the Gilded Era," *American Art Journal* 11.4 (October 1979): 66. Fenollosa put it this way in the 1913 second edition of his influential *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*: "This book conceives of the art of each epoch as a peculiar beauty of line, spacing, and colour. . . ." Ernest Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover, 1963), xxiii. For a glimpse at Freer's ongoing relationship, professional and personal, with Whistler, see their correspondence: Linda Merrill, ed., *With Kindest Regards: The Correspondence of Charles Lang Freer and James McNeill Whistler, 1890-1903* (Washington, D.C. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995). The Japanese influence on Whistler's art, and on the aesthetics of Fenollosa and Dow, was part of a wider

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- engagement with Japanese art and culture at this time in Europe and North America. On that see Lionel Lambourne, *Japonisme: Cultural Crossings between Japan and the West* (New York and London: Phaidon, 2005).
- 7 Charles Lang Freer to Dwight Tryon, 17 June 1895, from "Ama-no-Hashidate" (Japan), Dwight Tryon Papers, Freer Gallery of Art, Archives. I want to thank David Hogge of the Freer Gallery of Art for his help in finding this and the other archival sources I cite.
- 8 Charles Lang Freer to Cameron Currie, 31 July 1916, from Barrington, Massachusetts, the Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art, Archives.
- 9 For a helpful analysis of Freer and his collection see Thomas Lawton and Linda Merrill, *Freer: A Legacy of Art* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1993). For an analysis of Freer's collecting in the context of the "Golden Age" of East Asian art collecting, 1893-1919, see Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture*, 49-64.
- 10 Although they have used other terms and focused somewhat less on religious trends, and the wider cultural interest in Buddhism, some other interpreters of Freer have noted his inclusivist impulse. Clark suggests that Freer and Ernest Fenollosa "both observed strong affinities among the three major sections of Freer's collection: the Japanese and Chinese paintings, the ancient glazed pottery, and Whistler's paintings." Clark, "Charles Lang Freer," 68. Kathleen Pyne points to Freer's "universal aesthetics" that included not only the work of Whistler but also Near Eastern and Far Eastern art: Kathleen Pyne, "Portrait of a Collector as an Agnostic: Charles Lang Freer and Connoisseurship," *Art Bulletin* 78.1 (March 1996): 93. Ann C. Gunter identifies Freer's belief in "the transcendent harmonies he perceived among the works of disparate cultures worldwide": Ann C. Gunter, *A Collector's Journey: Charles Lang Freer and Egypt* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2002), 29.
- 11 Robert Wuthnow and Wendy Cadge, "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States: The Scope of Influence," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43.3 (September 2004): 378.
- 12 On the number of Buddhists in the U.S. see Thomas A. Tweed, "United States [Buddhism in], in Robert E. Buswell, Jr., ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, vol. 2 (New York: Thomson/Gale, 2004), 864-70; and Wuthnow and Cadge, "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States," 364. For a study of Chinese immigrants that shows that many affirmed or reaffirmed Buddhism in the U.S. see Noel Lin, "Finding Buddha in the West: An Ethnographic Study of a Chinese Buddhist Community in North Carolina," M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001.
- 13 On nightstand Buddhists, and other sorts of adherents and sympathizers, see Thomas A. Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist?," in Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann, eds., *Westward Dharma: Buddhism beyond Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 17-33.
- 14 Wuthnow and Cadge, "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States," 365.
- 15 Wuthnow and Cadge, "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States," 363.
- 16 Wuthnow and Cadge, "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States," 364-65.
- 17 Wuthnow and Cadge, "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States," 365.
- 18 The Buddhist presence has been mediated by other sorts of institutions, including philanthropic institutions and wealthy patrons. A cultural history of Buddhism would acknowledge the role of those foundations and patrons, including Cornelius Crane, Stephen Rockefeller, Peter Lynch, and

- Mitchell Kapor. I am indebted to Richard Jaffe, my colleague at Duke, for emphasizing this philanthropic connection. On the ways that religion is mediated by technology see Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 124-27.
- 19 Wuthnow and Cadge, "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States," 367. On the New Age Movement see P. Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996) and N. Drury, *Exploring the Labyrinth: Making Sense of the New Spirituality* (New York: Continuum, 1999).
 - 20 Tweed and Prothero, eds., *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History*, 269.
 - 21 Originally published in 1975, Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Miracle of Mindfulness* appeared in a revised edition with Beacon Press (Boston: Beacon, 1987). The sales figures I cite are from officials at Beacon Press, and I originally cited them elsewhere, where I also offered a brief biographical account of Nhat Hanh: Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen Prothero, eds., *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 268. On the uses of mindfulness practice for stress reduction see Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xiii. Mindfulness has been applied in other ways too. For example, in *Turning the Wheel: Essays on Buddhism and Writing* (New York: Scribner, 2003) the novelist Charles Johnson ponders "the elusive art of mindfulness" as an approach to writing. For an example of therapeutic Buddhism see Jon Kabot-Zinn, *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World through Mindfulness* (New York: Hyperion, 2005).
 - 22 On the movement see Christopher S. Queen, *Engaged Buddhism in the West* (Boston: Wisdom, 2000). In India, the movement is linked with the civil rights leader B. R. Ambedkar, who converted to Buddhism in 1956, and reached out to India's Untouchables between 1956 and 1966. As Queen notes, parallels also can be found among Buddhist activists in Thailand, Japan, Cambodia, and Myanmar (5). The movement also has found expression in the United States, for example in the outreach activities of the Zen Center of New York. On that, see Tweed and Prothero, eds., *Asian Religions in America*, 285-88. The religious and secular press in America took notice of both Nhat Hanh and Ambedkar at the time: see P.O. Philip, "Ambedkar now Buddhist," *Christian Century* 73 (19 December 1956): 1493-94; and "Thich Nhat Hanh," *The New Yorker* 42 (25 June 1966): 21-23.
 - 23 Brenda Shoshanna, *Zen and the Art of Falling in Love* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2003); Sarah Arsone, *Zen and the Art of Changing Diapers* (Pacific Palisades, Calif.: Arsone, 1993).
 - 24 On the influence of Buddhism in contemporary American art see Jacquelyn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob, eds., *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). That volume includes an analysis of Biggers' installations (204-11) and Viola's videos (248-57).
 - 25 Tweed, *American Encounter with Buddhism*.
 - 26 Tweed and Prothero, eds., *Asian Religions in America*, 151-52. On Canavarró see Thomas A. Tweed, "Inclusivism and the Spiritual Journey of Marie de Souza Canavarró," *Religion* 24 (January 1994): 43-58.
 - 27 For one of the classic treatments of the spiritual crisis see Paul A. Carter, *The Spiritual Crisis of the*

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- Gilded Age* (Dekalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University, 1971).
- 28 Tweed and Prothero, eds., *Asian Religions in America*, 152-53.
 - 29 Quoted in Tweed, *American Encounter with Buddhism*, 27.
 - 30 Quoted in Tweed, *American Encounter with Buddhism*, 27.
 - 31 Quoted in Tweed, *American Encounter with Buddhism*, 26.
 - 32 Tweed, *American Encounter with Buddhism*, 48-77. Much of my discussion below of the three types of Buddhists is taken from this source.
 - 33 On Olcott see Stephen R. Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).
 - 34 Tweed and Prothero, eds., *Asian Religions in America*, 143.
 - 35 Quoted in Tweed, *American Encounter with Buddhism*, 60.
 - 36 Tweed and Prothero, eds., *Asian Religions in America*, 149-50.
 - 37 Lawton and Merrill, *Freer: A Legacy of Art*, 149-51.
 - 38 Bigelow's letter is included in MURAKATA Akiko, "Selected Letters of William Sturgis Bigelow," Ph.D. diss. Department of History. George Washington University, 1971, 210-12.
 - 39 Quoted in Tweed, *American Encounter with Buddhism*, 70.
 - 40 Henry Adams, *The Life of George Cabot Lodge* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 68-69. See also George Cabot Lodge, *Poems and Dramas of George Cabot Lodge*, 2 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911).
 - 41 William Sturgis Bigelow, *Buddhism and Immortality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin; Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1908), 74-75.
 - 42 On Freer's relationship with Fenollosa see Lawton and Merrill, *Freer: A Legacy of Art*, 131-51. See also Kathleen Pyne, "Portrait of a Collector as Agnostic: Charles Lang Freer and Connoisseurship," *Art Bulletin* 78.1 (March 1996): 91-93; Clark, "Charles Lang Freer," 65-68.
 - 43 Ernest Fenollosa, *East and West*, 50-51.
 - 44 Fenollosa, *East and West*, 53-55.
 - 45 As Pyne notes, his intimate companion, Agnes E. Meyer, reported that Freer could not "remember the numerous females with whom he had physical relations" and that he had led "a life of constant, if selective, sexual gratification." This account comes from Agnes E. Meyer, "Charles Lang Freer and His Gallery," 40-42, container 126, Agnes Elizabeth Meyer Papers, 1907-1970, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. It is quoted and cited in Pyne, "Portrait of a Collector as an Agnostic," 86. Agnes Meyer also wrote to Freer about Buddhism, as Pyne notes (80). On the Near East and Far East in Freer's thought see Gunter, *A Collector's Journey*.
 - 46 Pyne, "Portrait of a Collector as an Agnostic: Charles Lang Freer and Connoisseurship," 75-97.
 - 47 Martha J. Hamilton [for Charles Lang Freer] to *The Path*, 27 February 1893, Charles Lang Freer Collection, Freer Gallery of Art, Archives.
 - 48 Charles Lang Freer to Edward S. Hull, 6 December 1898, Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art, Archives. In this letter, Freer thanks Hull for loaning him a copy of "Hand Book of Buddhism." Since I have not been able to find any other title from the period that matches this reference, I assume that Freer must have meant either the 1870 or 1888 edition, probably the latter, of Ernest

John Eitel's volume: Ernest John Eitel, *Hand-book of Chinese Buddhism, being a Sanskrit-Chinese Dictionary, with Vocabularies of Buddhist Terms in Pali, Singhalese, Siamese, Burmese, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Japanese* (Hong Kong: Lane, Crawford, and Co., 1888).

- 49 Charles Lang Freer to Dwight Tryon, 17 June 1895, from "Ama-no-Hashidate" (Japan), Dwight Tryon Papers, Freer Gallery of Art, Archives. One interpreter of American art, Matthew Baigell, has suggested that Tryon's landscapes were the most "refined" of the period, and that Freer's influence on his work manifested itself in Tryon's interest in "eastern" art and in his concern to suggest "the presence of a benign spirit in the physical world." Matthew Baigell, *A Concise History of American Painting and Sculpture*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 157. On Tryon's work in the Freer Gallery see Linda Merrill, *An Ideal Country: Paintings by Dwight William Tryon in the Freer Gallery of Art* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution; Hanover, N.H.: Distributed by the University of New England Press, 1990).

