

Soft Decoloniality and Decolonising the Displays at Chiddingstone Castle, Kent

Nick Swann

University of South Wales

nick.swann@southwales.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Popular misconceptions and misunderstandings regarding South Asian religions often have roots in colonial-era encounters and the oversimplifications which inevitably arise when viewing e.g. Buddhist thought through the lens of European philosophical concepts. This constitutes a form of colonisation of thought. Models of the world which were deemed fit for purpose in the past but which more recent scholarship has proved to be problematic still endure in the minds of many. As such, decolonising practices are relevant for the unlearning of misconceptions relating to Buddhist thought, practice, and material culture. This article explores the issue from the perspective of decolonisation practices in the public sphere, and in so doing draws a distinction between ‘hard decoloniality’ which addresses global social justice and ‘soft decoloniality’ addressing global cognitive justice. The focus of the article is on recent decolonisation practices at Chiddingstone Castle, a small independent museum in Kent, England.

KEYWORDS

Buddhism, Decolonization, Decoloniality, Museum Studies, Buddhist Modernism

* * *

During the early nineteenth century, when knowledge of Buddhist materials was considerably more limited than today, scholars were optimistic about their ability to master “the whole” of Buddhist history. On the basis of the specific Buddhist texts and practices they actually studied, these scholars unhesitatingly generalized about the entire field, which they dubbed *Buddhism*.

(Walters, 1998: 1 [original emphasis]).

This quote from the opening paragraph of Jonathan Walters’s essay *Finding Buddhists in Global History* neatly encapsulates an attitude that extended across the long 19th century and percolated out of nascent academic Buddhist Studies and into wider intellectual and public discourse in Europe and North America. Spokespeople for this ‘Buddhism’ took it on themselves to interpret Buddhist thought and practice using concepts that the general public could digest with minimal effort, inevitably resulting in simplifications. Often these concepts brought with them Christian connotations (‘suffering’ for *duhkha*, ‘compassion’ for *karunā*, ‘soul’ for *ātman*). In other instances English glosses for Buddhist terms were either too tightly focused (‘meditation’ for *bhāvanā*—a term which implies ‘cultivation’ and can be applied to other practices, including generosity (Lauer, 2023: 19–23)), or had a spectrum of meaning that did not fully overlap with the Pali or Sanskrit term they were trying to capture, leaving room at the edges where nuance could be lost (‘magician’ for *vidyādhara*, as discussed below). Furthermore, Buddhists of the time presented the religion as aligned with European Enlightenment thought (examples being Shaku Soen and Anagarika Dharmapala (Lopez, 2002: 35 ff. and 54 ff., respectively)) which led to a picture of ‘Buddhism’ which was partial, and potentially misleading. American and European spokespeople such as Paul Carus projected their own religious vision onto Buddhism too, influencing the public reception of Buddhist ideas (McMahan, 2008: 101–110).

A more critical approach to academic Buddhist Studies began to emerge in the post-Second World War period, with increasing acknowledgement that scholarship could at best reveal details of specific forms of Buddhist thought and practice, and certainly not the ‘whole’ of Buddhism (Walters, 1998: 3). Heinz Bechert initiated a key critical turn in Buddhist Studies when he first articulated the concept of Buddhist Modernism (Bechert, 1966), offering a framework through which to contextualise and critique the ways in which Anagarika Dharmapala, Shaku Soen, Carus, and others presented Buddhist ideas and practices. Buddhist Modernism reframes Buddhism as rational and in harmony with Western science, with meditation as the key practice, rituals and image ‘worship’ downplayed as merely cultural accretions, and deploying a symbolic interpretation of the more fantastical elements of Buddhist narrative texts (McMahan, 2008: 6-7). As much as anything this reframing came from Buddhist cultures themselves—particularly in the former British colonies which are now Myanmar and Sri Lanka—in order to present Buddhism as a modern and unsuperstitious ‘World Religion’, countering its negative colonial framing.

The above two paragraphs set out a distinction between colonial and postcolonial ways of understanding Buddhist thought and practice. While the simplistic, generalised, model of Buddhism from the colonial era made its way comfortably from the academic sphere to the public sphere, to a large extent the more subtle, critical, and contextualised postcolonial model has not. Consequently misconceptions and misunderstandings endure. Examples include: that Buddhists are pacifists (Harvey,

2021); that Buddhists are vegetarian (Jones, 2021); that Buddhism is more of a philosophy than a religion (Buswell and Lopez, 2014) – note that all three nouns in that statement are Eurocentric constructs; and that the Buddha was fat (Kolata, 2021). These are listed in no particular order, but the last one is of relatively little consequence whereas the first one can present an obstacle to understanding geopolitical conflicts. One or more of these misconceptions will be familiar to any lecturer in Buddhist Studies teaching a new undergraduate intake, even if those undergraduates had formally studied Buddhism in their secondary education.

Such misconceptions and misunderstanding constitute a form of colonisation of thought. Models of the world which were deemed fit for purpose in the past but which more recent scholarship has proved to be problematic still endure in the minds of many. As such, decolonising practices are relevant for the unlearning of misconceptions relating to Buddhist thought, practice, and material culture. This article explores the issue from the perspective of decolonisation practices in the public sphere, and in so doing draws a distinction between ‘hard decoloniality’ and ‘soft decoloniality’. The focus of the article is on recent decolonisation practices at Chiddingstone Castle, a small independent museum in Kent, England, but firstly there is some discussion of the term decoloniality.

Anibal Quijano describes coloniality as “a phenomenon that can survive actual colonialism... part of a rationale and the geopolitics of knowledge according to which some peoples, languages, continents and histories feel inferior to others, especially the elites of the countries that colonised them” (cited in Matos and Sansone, 2021: 80). Decoloniality addresses this, and is nothing particularly new. In Europe social anthropology has been decolonising its practices since the middle of the last century, as a result of the epistemological shudder of realising how complicit anthropologists had been in the maintenance of empires (Balzani and Besnier, 2022: 22), and how exoticised and orientalist images of ‘the other’ had been presented ‘back home’. Such decolonising practices began with the end of the idea of the closed ethnographic monograph (in which the people researched are unchanging and ahistorical) and an increased understanding of the need to include participant voices, as well as moves towards advocacy and even activism. These changes in anthropological practice have also had a direct influence on museum curatorial practice (Martin, 2009: 2), and in Europe more broadly the debate around decolonising museums has been ongoing for more than two decades (Giblin, Ramos and Grout, 2019: 472).

However, decoloniality has filtered out of academia and entered public discourse in recent years, principally through the activist movements Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter. Rhodes Must Fall originated in 2015 in objection to a statue of 19th century British colonialist Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town, South Africa (Chowdhury, 2021: 288). The movement was successful and led to the statue being removed, and sparked moves to decolonise curricula in South Africa. The movement also spread to Oxford, England (Drayton, 2019: 653). Black Lives Matter (BLM) originated in 2013 as a social media hashtag in response to the acquittal of White American George Zimmerman for the second degree murder of African-American teenager Trayvon Martin. It has become a chapter-based US organisation which “raises awareness of the violations against the human rights of black persons in this country” (Thomas, Ashburn-Nardo, and Bendl, 2017: 698). BLM gained international reach in 2020 following the public outcry in the US over the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin, which saw tens of millions of Americans take to the

streets in protest (Ng, 2020: 729) and “[i]n a short time, the movement gained momentum all over the world and the demonstrations supported by the BLM idea spread out over several European cities” (de Matos and Sansone, 2021: 80).

Both Rhodes Must Fall and BLM constitute activist expressions of decoloniality which energised public debate about the relationships that European nations have with their colonial pasts and the enduring structural violence that people of colour experience due to the legacy of colonial constructions of race and power. Outside of these movements, the most publicly visible exercises in decoloniality have been led by museums. Since 1970 UNESCO has been drawing up conventions relating to the export of artefacts and human remains plundered under colonialism, and calling for their repatriation (Matos and Sansone, 2021: 79). To this end, public museums in Europe have taken the initiative to rethink the ways that European colonial pasts are presented to the public, and to explore the repatriation of exhibits plundered from colonised cultures. Museum decolonisation exercises relate to both permanent displays and to temporary exhibitions, and examples in the UK include the British Museum (Giblin, Ramos, and Grout, 2019), the Pitt Rivers Museum (Hicks, 2020), Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museums Wales (Amgueddfa Blog, 2021), and National Museums Liverpool (“World Cultures Gallery | National Museums Liverpool,” 2023) among others. Continental European examples include Berlin, Brussels, and the Sagres promontory in Portugal (Turunen, 2019). These exercises refer to large, public, institutions with budgets and footfall to match. Their collections often have a clearly problematic provenance, stocked as they were by Empire-sanctioned pillaging during the colonial era.

Decolonialising efforts associated with activist movements and public museum practices are examples of what I term ‘hard decoloniality’. Formally or otherwise they are underpinned by policy (institutional policy, equality laws, international human rights legislation, UNESCO conventions), they are urgent, and they seek to address systemic colonial thinking which has a material impact on the formerly colonised people concerned. Hard decoloniality emerges when policy alone is not enough; when the assemblage (Deleuze, Guattari, and Massumi, 2013) of other social and cultural institutions remains unchanged and still facilitates a colonialist mindset. Hard decoloniality can be contrasted with a ‘soft decoloniality’ which seeks to address misrepresentations originating from legacy colonial thinking, with less urgency involved, and while the coloniality being addressed has less obvious material impact it nevertheless sustains the assemblage. These two forms of decoloniality can also be viewed through Boaventura de Souza Santos’ classifications of global social justice and global cognitive justice (Santos, 2007; de Oliveira Andreotti, 2011: 289–91). Global social justice is self-explanatory and its relation to hard decoloniality should be self-evident. The educational nature of soft decoloniality is related to global cognitive justice and the call to understand “the coexistence of many knowledges in the world and the relation between the abstract hierarchies which constitute them and... unequal economic and political power relations...” (*ibid.*: xv). Note that Santos is not setting up a binary, and in fact sees both forms of justice as inseparable – the quote completes with “...which produce and reproduce increasingly more severe social injustice” (*ibid.*: xv). Similarly hard and soft decoloniality are intertwined; there will always be an educational dimension to hard decoloniality, and initial soft decoloniality can influence policy and be a precursor to hard decoloniality. However, soft decoloniality does not always tackle ‘severe social injustice’, as in the example to which we now turn.

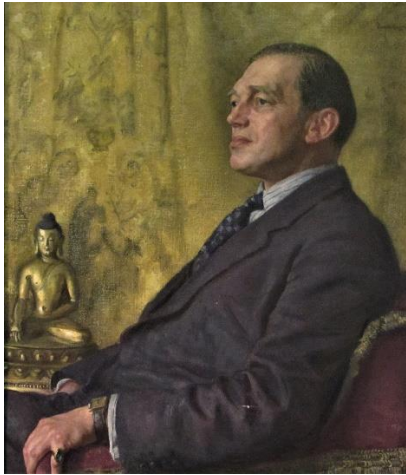
Denys Eyre Bower (1905–1977) was born into a middle-class family in Derbyshire, England and at 17 began his working life as a bank clerk. However, he had inherited his family’s passion for collecting art and antiques and at 38 he moved to London to set up an antiques shop. By this time he was experienced and knowledgeable regarding the British auction scene, and as well as buying stock at auction to sell he would also buy items to add to his private collections. These collections were built around four themes: Ancient Egypt, Japan, Stuart and Jacobite material, and Buddhist material. Bower was also convicted of attempted murder and suicide after a melodramatic stunt went badly wrong, and spent the years 1957–62 in prison (see Eldridge, 1996 for a full, if sympathetic, account).

Eventually, in 1955, he bought Chiddingstone Castle in Kent to house and display his collections. He was owner, arranger, and curator of the displays and even hand wrote labels for objects. He was also an occasional guide for members of the public, who could view the displays for a small fee. Effectively he constituted a “singular curatorial voice” (Giblin, Ramos and Grout, 2019: 480). After his death a trust was set up to maintain the collection and keep it housed at Chiddingstone Castle, transitioning it from a private collection to a museum collection (Collick, 2023b: 285).

The smallest of his four main collections, the Buddhist collection nevertheless held the most personal meaning to Denys. He identified as a Buddhist and collected objects that he considered beautiful from many countries throughout the Buddhist world, including Japan, China, Nepal, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and Burma.

(Denys Eyre Bower Bequest, 2023)

Bower’s understanding of Buddhism was very much informed by the ideas of his day. He was a member of the Buddhist Society, and was a close friend of Christmas Humphreys, who spoke at his trial (Eldridge, 1996: 42) and appeared to be a regular visitor to him during his time in prison (Collick, 2023b: 277). Travers Christmas Humphreys (1901–1983) is a key figure in the history of Buddhism in Britain, and a continuity figure in terms of presenting the colonial understanding of Buddhism as outlined in the first paragraph of this article. In 1924 he founded the Buddhist Society and remained its President until his death. Amongst his many publications he authored more than 25 books on Buddhism and edited six volumes of D. T. Suzuki’s works. However, it is to be noted that the Buddhist Society began its life as The Buddhist Lodge of the Theosophical Society, and Humphreys’ presentation of Buddhism is sometimes delivered through a Theosophical, perennialist, prism (Guy 2000). Furthermore, some of his claims exemplify the romanticist strand of Buddhist Modernism: “There has never been a Buddhist war, nor has any man been killed or even injured by a Buddhist for holding a different point of view.” (Humphreys, 1980: 22). Other claims are simply inaccurate and worryingly Eurocentric: “Of these [eighteen sects of early Buddhism] only one has survived, the Theravada or doctrine of the Elders, found today in Ceylon, Burma, Siam and Cambodia... Lying as it does on the fringe of the Buddhist world, this school was unaffected by developments elsewhere...” (*ibid.*: 22). This was the Buddhism of the Buddhist Society in the early to mid 20th century, and the Buddhism which Bower was exposed to.



Portrait of Denys Eyre Bower, with Buddha image in the background.

© Denys Eyre Bower Bequest. Used with permission.

The Buddhist collection at Chiddingstone Castle consists of around 150 objects, some 70 of which relate to Tibetan Buddhism. In January 2018 the Buddhist Room was affected by a water leak, requiring complete redecoration and a re-displaying of the exhibits. The Curator, Naomi Collick, saw this an opportunity to decolonise the displays, not least to move away from the 'cabinet of curiosities' style typically adopted by Bower (Collick, 2023b: 283). The display cabinets in Bower's Buddhist Room had been cluttered and often contained materials from a range of cultures, eras, and geographical areas with little context supplied and surprisingly little sensitivity for the religious significance of certain objects, such as statues of deities. The Buddhist Room reopened in summer 2018.

October 2018 saw the first activity in the decolonising process: inviting members of Bodhicarya Kent, a local Tibetan Buddhist group headed by the Tibetan lama Ringu Tulku Rinpoche, for a Curator-led tour of the Buddhist collection, including viewing objects in storage. The group also sat in meditation (unaccompanied) in the Buddhist Room. The Curator subsequently discussed the displays with the group, gaining informal feedback. There were some 15 in the group; ethnically none were Tibetan. The Curator had already begun to display objects such as images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in more sensitive ways, for example they were no longer displayed at floor level, or stacked one above another on shelves in cabinets (which from an emic perspective can denote a hierarchy which might not be appropriate). Such practices were discussed, with the group advising that images should be placed at eye level or above. Ringu Tulku himself visited Chiddingstone Castle in May the following year.

Reflecting on the initial visit on their (public) FaceBook page, Bodhicarya Kent posted:

Practising within the space with these sacred objects felt like making a re-connection, as the living Dharma that these objects symbolise and represent inspired our practice and brought alive the meaning that perhaps has been latent and laying dormant within them for so many years (Collick 2023a).

They were more than items of historical or aesthetic interest, but were treated as ‘charismatic objects’ (Wingfield, 2010: 55), with extra-ordinary qualities. This theme is returned to later.

The next phase, and one which I helped facilitate, was to invite a small focus group of Tibetans to visit Chiddingstone Castle and discuss a selection of Tibetan items from the collection. The intended outcome was for the focus group’s comments to be used in the new displays, adding Tibetan voices and giving greater context to the visiting public. Initially I identified two Tibetans known to me but both turned down the opportunity, principally for reasons of time. One had recently been part of a similar exercise at another museum and although he did not say it himself he may have had what could be termed ‘decolonisation fatigue’. Instead the invitation to form a focus group was accepted by three other Tibetans; Tashi and Pema Murik, and Tsering Passang. All were in the age range of 40–55 and were principally educated in diaspora in India. In my evaluation they proved to be better for the exercise than my initial choices, mostly because of the addition of a female voice but also because they exercise was fresh for all of them.

On a sunny day in February 2022 the focus group came to Chiddingstone Castle and met with the Curator, a Trustee, a note taker, and me. My role was relatively passive and consisted of interpreting Tibetan terminology if required, asking the occasional question for clarification purposes, and responding to discussions (in contrast to initiating them). The conversations were predominantly conducted in English, with some exchanges in Tibetan. I also had copies of Beer (2014) and Wilson and Brauen (2000) with me as reference works on iconography. To begin with some twelve items had been taken from storage to be handled and scrutinised at a table. After some brief training by the Curator on the handling of the collection, the objects were presented one by one to the focus group. Objects included ritual items such as a bell and *vajra*; several metal statues of the Buddha (not all of which turned out to be Tibetan); statues of two key figures in Tibetan Buddhism, namely Padmasambhava and Tsong Khapa; and some miscellaneous items such as a snuff bottle and part of a stand for a statue or possibly for a reliquary *stūpa*. The Padmasambhava statue had a hand written label which read:

Tibetan Bronze Figure of Padma-sambhava the magician. Founder of Lamaism. 18th century.

This presented an exoticised and colonial impression of the image. The term ‘Lamaism’ for Tibetan Buddhism has long been retired in academic circles as it denies Buddhist credibility to Tibetan religious expression: “the nineteenth century portrait of Lamaism [is] as something monstrous, a composite of unnatural lineage devoid of the spirit of original Buddhism” (Lopez, 1998: 16). The term ‘magician’ is likely a simplistic and partial translation of the Sanskrit *vidyādhara*: a word which has ‘magician’ in its spectrum of meaning, and which also refers to a class of deities with magical powers. For Buddhist purposes the more literal translation of ‘knowledge holder’ is likely better, and is in line with the Buddhist practice of appropriating Brahminical labels, adding some ‘spin,’ and applying them to Buddhist concepts. For example, in Pali sources the Buddha acknowledges that he has *iddhis* (psychic powers such as flight and mind-reading) in the same way that some Brahmins and yogis do, but states that the ability to instruct people in the Dhamma is the greatest *iddhi* (Bodhi, 2012: 263–5).

In a general discussion around Buddhist statues, Tsering Passang added that statues should not be treated like mundane art objects and if they have been consecrated they should be treated as if they are the actual deity that they represent. Pema Murik talked about how Buddhist images and shrine rooms are not just for the wealthy or the elite. Ideally every Tibetan Buddhist home would have a dedicated shrine room, even if it meant children having to share a bedroom (note that communal sleeping is quite normal in households in Tibet, but children raised in the UK share aspirations with their non-Tibetan peers around having their own space).

The final object to be scrutinised was a *ga'u* (Tib.) (amulet box) measuring around 12cm x 7cm x 2cm. It had formerly been displayed in a cabinet with other *ga'u* and labelled collectively by Bower as:

Tibetan charm boxes. Copper with gold and silver fronts – worn by priests and pilgrims. Containing reliques [sic] and charms.

The labelling is not particularly inaccurate, except that *ga'us* are not restricted to 'priests and pilgrims'. It was clear that there were objects inside the *ga'u* and with little hesitation, and to the surprise of the Curator, Tashi Murik opened it. Inside were a *tsa tsa* (moulded clay image) of the wrathful protective deity Bhairava (Tib. *'jig byed*) wrapped in a piece of Tibetan paper, and a *srung mdud* (a strip of cloth with a knot in the middle blessed by a lama for protection). There was some general discussion of how *ga'u* were – and still are – carried by Tibetan nomads (amongst others) and used to house medicines and protective objects. The *ga'u* had the stylised ten syllable Kālacakra mantra incised on its cover, and Tsering Passang talked about how the mantra is considered to be protective and how he had a version of it hanging from his car's rear view mirror. From an etic curatorial perspective, the object was something to be documented accurately, and conserved for public viewing; opening it was outside of general curatorial prurience. From an emic perspective, the object was something pragmatic and its contents might shed light on its past owner's life and needs.

Two larger items were scrutinised in the storerooms themselves: a *thang ka* (painted image) of Vajravarāhi, and a Buddha statue which was identified by Tashi Murik as Mongolian rather than Tibetan. The focus group then moved to the Buddhist Room to discuss Tibetan items currently on display. There were comments regarding a Buddha statue and small stupa which ought to be displayed slightly higher – at least at eye level. Of particular interest was ornately decorated yellow *spyi blugs* set (a ewer and accompanying cup and bowl) originally labelled as:

Imperial yellow cloisonne altar set, decorated with the 8 Buddhist symbols.
Given by the Tashi-Lama of Tibet to the Viceroy of India, Lord Minto, in 1908.
Imperial Chinese, late 18th cent.

'Tashi-Lama' refers to the 9th Panchen Lama (whose traditional seat is Tashi Lhunpo monastery in Shigatse, Tibet). Tashi Murik described how *spyi blugs* are used in purification rituals in which a lama pours water onto an image of the item to be purified as reflected in a circular polished metal mirror (*me long*). The item was being displayed a little incorrectly (the cup should have been in the bowl, not next to it). Tsering Passang suggested that the objects could be used to illustrate historic political connections between the UK and Tibet.



spyi blugs from the collection, alongside Bower's hand-written label.

© Denys Eyre Bower Bequest. Used with permission.

There was one item we were not able to view on the day, namely an incense burner reportedly taken during the Younghusband Expedition (1903–04). Although it started as a diplomatic mission to secure a trade treaty, the Younghusband Expedition turned into a temporary invasion of Tibet by British Imperial forces in which "...numbers of ill-prepared Tibetan troops were cut down by infinitely superior fire power," (Kapstein, 2006: 170) and which led to an investigation by the British Parliament. Items looted during the Expedition and brought back to Britain established the aesthetic standards for Tibetan 'art' in the British colonial mind, and popularised its collection (Harris, 2012: 52).

After the focus group day the note taker sent draft notes to me to look over and add spellings of Tibetan and Sanskrit terms. The Curator used these as the basis for the refreshed wording of displays for the Buddhist Room and circulated a draft of her proposed text for comment and approval by all who attended the focus group day. The new displays went live in June 2022, with a 'discovery box' launched in April 2023 consisting of handleable items related to the displays.

In all, the decolonisation exercise was carried out with friendly professionalism and in a spirit of collaboration between all parties. All found it a positive experience, and the staff and trustees of Chiddingstone Castle are aiming to develop long-term connections with the Tibetan community, for example through a proposed annual picnic in the Castle's grounds.

The exercises highlighted ontological differences in the way that Buddhists and non-Buddhists configure objects in the collection. Notwithstanding the affection individual curators may have for items under their stewardship, an object such as an image of a Buddhist deity might be configured curatorially as simply a part of the overall collection, with a catalogue number, record of provenance, and details of any related conservation work etc. For the Bodhicarya group and for the Tibetans in the focus group certain exhibits were configured as more than just objects but as embodiments

of the Buddha or Buddhist deities. They are 'charismatic objects' comparable to the Sultanganj Buddha in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, England (Wingfield, 2010). Wingfield discusses several aspects of the Sultanganj Buddha's charisma, including how Buddhists encounter and interact with the statue, specifically when invited to make offerings to the statue in what has become an annual ceremony during *Vesakh* (the anniversary of the Buddha's birth, awakening, and death). There are clear equivalents with Buddhist encounters with images at Chiddingstone Castle; despite being housed in a secular context, the images are configured by Buddhists as something beyond the secular. There can be little doubt that Bower, as a Buddhist, also appreciated the charisma of objects he collected, but his exposure to Buddhist practice seems not to have extended to Buddhist-appropriate ways of understanding or treating consecrated images. His descriptions of acquisitions often resemble catalogue entries for an auction (Collick, 2023b: 275); ontologically he configured objects more as art than as embodiments of actual deities.

The refreshed displays at Chiddingstone Castle, sensitive to the Buddhist ontological position on the exhibits, are an example of how soft decoloniality addresses global cognitive justice. Bower's understanding of Buddhism was informed by the colonial ideas of his time, ideas which he communicated to the public through the display practices of his collection, aiding their perpetuation and the further colonisation of thought. Through soft decoloniality the displays now present Buddhist thought and practice on their own terms, while also acknowledging and giving context to Bower's relationship with his collection.

In the wider context, the Buddhist collection at Chiddingstone Castle differs from collections at national museums such as the British Museum in several key aspects. Firstly, it is a 'closed' collection in the sense that it is not going to be added to. Secondly, objects in the collection were all bought on the open market; the items were bought in good faith by Bower, although their earlier provenance is colonial in some if not many cases (e.g. the Younghusband incense burner). Thirdly, the way in which Bower selected and labelled items for the collection tells us something of the story of Buddhism in the UK. These differences and their implications to soft decoloniality are discussed in turn.

Museums such as the National Museums Liverpool (NML) are fully conscious of the colonial practice of displaying other cultures as ahistorical and unchanging (Martin, 2009: 6). In order to address this and to present, for example, Tibetan culture as living and dynamic, NML has acquired contemporary Tibetan art including Gongkar Gyatso's *My Identity* series of photographic self portraits (see Harris, 2006). Chiddingstone Castle is limited with regard to what it can add to Bower's collection. That said, there are plans to juxtapose a contemporary, mass produced, Kālacakra mantra amulet with the *ga'u* discussed above in order to convey both change and continuity in Tibetan Buddhist practice. The addition of the discovery box of contemporary Buddhist objects also aims to "...emphasise that the objects are part of a living culture and religion, rather than being simply works of art or 'curiosities'" (Collick, 2023b: 284).

As well as the soft decoloniality of adding contemporary material to collections, other museums are famously engaged in hard decoloniality such as the Pitt Rivers Museum's dialogue to repatriate Benin Bronzes (see Hicks, 2020). There are no human remains in Chiddingstone Castle's Buddhist collection, and little danger of being "scared of what [lies] in the cupboards" (Smith, 2022: 11). While there are no calls for the repatriation of objects in the collection, the new displays do acknowledge

that “Further research may reveal that other objects [in addition to the Younghusband incense burner] in the Tibetan collection could have been looted during this expedition or acquired due to Britain’s status as a colonial power in the area.” This at least problematises the idea of colonialism, and compares with the British Museum’s recent approach to its South Asian galleries regarding how “transparently highlighting the ways in which certain objects were collected, displayed and interpreted by the British Museum to project the ‘idea’ of India can yield thought-provoking results” (Giblin, Ramos and Grout, 2019: 479).

Bower’s labelling was frequently inaccurate and exoticising, even quixotic – he labelled one object as “The Dalai Lama’s teapot” with no evidence to support the claim (Collick, 2023b: 280). An image of Palden Lhamo (the main wrathful protector deity of Tibet) was labelled “the great she-devil”. The new displays attempt to provide more accurate and culturally sensitive labelling which tell the visitor something of the use of the exhibits, present as well as past. Where Bower’s original labelling is referred to in the displays it is transparently highlighted as being such, alongside more objective information about the exhibits: contextualising Bower in order “to dissolve the singular curatorial voice” (Giblin, Ramos and Grout, 2019: p. 480) rather than erasing him altogether. This enables the public to see the contrasts between a colonial and post-colonial understanding of Buddhism.

While Chiddingstone Castle’s Buddhist collection was gathered and displayed through a colonial, aesthetic, gaze it would be harsh to describe it as one of the “active tools of empire” (Giblin, Ramos and Grout, 2019: 471) like the British Museum. It had a more subtle colonial role in that it communicated a romanticised, Buddhist Modernist, understanding of Buddhism based on “static and objectifying Western classification systems” (*ibid.*: 481). Adding Tibetan voices helps to de-exoticise the displays, and presents the objects’ users “as agents of history and not just passive human beings” (de Matos and Sansone, 2021: 81).

Despite his labelling practices, Bower held the objects in his Buddhist collection in a positive and sympathetic light, appreciative of their charisma. He was after all a Buddhist, although his understanding of and commitment to Buddhism is unclear: “[Christmas] Humphreys and Bower were fellow Buddhists – the former a serious one, Bower just a romantic, attracted by the beautiful imagery of Buddhism... and the pacific nature of its credo” (Eldridge, 1996: 42). While decolonising the displays at Chiddingstone Castle might not be in the same bracket as returning human remains or removing a colonial statue, acts of soft decoloniality are nevertheless important in terms of global cognitive justice and the presentation of the worlds and ideas of ‘the other’ as being just as valid, autonomous, and dynamic as those of ‘the self’, which in subtle but important ways help to challenge the assemblage.

Museums lie at the interface between academia and the general public. Historically, national museums such as the British Museum communicated more than just explicit information about their exhibits; the very presence of the exhibits such as human remains and colonially-plundered artefacts implicitly communicated a message of colonial superiority. Such messages were absorbed with little question by visitors for whom such exhibits represented a distant, subaltern, ‘other’. While hard decoloniality addresses global social justice through the repatriation of exhibits, soft decoloniality can be deployed to present an alternative narrative to the public, showing colonial pasts in a more objective light and challenging ethnocentrism. It is hoped that this

typology of hard and soft decoloniality can shed light on other decolonising practices in areas such as education, policy-making, and activism.

Bibliography

- Amgueddfa Blog. 2021. "Decolonising Amgueddfa Cymru's Collection – the Journey Begins | Museum Wales." 2021. <https://museum.wales/blog/2394/DecolonisingAmgueddfaCymrus-Collection--the-journey-begins/>.
- Balzani, Marzia, and Niko Besnier. 2022. *Social and Cultural Anthropology for the 21st Century: Connected Worlds*. London: Routledge.
- Bechert, Heinz. 1966. *Buddhismus, Staat Und Gesellschaft in Den Landen Des Theravada Buddhismus. Vol I*. Berlin: Alfred Metzner.
- Beer, Robert. 2014. *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 2012. *Anguttara Nikaya - The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Complete Translation*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Buswell, Robert E. Jr., and Donald S. Jr. Lopez. 2014. "10 Misconceptions about Buddhism." *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, no. Summer.
- Chiddingstone Castle Trust. 2023. "Buddhist Art Collection — Chiddingstone Castle in Kent." 2023. <https://www.chiddingstonecastle.org.uk/collections/buddhist/>.
- Chowdhury, Rashedur. 2021. "From Black Pain to Rhodes Must Fall: A Rejectionist Perspective." *Journal of Business Ethics* 170 (2): 287–311. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10551-019-04350-1>.
- Collick, Naomi. 2023a. "Personal Communication."
- . 2023b. "The Display of Tibetan Buddhist Objects at Chiddingstone Castle: A Historic Home." In *Tibetan Buddhist Monastery Collections and Museums*, edited by Christian Luczanits and Louise Tythacott, 269–86. Kathmandu: Vajra Academic.
- Deleuze, Gilles, Félix Guattari, and Brian Massumi. 2013. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Drayton, Richard. 2019. "Rhodes Must Not Fall?" *Third Text* 33 (4–5): 651–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2019.1653073>.
- Eldridge, Mary. 1996. *Beyond Belief*. Stoney Litho.
- Giblin, John, Imma Ramos, and Nikki Grout. 2019. "Dismantling the Master's House." *Third Text* 33 (4–5): 471–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2019.1653065>.
- Guy, David. 2000. "Christmas Humphreys." *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, no. Summer.
- Harris, Clare. 2006. "The Buddha Goes Global: Some Thoughts towards a Transnational Art History." *Art History* 29 (4): 698–720. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1467-8365.2006.00520.X>.
- . 2012. *The Museum on the Roof of the World: Art, Politics, and the Representation of Tibet*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Harvey, Peter. 2021. "Are Buddhists Pacifists?" In *Buddhism in 5 Minutes*, edited by Elizabeth Harris, 284–88. Sheffield: Equinox.
- Hicks, Dan. 2020. *The British Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*. London: Pluto Press.
- Humphreys, Christmas. 1980. *The Buddhist Way of Life*. London: Unwin Paperbacks.

- Jones, Dhivan Thomas. 2021. "Are Buddhists Vegetarians?" In *Buddhism in 5 Minutes*, edited by Elizabeth Harris, 289–92. Sheffield: Equinox.
- Kapstein, Matthew T. 2006. *The Tibetans*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Inc.
- Kolata, Paulina. 2021. "Who Is the Fat Buddha Figure?" In *Buddhism in 5 Minutes*, edited by Elizabeth Harris, 60–62. Sheffield: Equinox.
- Lauer, Erin. 2023. "An Analysis of the Terms 'Meditation' and 'Ritual' in Anglophone Buddhism." University of South Wales.
- Lopez, Donald S. 1998. *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2002. *Modern Buddhism*. London: Penguin.
- Martin, Emma. 2009. "Developing and Defining Migratory Practice for the Museum." *Craft + Design Enquiry*, January, 1–25.
- Matos, Patricia Ferraz de, and Livio Sansone. 2021. "FORUM Decolonising Europe: National and Transnational Projects." *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 30 (2): 79–85. <https://doi.org/10.3167/ajec.2021.300205>.
- McMahan, David L. 2008. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ng, Eddy. 2020. "Black Lives Matter: On the Decal of Systemic Racism, White Liberals, and Polite Racism." *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* 39 (7): 729–39.
- Oliveira Andreotti, Vanessa de. 2011. "(Towards) Decoloniality and Diversity in Global Citizenship Education." *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 9 (3–4): 381–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2011.605323>.
- Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 2007. *Cognitive Justice in a Global World*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 2022. *Decolonising Methodologies*. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury.
- Thomas, Kecia M., Leslie Ashburn-Nardo, and Regine Bendl. 2017. "Broadening the Conversation: Why Black Lives Matter: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal." *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* 36 (8): 698–706.
- Turunen, Johanna. 2019. "Decolonising European Minds through Heritage." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 26 (10): 1013–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2019.1678051>.
- Walters, Jonathan. S. 1998. *Finding Buddhists in Global History*. Washington DC: American Historical Association.
- Wilson, Martin, and Martin Brauen. 2000. *Deities of Tibetan Buddhism*. Somerville MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Wingfield, Christopher. 2010. "Touching the Buddha: Encounters with a Charismatic Object." In *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, edited by Sandra Dudley, 53–70. London: Routledge.
- "World Cultures Gallery | National Museums Liverpool." 2023. 2023. <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/news/press-releases/world-cultures-gallery>.