

## Article

# An Ongoing Womanist Buddhist Project: Reading between the Times

Chera Jo Watts

Department of Religion, Institute for African American Studies, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30609, USA; cheraw@uga.edu

**Abstract:** This article challenges the dominant Christian-centered approach to Black religious life by exploring contemporary Womanist Buddhist and Black Buddhist practice, writing, and thought alongside writings of early East Asian Buddhist nuns, noting similarities, differences, and the intersections among and between these written accounts. “Reading Between the Times” signals the ongoing nature of this project, and this particular paper draws heavily upon Kathryn Ann Tsai’s 1994 translation *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries* along with several Womanist and/or Black Buddhist voices, such as Faith Adiele, Melanie Harris, bell hooks, Layli Maparyan, Carolyn Jones Medine, Alice Walker, reverend angel Kyodo williams, Jan Willis, and Pamela Ayo Yetunde. Rather than make definitive claims, this paper becomes curious with initial observations surrounding authorial voice, intersections of race/gender/class within a particular temporal space, “legitimacy” questions, and others—and, of course, invites more work in the future. Deploying an engaged Buddhist pedagogy to inform mindful scholarship, this paper reminds us that we have more commonalities than oppressive systems often admit or acknowledge, and it concludes with a call to action.

**Keywords:** African American; Womanist; Womanism; Black feminism; American Buddhism; Buddhists; Black Buddhists; engaged Buddhism; early Buddhist Nuns; comparative religious studies



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## 1. Introduction and Inspiration

Do not think that the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice non-attachment from views in order to be open to receive others’ viewpoints. Truth is found in life and not merely in conceptual knowledge. Be ready to learn throughout your entire life and to observe reality in yourself and in the world at all times (Hanh 1987).

—Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese Buddhist monk<sup>1</sup>

Inspired by the “Buddhist Resources for Womanist Reflection” project established in 2009 at Harvard University’s Center for the Study of World Religions (co-facilitated by Charles Hallisey and Melanie Harris; Harris (2014), this paper disrupts the dominant Christian-centered narrative concerning Black religious life by seriously considering Womanist Buddhist and Black Buddhist writing, thought, and practice as demonstrated in their scholarship, autobiographical, and semi-autobiographical writings alongside writings of some of the earliest Buddhist nuns. As a graduate student at The University of Georgia amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, a professor directed me toward Kathryn Ann Tsai’s 1994 translation *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries* (A translation of the *Pi-ch’iu-ni chuan*, compiled by Shih Pao-ch’ang). Although Charles Hallisey’s 2015 translation *Therigatha: Poems of the First Buddhist Women* resonates for this practice because of its use during the 2009 Womanist Buddhist reading group co-directed by Hallisey and Harris, this paper will not extensively engage with that text (except noting its importance for the first Womanist Buddhist reading group). Though not

an exhaustive list, some of the Womanists, Womanist Buddhists, and/or Black Buddhist voices represented in this paper include Faith Adiele, Melanie Harris, bell hooks, Layli Maparyan, Carolyn Jones Medine, Alice Walker, reverend angel Kyodo williams, Jan Willis, and Pamela Ayo Yetunde. For the purposes of this imaginative project, official labels matter little; further, not all who embody or practice Womanism label themselves as such (Phillips 2006, p. xxi), and this is the point: as scholars and practitioners, we aim to embrace curiosity, fluidity, and plurality rather than cling to precise, containing boundaries.

Further, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the geo-political and societal circumstances under which I write and publish this paper. In the wakes of the 2020 murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, mainstream attention shifted towards ongoing Black Lives Matter movements amidst the continuing global COVID-19 pandemic, including another new deadly variant, Omicron.<sup>2</sup> These stresses and others wreak havoc physically, mentally, spiritually, and economically within millions of lives; therefore, this havoc, pain, and discomfort (and *sometimes hope*) undergird the spirit of individual and collective consciousness. As scholars, practitioners, and teachers, we need responsible, intentional comparative studies as we practice toward a cross-cultural, transnational justice (Mohanty 1984, 2002). Channeling the bodhisattva spirit, let us fearlessly imagine ourselves as active participants in and contributors to these movements regardless of racial, ethnic, gender, religious, or other background. To that end, this paper is not meant to hierarchicalize the experiences of these women—these audacious, fearless women.<sup>3</sup> Rather, this scholar intends to witness their experience and aims to infer similarities, differences, and the intersections among them to open space such that new insights emerge. In “Under Western Eyes’ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles”, post-colonial feminist scholar Chandra Mohanty reminds us: “The differences and borders of each of our identities connect us to each other, more than they sever. So the enterprise here is to forge informed, self-reflexive solidarities among ourselves” (Mohanty 2002, p. 530). With a keen focus on differences, Mohanty intends to establish “common differences” by which all may cross-culturally unite. Inspired by Mohanty’s call to action, this project asks that we imagine this work transcending temporal, geographical, religious, and racial boundaries. This becomes engaged Buddhism practiced in real life or what Womanist scholar Layli Maparyan labels, “Luxocracy”, or “rule by Light”, as an orientation in the world.<sup>4</sup>

First, I briefly review Womanist thought and discuss a handful of key voices, noting ways in which their scholarship and activism informs the Womanist community and the academy, finally gesturing toward Womanist Buddhists and Black Buddhists.<sup>5</sup> Next, I contextualize a key source for biographies of early East Asian Buddhist nuns, Kathryn Ann Tsai’s 1994 translation *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries* (A translation of the *Pi-ch’iu-ni chuan*, compiled by Shih Pao-ch’ang), anchoring this project’s inspiration with the 2009 Womanist Buddhist readings of *Therigatha*. Finally, I play with observed similarities, differences, and the intersections among and between these written accounts, mindful that each were operating within and in response to their respective “master narratives”,<sup>6</sup> always in the margins or as boundary dwellers. Never the center, never the deciders, these audacious women literally *wrote themselves* into the conversations, and to this day, their work continues as legitimacies or legacies are continuously called into question; thus, let us be honest with ourselves and each other: *boundary enforcers do not welcome margin dwellers in “their” spaces*.

Before going further, I openly acknowledge that for some readers and scholars, comparing Early Chinese Buddhist nuns alongside American Black Buddhists seems like a stretch. For instance, we know that our Chinese Buddhist nuns typically occupied the elite class in their society, and they did not experience racism or legacies of enslavement in the tangible ways that American Black Buddhists experience these harms. Again, this paper does not seek to collapse these groups of women into homogenous groups; rather, it encourages a practice. Thus, I encourage readers to stretch their minds and spirits, disrupt hegemonic norms imposed by the academy, and see what emerges. Deploying an engaged

Buddhist<sup>7</sup> pedagogy, “Reading Between the Times” as a practice reminds us that we have more commonalities as humans than systems of oppression acknowledge or admit. Much like elements of the Noble Eightfold path intersect, reinforce, and complement one another, these initial observations among Womanist Buddhists, Black Buddhists, or Womanist voices and early East Asian Buddhist nuns are not operating in isolation. Each individual similarity or difference warrants substantial inquiry on its own, and this paper proposes more questions than answers, thus inviting more work in the future. We have much to learn from the past, present, and from the interplay between these temporal spaces. Let us disrupt to instruct, lean into the pauses, and reflect upon what emerges.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Womanist Buddhist Voices

On 16 August 2002, Womanist writer and Black Buddhist practitioner Alice Walker delivered her first Dharma talk at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, California. This talk marks the first time Walker openly identified with Buddhism. Walker said, “Though not a Buddhist, I have found a support in the teachings of the Buddha that is beyond measure, as I have found comfort and support in those teachings I have received from Ancient Africans and Indigenous people of my native continent and from the Earth itself,” (Walker 2006, p. 105). Walker makes clear that she is not concerned with labeling herself “Buddhist”; rather, she strives for embodying enlightenment (Walker 2006, p. 94). Yet, Walker’s Buddhist practice remains an important part of her life, and her canon of writing showcasing Buddhism’s influence in her life has expanded considerably since 2002.<sup>9</sup>

Nearly twenty years earlier (following the publication of Walker’s essay collection, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, in 1983), Womanism entered the religious studies academy in 1985 through the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature, where it maintains an evolving community of scholarship and activism across many disciplines (Floyd-Thomas 2006, p. 3). Though originally extended through the Christian theological lens in the United States<sup>10</sup>, I extend gratitude to scholars such as Melanie Harris, Carolyn Jones Medine, Layli Phillips Maparyan, Nagueyalti Warren, and others who acknowledge the roots of Womanism with Walker’s definition, personal spirit, and ethics while extending toward ancestral mothers and grandmothers. Their scholarly work builds upon the work of ancestors (and earlier waves of Womanist thought),<sup>11</sup> urging fluidity and religious plurality within the Womanist academic and activist communities to *truly embody and center* the rich, varied lives of Black women, living and ancestral, across all of their identities and experiences.

Again, this particular paper disrupts the Christian-dominated narrative as it pertains to Black religious life and experience. As articulated by Walker, Womanism does not prioritize the Christian God or Christology as the spiritual norm for Black experience. Rather, a Womanist “Loves the Spirit” and remains “Committed to the wholeness and survival of entire people, male and female,” (Walker 1983, pp. xi–xii). In addition, as reverend angel Kyodo williams poignantly notes in *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*, “With the exception of Malcolm X, the Black prophetic voice has been erringly associated with Christianity” (Williams et al. 2016, p. 192), to which I would add, so has the majority of Womanist theological or religious studies scholarship. To go a step further, Christianity is often presumed. In addition to these audacious scholars, I extend gratitude toward the many generous practitioners and skilled autobiographers whose work inspires and influences ongoing Womanist Buddhist scholarship, practice, and exploration. In addition to Alice Walker, some examples include reverend angel Kyodo williams, Jan Willis, Pamela Ayo Yetunde, bell hooks, Ralph Steele, and Faith Adiele, who offer glimpses into the innermost reflections of Black Buddhist practice through their works.<sup>12</sup> However, they are not alone in their practice and therefore should not be considered a complete list of references.<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned, the Womanist Buddhist project emerged in the academy in 2009 thanks to a grant co-directed by Melanie Harris and Charles Hallisey supported by the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University (Harris 2014, p. 108). This project

generated interesting and hopeful in-person conversational gatherings between Buddhists and Womanists, resulting in several articles published in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (2014 and 2016), and as Harris indicates, a forthcoming edited volume (*Standing on Two Legs: Buddhist Resources for Womanist Reflection*) (Harris 2014, p. 109). Unlike Christianity, which is inextricably linked to imperialism, nationalism, and enslavement in the United States, Buddhist teachings and practices (particularly those under the auspice of engaged Buddhism) *might* be uniquely positioned for healing, inspiration, and forward-thinking action as we collectively demand justice and undo systems of racism, heterosexism, and patriarchy.<sup>14</sup>

However, not all Womanists identify with Buddhism; in fact, many of them do not. In addition, not all Black Buddhists reject Christianity entirely. Jan Willis immediately comes to mind as a self-identified Baptist Buddhist, but many others retain aspects of their Christian faith and practice. Further, not all Black men and women practicing or identifying with Buddhism would label themselves Womanist. As a scholar and practitioner with a nod toward Womanist doctor mothers, I embrace curiosity, fluidity, and plurality rather than cling to precise, containing boundaries. As Womanist scholars Layli Phillips (now Maparyan) and Barbara McCaskill remind us, “By dint of our differences, Womanist scholarship is composed of transformative harmony, proactive tension, and regenerative collaboration. Womanist scholarship resists dogma, and it offers a vision of intellectual leadership in which reliance and responsibility are not approached as handicaps but as liberatory strategies” (Phillips and McCaskill 1995, p. 1014). In the spirit of “proactive tension and regenerative collaboration”, some of the voices included in this paper may not label themselves as “Womanist” or “Womanist Buddhist”. However, regardless of label or category, they remain relevant voices in this ongoing conversation. An aspect of my ongoing decolonizing practice problematizes any project wishing for clear distinctions and boundaries.

In her introduction to *The Womanist Reader*, Layli Phillips (Maparyan) defines Womanism as:

A social change perspective rooted in Black women’s and other women of color’s everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension. (Phillips 2006, p. xx)

This expansive definition, viewing Womanism as both a mode of being *and* ongoing, cumulative practice, allows scholars, practitioners, and everyday folks to meaningfully participate in collective social justice movements in the ways that they can from the spaces they occupy. Maparyan’s definition proves especially useful, as it resonates with engaged Buddhist practice and a re-imagining or re-orienting society from the perspective of those most oppressed within what Toni Morrison notes as our global master narrative. However, this re-orientation would understandably enact change across most of our lives, for whether or not we want to admit it, we all participate in global white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,<sup>15</sup> especially those occupying space in the academy. A true imagining of a collectively just society invites us to acknowledge how we participate (without lingering on defensive tendencies) and also what might happen if we stop clinging to the current normative societal systems. For the purposes of this paper, I propose *questions*, not answers, noting that this continuous reflective work remains relevant and important, invoking what emilie townes calls the “Womanist Dancing Mind”.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Contextualizing the *Lives of the Nuns*

A millennium and a half ago there lived in China some remarkable women who cast aside the fetters of the world to become Buddhist nuns. *Lives of the Nuns* preserves the memory of their lives and deeds and gives us a look into a world that is foreign, exotic, and now vanished; yet, that world is far less alien than we might first think, for it is peopled with men and women who express the same emotions—the same desires, aspirations, or longings for spiritual enlightenment—



as those found in all times and in all places. Furthermore, the character of these nuns who lived during dangerous and chaotic times can instruct us who also live in such times. (Pao-ch'ang 1994, p. ix)

Quoted from the preface to *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries*, Tsai's words resonate with the intentions of this paper and with the havoc of our current moment. Written with any interested reader in mind, whether scholar or general audience, Tsai worked constantly with another translation (by Li Jung-hsi of the Chinese Buddhist Association in Peking) alongside ongoing conversations with colleagues and map references and, when necessary, contextualized through bracketed notes such that scholars can successfully navigate the text (Pao-ch'ang 1994, pp. ix–x). The importance of this massive undertaking cannot be overstated. As John Kieschnick notes in his review, Tsai's translation "itself is impeccable" and easily surpasses that of Li Jung-hsi (which Tsai acknowledges as a helpful and essential resource) (Kieschnick 1994, p. 274). Therefore, Tsai's translation grounds the early Chinese Buddhist nun section of this practice.

In the introduction, Tsai observes: "More than a mere collection of biographies, their dates cover the period of the founding and establishing of early Buddhist monastic order for women from the early fourth century to the early sixth century. The *Lives* allows us to see the development of monastic life for women in China from its beginnings" (Pao-ch'ang 1994, p. 1). The introduction credits Shi Pao'ch'ang with compiling the original Chinese book in or around A.D. 516, with subjects selected based on the merit of their story and with the hopes of further inspiring or spreading Buddhism in China. Tsai continues: "Fifteen hundred years later the biographies are of interest to us for very different reasons. We see in hindsight many features of the early history of Buddhism in China and many reasons why women of that time might take up the life of a Buddhist nun" (Pao-ch'ang 1994, p. 1). Such reasons included but were not limited to religious aspirations, avoiding "unwelcome marriage, flight from war, homelessness, lack of protection, or frustrated intellectual ambitions" (Pao-ch'ang 1994, p. 7).

However, as Kieschnick reminds us in his review:

Because we have little evidence on nuns outside of the accounts in the *Lives*, use of the *Lives* as a source for historical events is particularly precarious. We are on firmer ground if we read the *Lives* as a reflection of mentalities of the sixth century, when the collection was compiled. This in turn raises the question of just whose mentality the collection reflects. The compiler of the collection was a monk, not a nun, and when compiling the biographies, he drew in part on accounts composted by literati. (Kieschnick 1994, p. 275)

To be sure, Chinese aristocrats during the fourth to sixth centuries concerned with controlling the narrative surrounding Buddhism's spread influenced the texts produced through their patronage. There are similar concerns with other ancient medieval Chinese Buddhist texts, such as with the Temple Legends of the *Lo-yang Ch'ien-lan-chi*, which Whalen Lai considers at length in an article published in the edited volume *State and Society in Early Medieval China*. Lai's article negotiates the complexities of the text (written by Yang Hsuan-chih in 547), mining for important information such as its use as an early Buddhist temple record for the northern city of Lo-yang following racial conflict and war, while noting other gems (Lai 1990, pp. 229–31). For example, we learn that the Empress Dowager Ling built a magnificent Buddhist temple in 516 "as an expression of her hope for a reign of Eternal Peace" (Lai 1990, p. 247). Sadly, the temple becomes symbolic of Empress Dowager Ling's fall in the *Lo-yang Ch'ien-lan-chi* (Lai 1990, p. 247).

Although the *Lo-yang Ch'ien-lan-chi* indicates that nuns and convents existed prior to the conflicts that ransacked the city of Lo-yang,<sup>17</sup> Tsai reminds us that we might consider "the convent founded by Ching-chien (no. 1) in 317 to be the first . . . [noting that] Ching-chien (no. 1) founded her convent in Ch'ang-an one year after the sacking of that city by the nomads" (Pao-ch'ang 1994, pp. 5–6). Note the pattern: we see Buddhism rooting in China

during significant social and political turmoil or upheaval, and we see nuns ordaining to escape their own turmoil but also as a way to nourish themselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We shall observe this pattern later when considering similarities between our early Chinese Buddhist nuns and American Black Buddhist practitioners, particularly as a means to heal racial trauma or free the mind and spirit from the dangers of racism.

Further, this important biographical text “is unique not only because it is devoted to women but also because it covers the time of the founding of the Buddhist assembly for women” (Pao-ch’ang 1994, p. 107). Generally speaking, the biographies concern themselves with the following themes: adherence to monastic precepts and proper transmission of rules, vegetarianism, meditation, devotional or cult practices, and finally, matter of death (with suicide as high honor) (Pao-ch’ang 1994, pp. 9–12). In some cases, they allow us a sense of the nun’s background, including family life, marital status, or age, noting some women entered the monastery as children (some as young as five), while others entered as elders. Regardless, the typical age for receiving the “full obligation” remained twenty years old (Pao-ch’ang 1994, pp. 6–7).

Ann Heirman’s article “Where is the Probationer in the Chinese Buddhist Nunneries?” provides some helpful information contextualizing this period, noting the typical “probationary period” lasted two years from age eighteen to twenty (Heirman 2008, p. 105). Of course, some exceptions surfaced, especially for married women, who could sometimes begin their study at the age of ten years old or sometimes after a ten-year marriage (Heirman 2008, p. 105). However, as *vinaya* translations emerged in fifth-century China, there were differences in regulations for nuns’ probation periods, monastic rules, and especially ordination, influencing the ongoing questions of legitimacy and validation (Heirman 2008, pp. 105–6). This question of legitimacy continues in the present and also resonates with our Black Buddhists, especially as they contend with racism both within and outside the academy, unfortunately including within their predominantly white *sanghas*.<sup>18</sup>

Again, the *Lives* distinguishes itself as an important translation that lends a snapshot into mindsets of the time. For instance, establishing the nuns as models of intelligence devoted to ongoing study seems important:

Fifty-three of the sixty-five biographies mention the woman’s ability to read and write. Traditional Chinese society did not encourage literacy among women, and education for girls was ordinarily restricted to the domestic arts. Therefore, the very high rate of literacy among our select group of nuns is noteworthy. The biographies suggest that some women may have gone into the monastic life to be able to follow scholarly pursuits, a vocation that might otherwise have been denied them. (Pao-ch’ang 1994, p. 7)

However, as Kieschnick’s review reminds us, “The reader should also keep in mind the fact that the wayward nun is a stock figure in anti-Buddhist polemic in the Six Dynasties period, and that the presentation of the nuns in the *Lives* as strictly observing the regulations may have been intended in part to combat this negative image” (Kieschnick 1994, p. 274). Furthermore, three of the biographies (nos. 14, 27, and 34) explicitly concern themselves with adherence to monastic regulations or precepts and proper transmission of monastic lineage (Pao-ch’ang 1994, p. 9). This further suggests the importance of this message to the monk Shi Pao’ch’ang and his aristocratic influencers during compilation.

Due to space limitations, this paper briefly considers a selection of the sixty-five biographies. Again, more work is needed in the future. Further, I note Tsai’s translations and notes as they appear in the text, including brackets around words or her added notes for further clarification. The biographies appear chronologically or as close as possible based on estimated dates, spread out among four dynasties in China: Chin dynasty (265–317/317–420), Sung dynasty (420–479), Ch’i dynasty (479–502), and Liang dynasty 502–557).<sup>19</sup> During explorations of contour and texture among initial observations, let us return to these questions: what can this teach me? What can this teach us?

#### 4. Between the Times: Similarities, Differences, and Intersections

##### 4.1. Similarities and Intersections

Meditation forces me to be brutally honest with myself. If I'm impatient to note my twenty-eight points, in a hurry to be somewhere else, and neglect the time to note all my thoughts, I don't get results. If I see that the goal is in the process itself, I will do it skillfully, I won't forget the points, and concentration will deepen and deepen. There's no reason to try to fool anyone or take shortcuts. The goal is in the practice. The good is in the practice. The god is in the practice (Adiele 2004, p. 137).

-Faith Adiele, Black Buddhist nun

For now, I focus on two major similarities between our Early Asian Buddhist nuns (henceforth abbreviated EAN) and our Womanists or Black Buddhists (henceforth abbreviated WB) while acknowledging issues lumping these women together categorically. Remember, our EAN and WB do not occupy homogenous groups. Further, there are many intersections among the observed similarities. Yet, in the spirit of an engaged Buddhist pedagogy and the "Womanist Dancing Mind", I became curious with what the similarities and initial observations may teach us, leaning into the "good of the practice". As previously stated, each of these observations warrants substantial research on its own.

First, institutional norms almost certainly ensure exclusion for both EAN and WB. Whether through ordination, monastic codes, and precepts, living among society dictated by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy or the academy, both groups of women face institutional sexism and intentional exclusion (though it plays out in different ways). Second (and of course this intersects with the first point), debates regarding validity or legitimacy of EAN and WB continue in the present. Therefore, in some cases, their presence in these spaces can be viewed as resistance to the established master narrative. Moreover, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge *some* privilege each group of women occupies within their geographical and temporal space, noting that most of the histories of everyday women were never recorded in the first place and therefore remain lost in time. All of these observations intersect, contextualize, or highlight one another, and my attempt through this paper is to begin to witness that interconnectedness and become curious with insights which emerge.

In the introduction to the *Lives*, Tsai states, "The most significant obstacle to a woman's entering the Assembly of Nuns was men rather than doctrine" (Pao-ch'ang 1994, p. 1). Early texts compiled by *vinaya* masters express concern over the first Chinese Buddhist nuns ordained in the fifth century (some of whose biographies appear in the *Lives*) and present the nuns in a negative light. Monks seemed particularly concerned regarding dual ordination, that is, the practice of nuns ordaining first in the presence of legitimate Buddhist monks and second within the presence of legitimate Buddhist nuns (Heirman 2015, pp. 31–32). Of particular interest is the bureaucratic *impossibility* of dual ordination for the first Chinese Buddhist nuns. In fifth-century China, Buddhist nuns had never been ordained, and therefore, no group of nuns existed to legitimize the first group. Biographies nos. 14 (Hui-kuo—Fruit of Wisdom—ca. 364–433 of Luminous Blessings Convent), 27 (Seng-kuo—Fruit of the Sangha—b. 408 of Kuang-ling), and 34 (Pao-hsien—Precious Virtue—ca. 401–477 of Universal Wisdom Convent) deal specifically with this issue (Pao-ch'ang 1994, p. 9). Yet, through these discussions, an interesting solution came about. Considering this "exemplary" case, Heirman writes: "it was decided to hold a so-called 'second ordination,' this time in the presence of an adequate quorum of (Sinhalese) nuns able to assure a proper transmission of rules for women from the time of the Buddha" (Heirman 2010, p. 64). The legitimacy of the Sri Lankan nuns was not discussed in surviving historical records, but records indicate the importance of their understanding of the Chinese language (Heirman 2010, p. 65). An excerpt from Pao-hsien's (no. 34) translated biography reads:

Later, the nun Hui-kuo and the other nuns met the foreign nun Tessara and her companions when they arrived in China. In the eleventh year of the yuan-chia

reign period (434) [of the Sung Dynasty], the [Chinese nuns] once again received the full monastic obligation from the Indian missionary monk Sanghavarman on the ceremonial platform at Southern Grove Monastery, and this time both the Assembly of Monks and the Assembly of Nuns [comprising the women from Sri Lanka] were present. [Thus the lineage and tradition of the monastic obligation for women from the time of the Buddha's stepmother had finally been properly transmitted to China.] [Gunavarman] had not said that the first transmission to China, from the Assembly of Monks only, was invalid. He had said, rather, that the second transmission [that included the Assembly of Nuns] was augmenting the good value of the obligation that had already been received. (Pao-ch'ang 1994, p. 63)

Thus, the importance of Sri Lankan nuns legitimizing the EAN cannot be overstated. Additionally, since the *Therigatha* asserts itself "Poems of the First Buddhist Women", could these women be the elders or ancestors of these essential Sri Lankan nuns? Remember, the 2009 Womanist Buddhist reading group gathered around the *Therigatha*, and that would be an interesting connection. Finally, "many of the questions raised in the early centuries of Chinese Buddhism are parallel to questions raised today, while also the reactions and solutions that were proposed many centuries ago do not differ substantially from those put forward in recent discussions" (Heirman 2010, p. 63). Again, questions of legitimacy remain at play both for contemporary Asian Buddhist nuns and American Black Buddhists.

In the United States, the ongoing legacies of enslavement (such as unequal access to quality education or healthcare, food insecurity, racism, and racial trauma, to name a few) mark African Americans', as historian of religions Charles H. Long puts it, an *involuntary presence* (Long 1986, p. 188). Yet, through the cumulative work of hundreds of years of ongoing liberation movements, WB such as Alice Walker, Jan Willis, angel Kyodo Williams, bell hooks, and Faith Adiele broke (and continue breaking) barriers and made (and continue making) their mark on the academy and in the publishing world. This work does not come easily to one's physical, mental, or spiritual being. In *Black Feminism Reimagined After Intersectionality*, Jennifer Nash witnesses and reflects upon "the academy's systematic extraction of knowledge and service from black women, alongside the university's continued inattention to the structures of violence that mark black female faculty's day-to-day experiences" while imagining ways black women might instead nourish themselves and their scholarship (Nash 2019, pp. 19–32). This work is imaginative, nourishing, and essential. Similarly, Mikki Kendall's *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women a Movement Forgot* (2020) asks that readers consider their relationship to and participation in respectability politics, gun violence, global food insecurity, homophobia, and other dangerous and problematic societal norms. Like Nash, Kendall's work disrupts norms, poses questions, and invites reflection for all readers (while carefully considering the socio-political spaces or various identities they occupy). Reflecting on their experiences in the academy, Layli Phillips (now Maparyan) and Barbara McCaskill write:

When Black women enter the academy, they bring with them different kinds of lives—lives shaped by the ubiquitous and historically inescapable fact of triple oppression. All Black women, regardless of their social background, have had to formulate themselves in response to this fact. It becomes inevitable, then, that when Black women enter academe, they bring with them all of the knowledge and expertise that has accrued around this particular fact of their existence. Black women's lives are not, however, defined by the fact of triple oppression; Black women also bring with them intergenerationally transmitted experiential and metatheoretical frameworks based on their ancient African origins and what it meant to be a woman in Black Africa. Together, these two facts: triple oppression and African origins—generate unique thematic concerns and interpretive frameworks that, when brought in by Black women, enrich the academy, further humanize it, and make it more accessible to a wider segment of



humanity, including, but not limited to, Black women. (Phillips and McCaskill 1995, p. 1010)

Many of the WB sources consulted through this work are autobiographical in nature; as such, “legitimacy” questions often arise by the Ivory Towers of Academe, playing out in areas such as course topic assignments, faculty appointments, research funding, and salaries. In response, we must remind folks that margin dwellers, folks occupying the boundaries or margins as opposed to centered positions in our global society (i.e., the master narrative), literally write themselves into history books and conversations. Another contemporary and groundbreaking work by Stephanie Evans, *Black Women’s Yoga History: Memoirs of Inner Peace* (2021), similarly explores Black female ancestors through their written works on healing, and I highly recommend this work and her scholarship on #historicalwellness, as it intersects with the interests of this “Reading Between the Times” practice.

Further, Chandra Mohanty cautions us against patterns of analysis that lead to a troubling common effect—that is, reinforcing Western imperialism and hegemony (Mohanty 1984, p. 336). It is this *effect* Mohanty finds most concerning, and it would seem that Phillips (Maparyan) and McCaskill agree:

While traditional White men’s scholarship presumes to have a monopoly on content as well as method, Black women’s scholarship underscores the fallacy and pomposity of such a presumption. Ironically, universality emerges not from the imposition of sameness and the enforced proclamation that “we’re all just human underneath it all”, but from the careful and respectful acknowledgment that both individuals and groups have experiences that generate differences in both vision and concern and the recognition that these differences can contribute to the robustness and optimal functioning of the human race as a whole. (Phillips and McCaskill 1995, p. 1011)

If we truly aim to value all humans of the human race, we have much to learn from WB pedagogy and from the example of our EAN, who leaned on the Sri Lankan nuns to uphold and uplift their own status. Layli Phillips (Maparyan) writes, “... womanism does not emphasize or privilege gender or sexism; rather, it elevates all sites and forms of oppression, whether they are based on social-address categories like gender, race, or class, to a level of equal concern and action” (Phillips 2006, pp. xx–xxi). Again, our differences connect us to each other more than they sever. As the effects of this global COVID-19 pandemic remind us, our health (and our liberation) inextricably links us to one another.

Finally, let us briefly acknowledge that the women observed for the purposes of this paper occupied/occupy *some privilege* within their respective societies. Given the glaring sexism present in medieval Chinese society, it might be difficult to acknowledge. However, our EAN most often hailed from elite Chinese families and were chosen as exemplary models for the biographies (Pao-ch’ang 1994, pp. 7–8). Therefore, lives of ordinary early East Asian nuns remain lost to history. Tsai heartbreakingly notes, “... we forget that for every famous nun there was an unknown number of unknown nuns of ordinary standing. We cannot see them” (Pao-ch’ang 1994, p. 8).

Next, considering the blatant racism and sexism facing our WB as they live, work, and move about the United States, it might be difficult to remember that as published writers and scholars, their voices are recorded and heard in different ways than the vast majority of Black women. Similar to the ordinary nuns, “we cannot see them.” Again, most of the historical records of laywomen, ordinary healers, and practitioners (i.e., the everyday women who care for and ensure the continuation of our worlds) are lost to history or *never recorded in the first place*.

#### 4.2. Differences and Intersections

In *Under Western Eyes Revisited*, Mohanty reminds us: “My project was anchored in a firm belief in the importance of the particular in relation to the universal—a belief in the local as specifying and illuminating the universal ... I was committed, both politically

and personally, to building a noncolonizing feminist solidarity across borders" (Mohanty 2002, p. 503). Inspired by Mohanty's transnational, cross-cultural call to action within and among feminist scholarship, a call that undergirds political action in our global society, I next became curious with a handful of initial observed differences between our EAN and WB. For the purposes of this paper, I focus primarily on authorial voice and the difference between scholarly or autobiographical writing (for WB) versus biographies (for EAN). Furthermore, I briefly consider the racial implications of our EAN, who traditionally occupy the elite, aristocratic society alongside our WB, African American, or Black women, whose intersecting identities simultaneously contend with racism and sexism in our society.

First, perhaps the most striking noted difference pertains to authorial voice; our WB write as scholars or publish autobiographical accounts, while our EAN biographies were chosen and compiled by a monk (Shih Pao-ch'ang). In his review of the *Lives*, Kieschnick writes: "Therefore, when we read an account of a fourth-century nun who valiantly protected her chastity, we may wonder whether this is an accurate account of a nun who in fact fended off a lecherous official, or if it reflects a more general concern with chastity on the part of fourth- or fifth-century nuns, or if it is the product of the concerns of a single sixth-century monk" (Pao-ch'ang 1994, p. 275). This statement refers to a somber biographical account of the nun Chih-hsien (no. 3) (Wise Virtue) (ca. 300–370+) of West Convent of Ssu Province in north China, who escaped sexual attack from a government official, Tu Pa, who did not approve generally of Buddhist monks and nuns and insisted on "examining" them to determine the quality of their practice and beliefs. When forced alone with Tu Pa, Chih-hsien resisted his sexual advances. In response, Tu Pa stabbed her with a dagger "over twenty times" (Pao-ch'ang 1994, pp. 21–22). The biography gives no further commentary on the attack itself except that Chih-hsien revived after Tu Pa left and instead concludes with continued reverence for her faithful practices, which continued into her old age (Pao-ch'ang 1994, pp. 22–23).

In contrast, our WB write and publish for themselves. Yet, as scholars, they experience various modes of censorship within the academic community. As a result, WB adapt certain language, styles, and modes of being, often diminishing or minimizing their Blackness. For instance, reflecting upon her experience in undergrad at Harvard University, Faith Adiele writes: "I sensed, without yet being able to articulate it, that Harvard represented the very essence of the West that didn't work for me . . . I remembered that Eastern culture opposed oppositionals, that ambiguity flowered like orchids" (Adiele 2004, p. 26). Buddhist Studies scholars might criticize Adiele's proclamation, proposing that she and other Black Buddhists "romanticize" Buddhism by imposing Western beliefs and present societal perceptions.<sup>20</sup> Such scholars promoting Buddhist purism should consider the religion's global history and evolution. For instance, David McMahan's widely acclaimed book, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, offers insightful arguments concerning the spread of Buddhism and its adaptability as it moves and changes in different temporal and geopolitical spaces. In a future paper, it would be interesting to seriously consider Black Buddhist practice in light of his insights.

For now, whose interests are served through maintaining purity? Why does this notion remain important to them and their scholarship? Again, the purpose of this paper specifically and my scholarship generally proposes questions, not definite answers. BIPOC voices, poor voices, and female voices, the margin dwellers of our global history, remain eliminated or discarded from most conversations recorded to historical memory. However, we get a sense of Adiele's own voice through her work:

How do I begin to explain that, though I lived the role more seriously than anything in my life, being a Buddhist nun actually had little to do with being a Buddhist or with being a nun? It was about hacking a difficult path through the jungle, clawing my way from one paradigm to another. The change was the journey itself, and anyone can get there, down any trail. (Adiele 2004, p. 28)

Unfortunately, we have no such accounts written by EAN regarding their firsthand experience. However, Wendi Leigh Adamek's promising research and analysis concerning

a recent archaeological find shows early seventh-century medieval Chinese nuns asserting agency in their religious practice. Her article explores communally constructed niches and inscriptions in the cliffs and rocks of Lanfeng shan (Misty Peak Mountain), facing Bao shan (Treasure Mountain) (Adamek 2009, p. 1). Very few accounts of medieval women in Asia exist; therefore, Adamek's insights warrant further discussion, as they offer a brief glimpse into the mindsets and practices of a community of everyday nuns during the Tang dynasty (Adamek 2009, p. 2).

In contrast, while WB write or publish in first-person authorial voice, their autobiographical accounts and scholarly writing endure lengthy and rigorous editing by publishing companies or peers during the review process. As observed with our EAN, one must always consider authorial intent, voice, and intended audience. In addition, one should become curious with reasons for censorship, particularly when (typically master-narrative) societal boundary enforcers censor margin dwellers writing their experiences into the conversation. Reflecting upon her own experience writing, teaching, and publishing as an academic Black woman, Barbara McCaskill shared:

It is not at all easy to revolutionize the question and to ask, What is it that nonacademic, everyday women bring to womanist scholarship in the academy? I am troubled by this question. Perhaps I am troubled because, as a predominantly white university-trained scholar of literature and literary history, I am disciplined to think all too often from the center—my center, my area of specialization, my research orientation, of what have you—and then to spiral out. More than this, I am troubled by what I perceive to be this question's concealed ahistorical, elitist assumption . . . that the center of an aspiring womanist academic originates in academe. The question and its reverse seem, first, to propose that a kind of Demilitarized Zone distinguishes universities from the communities that surround them; then, that this Zone, once transgressed by Someone Like Me, morphs to an Ivory Curtain crashing down between the esoteric womanist scholars that Someone Like Me aspires to and the nonscholars, relevant and accountable, that Someone Like Me once resembled. (Phillips and McCaskill 1995, pp. 1011–2)

She next insists that readers collapse the boundaries and acknowledge what might become of a "we" mindset and, importantly, to practice it. Indeed, these WB and EAN writings, though communicated from different authorial voices, have much to teach us. Recognizing our interconnectedness proves essential if we are to survive as a society.

Before concluding this paper, it bears reiterating that our EAN generally occupied the elite, aristocratic class within their temporal and geographic spaces in medieval Chinese society. Further, the EAN would not experience the traumas of racism or the legacies of enslavement, like our WB endure. Again, Charles Long reminded us to consider the implications of an entire people in the United States living as an *involuntary* presence. Yet, within all of our observed differences, these women occupy the margins within their societies (never the center; never the deciders; never within the societal master-narrative).

## 5. Conclusions and Call to Action

Simultaneously with our commitment to disrupting and dismantling structures that degrade humanity, a commitment to the practice of engaging the humanity of people wed to perpetuating those structures must co-exist. Whether by arrogance, ignorance, or fear, we must bear witness to their suffering as our own. Challenge what is unjust. Invest in their basic goodness. Always moving toward integration. Without this commitment and practice, we merely mirror the destructive forces of polarization and power (Williams et al. 2016, p. 203).

-reverend angel Kyodo williams, Zen Buddhist Priest

Deploying an engaged Buddhist pedagogy, reverend angel Kyodo williams, WB activist and author, reminds us why this work is important; namely, we do not wish to "mirror the destructive forces of polarization and power". Yet, we must ask ourselves: How

do we move forward? What could WB learn from the history of EAN? What could scholars writing about EAN and medieval Chinese Buddhism learn from WB? As mentioned earlier, in 2009, WB scholar Melanie Harris and Charles Hallisey of Harvard Divinity School used a grant from the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard “to do something imaginative and creative”, inviting “several renowned Womanist and Buddhist scholars to Harvard to read Buddhist texts together in community and discuss whether there was anything inherent in both traditions that would expand Buddhist studies and broaden interreligious dialogue in Womanist thought”. This generative work inspired numerous presentations to American Academy of Religion, essays published in the *Journal of Buddhist-Christian Studies*, and a forthcoming edited volume entitled *Standing on Two Legs: Buddhist Resources for Womanist Reflection* (Harris 2014, p. 108). Further, their work inspired and encouraged my practice. In future works, I would like to consider the *Therigatha* alongside the *Lives* and to revive those Womanist and Buddhist practitioner conversations.

Similarly, Kate Dugan’s article, “Buddhist Women and Interfaith Work in the United States”, explores several important contributions from female Buddhist practitioners and scholars, particularly as it pertains to interfaith or interreligious dialogue and implications for broad social justice reform (Dugan 2007, p. 36). Aimed at a similar practice and in the spirit of “proactive tension and regenerative collaboration”, I observed similarities between EAN and WB, such as institutional norms that ensure exclusion, and ongoing questions of validity or legitimacy. In addition, I considered differences such as biographical versus autobiographical writing (and implications) and the interplay among these observations, including racial implications. However, I remain most concerned with potential outcomes from the practice of this scholarship.

In *killing rage: ending racism*, bell hooks reminded us that beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation and by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world (Hooks 1995, pp. 263–72). In the spirit of hooks’s beloved community and Mohanty’s call to action, this paper contributes to the growing body of intentional, interdisciplinary scholarship and practice, which inspires us to imagine a more perfect, more just society by becoming curious with patterns played out in history: turning over, over, and over, much like a wheel. Mindful of this pattern, I conclude with a poem by emilie townes published in the first womanist anthology, *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, which speaks to all women regardless of the temporal, geographic, religious, or other space they occupy. The poem echoes essential elements of a transnational, cross-cultural, decolonizing feminist political movement: righteous anger, resistance, solidarity, and *hope*; most importantly, it ends with a *we*: “many women strong, and growing”.

they came because of the wailing  
     the wailing of so many voices  
         who had a strong song  
             but were choking from the lack of air  
 they came because of the weeping  
     the weeping of so many tears  
         that came so freely  
             on hot but determined faces  
 they came because of the hoping  
     the hoping of the beating heart  
         the fighting spirit  
         the mother wit tongues  
         the dancing mind  
         the world in their eyes  
 they came because they had no choice

to form a we  
that is many women strong  
and growing (Townes 2006, p. 251)

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Specifically quote Thich Nhat Hanh and Engaged Buddhism (later) because he's consistently referenced by Alice Walker, bell hooks, reverend angel Kyodo williams, Melanie Harris, Carolyn Jones Medine, and other Black Buddhists, Womanists, and/or social justice activists. Also, of note, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., nominated Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. Full letter: <https://plumvillage.org/letter-from-dr-martin-luther-king-jr-nominating-thich-nhat-hanh-for-the-nobel-peace-prize-in-1967/> (accessed on 1 February 2022).
- <sup>2</sup> As designated by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 26 November 2021: <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-11-2021-update-on-omicron> (accessed on 1 February 2022).
- <sup>3</sup> "Audacious" used in the spirit of Alice Walker's four-part definition of Womanist from *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), specifically part one.
- <sup>4</sup> For more on "Luxocracy," see the Epilogue from *The Womanist Idea* (2012) by Layli Maparyan.
- <sup>5</sup> Note: Some of the authors included would label themselves "Womanist Buddhist," (such as Alice Walker, reverend angel Kyodo williams, and Pamela Ayo Yetunde) while some label themselves, "Black Buddhist," (such as Faith Adiele, Jan Willis, and bell hooks). Regardless of label, they remain relevant voices for the purposes proposed in this article.
- <sup>6</sup> In an interview with Bill Moyers in March 1990 for his television series, *A World of Ideas*, prophetic writer Toni Morrison explains the 'master narrative'—that is, the 'ideological script being imposed by the people in authority by everybody else.' See: Morrison (1990). Transcript & video clip: <https://billmoyers.com/content/toni-morrison-part-1/> (comes up about four minutes into this clip) (accessed on 1 November 2020).
- <sup>7</sup> For brief history and context concerning Engaged Buddhism, see Patricia Hunt-Perry and Lyn Fine, "All Buddhism is Engaged: Thich Nhat Hanh and the Order of Interbeing", in *Engaged Buddhism in the West* ed. Christopher S. Queen (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000), pp. 35–66.
- <sup>8</sup> The phrase 'lean into the pauses' was inspired by Alice Walker's Commencement Address to the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, California, in May 2002 (speech transcript published as "All Praises to the Pause; The Universal Moment of Reflection," in *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: Inner Light in a Time of Darkness*, 2006).
- <sup>9</sup> See: *We Are The Ones We Have Been Waiting For: Inner Light in a Time of Darkness* (The New Press, 2006), *Over-Come Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Palestine/Israel* (Seven Stories Press, 2010), *The Chicken Chronicles: Sitting with the Angels Who Have Returned with My Memories: Glorious, Rufus, Gertrude Stein, Splendor, Hortensia, Agnes of God, The Gladyses, & Babe, A Memoir* (The New Press, 2012), *The Cushion in the Road: Meditation and Wandering as the Whole World Awakens to Being in Harm's Way* (The New Press, 2013), *The World Will Follow Joy: Turning Madness Into Flowers* (The New Press, 2013), and the newest, *Taking the Arrow Out of the Heart* (37 Ink, 2018).
- <sup>10</sup> Of particular note is the 1989 *Roundtable Discussion: Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective* consisting of powerful Womanist scholars: Cheryl J. Sanders, Katie G. Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, M. Shawn Copeland, bell hooks, and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes. Published in: *The Womanist Reader*, edited by Layli Phillips (Maparyan), 2006.
- <sup>11</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I'm less concerned with articulating the waves of Womanist thought, except when noting that later 'waves' pick up on initial traces or ruptures from prior generations, carrying these ideas and practices forward, moving towards truly embracing all identities and experiences of humanity. For a history of waves of Womanist thought, *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society* (2006), edited by Stacey Floyd-Thomas, remains an excellent resource.



- 12 For Williams: consider *being black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace* (Viking Press, 2000) or *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation* (North Atlantic Books, 2016, co-authored by Lama Rod Owens & Jasmine Syedullah). For Willis: consider *Dreaming Me: Black, Baptist, and Buddhist, One Woman's Spiritual Journey* (Wisdom Publications, 2008) or *Dharma Matters: Women, Race, and Tantra* (Wisdom Publications, 2020). For Yetunde: consider *Black & Buddhist: What Buddhism Can Teach Us About Race, Resilience, Transformation, & Freedom* (Shambhala, 2020). For hooks: consider *killing rage: ending racism* (Henry Holt & Company, LLC., 1995) & *all about love: new visions* (HarperCollins Books, 2001). For Adiele: consider *Meeting Faith: The Forest Journals of a Black Buddhist Nun* (W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2004). For Steele: consider *Tending the Fire: Through War and the Path of Meditation* (Sacred Life Publishers, 2014).
- 13 The Dedication pages (v–vi) of *Black & Buddhist: What Buddhism Can Teach Us About Race, Resilience, Transformation, & Freedom* (Edited by Pamela Ayo Yetunde and Cheryl A. Giles, 2020) contain an excellent list of Black Buddhist practitioners.
- 14 For more information regarding Christianity's long and complicated relationship to racism and racist practices, including enslavement of Africans, consider reading *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* by Ibram X. Kendi (New York: Bold Type Books, 2016).
- 15 I'm indebted to bell hooks for my present understanding of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, particularly from recent readings of: *killing rage: ending racism* (1995) and *all about love: new visions* (2001).
- 16 Worth noting that Toni Morrison's 1996 National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters acceptance speech inspired townes's articulation of a Womanist Dancing Mind. For full definition of "Womanist Dancing Mind," see: emilie townes, "The Womanist Dancing Mind: Speaking to the Expansiveness of Womanist Discourse," *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 237.
- 17 See table on pg. 231 of Lai's article for helpful context.
- 18 For the purposes of this paper, I do not focus on racism in American Buddhist spaces. If interested in learning more, see: "The Challenges of Being POC in Largely White Sanghas," a video by Harvard Divinity School during the 2nd "Buddhism & Race" conference, April 23, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qv3aI\\_fSSyk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qv3aI_fSSyk) (accessed on 1 February 2022) and "Making the Invisible Visible: Healing Racism in Our Buddhist Community," available on the Spirit Rock meditation center website and originally published as a teaching booklet, <https://www.spiritrock.org/document.doc?id=9> (accessed on 1 February 2022).
- 19 See pg. 13 of the *Lives* for an excellent table of Dynasties and Kingdoms; also, see Appendix A of the *Lives* for information concerning the context of translations and sources.
- 20 For a recent example of such a critique, see: Adeana McNicholl's article, "Being Buddha, Staying Woke: Racial Formation in Black Buddhist Writing," from *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, December 2018, Vol. 86, No. 4, pp. 883–911, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfy019> (accessed on 1 February 2022).

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