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## **The First Buddhist Mission to the West: Charles Pfoundes and the London Buddhist mission of 1889 – 1892**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article challenges two general assumptions shared by scholars of Western Buddhism: (1) that the earliest Buddhist missions to the West were those established in California from 1899 onwards; and (2) that Ananda Metteyya's (Allan Bennett's) London mission of 1908 was the first Buddhist mission to London and thus to Europe. Recent collaborative research by scholars in Ireland and Japan demonstrates instead that the Japanese-sponsored 'Buddhist Propagation Society' (BPS) launched in London in 1889 and led for three years by the Irish-born Japanese Buddhist Charles Pfoundes predates both of the above-mentioned 'first' Buddhist missions. In this article we offer a first attempt to document the nature, activities and significance of the London BPS, drawing on Japanese and UK sources to examine Pfoundes' role and that of his Japanese sponsors. We discuss the nature of Pfoundes' Buddhism, the strategy and activities of the London BPS and the reasons for its eventual demise. The conclusion examines the links between the BPS and the later 'first' Japanese Buddhist missions in California and asks what hidden connection there might be between Pfoundes' missionary campaign in London in 1889-92 and Ananda Metteyya's return from Burma as the 'first' Buddhist missionary to London, almost two decades later.

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### **Early Buddhist missions to the West: the conventional history**

In April 1908 the Rangoon-ordained Buddhist monk Ananda Metteyya (Allan Bennett, 1872-1923) arrived in London with a party of Burmese sponsors. Ananda Metteyya's very presence in the capital, as a yellow-robed, shaven-headed monk demonstrating by example that it was (just) possible for a European to follow the strict *vinaya* regime in Edwardian London, aroused a good deal of interest in the press and among the public. In addition to preaching by example, Ananda Metteyya -- not a gifted orator -- delivered some talks on Buddhist thought and practice and gave interviews to the

press.<sup>1</sup> Within six months he was *en route* back to Burma.<sup>2</sup> This visit is commonly regarded as the epochal first Buddhist mission to Europe, and for many writers marks the 'real' beginning of Buddhism-as-a-lived-religion in the UK.<sup>3</sup>

While Ananda Metteyya's 1908 mission to London has long been identified as a starting-point for the story of 'Buddhism in Britain', students of Western Buddhism are by now well aware that it was not the first Buddhist mission to the West. Japanese Buddhist missions, oriented mainly towards expatriate Japanese but with active Western adherents, had developed in California from 1899 onwards<sup>4</sup> and these West Coast missions are now considered by scholars to be the earliest Buddhist missions to the West (Tweed 2000).

In this article, we set out to demonstrate that the first London Buddhist mission was in fact established in 1889, predating even the Californian missions by a decade. From 1889 to 1892, the Irish-born Japanese Buddhist Charles J. W. Pfoundes (1840-1907) headed an official Buddhist mission known as the 'Buddhist Propagation Society'. This was based in Westminster, operated throughout London and its suburbs and was the first and indeed only foreign outpost of the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* (lit. 'Overseas Propagation Society' but normally translated 'Buddhist Propagation Society'), an initiative of a group of reformist Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land) Buddhists based in Kyoto.

The Buddhist Propagation Society in London and Pfoundes' role in it were of course known to, and publicised by, his Buddhist sponsors in Japan at the time<sup>5</sup> and at least one contemporary Japanese account<sup>6</sup> was available to Notto Thelle, who in 1987 wrote:

The Society for Communication with Western Buddhists (*Ōbei Bukkyō Tsūshinkai*) was founded in 1887; it was later reorganized as the Buddhist Propagation Society (*Kaigai Senkyō Kai*, literally Overseas Missionary Society), under the leadership of Akamatsu Renjō. Its purpose was to propagate Buddhism in the West, through missionaries and publications. A branch office was established in London in 1890, and a journal was published, entitled *Bijou of Asia* [*Ajia no hōshu*].

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<sup>1</sup> 'THE SCOTTISH BUDDHIST: Arrival in London' *Times of India* 9 May 1908, 13. 'BUDDHISM: Its Mission in the West' *Times of India* 19 May 1908, 8 summarises a piece by Ananda Metteyya in the London *Daily Chronicle*, while 'WEST AND EAST' *Times of India* 25 May 1908, 6 reports on his first talk at the Royal Asiatic Society on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May, commenting that 'The Bhikkhu surveyed the principles of Buddhism and traced the life of its founder in a long address read from typed MSS, in slow, monotonous tones, and with an entire absence of the force and fire we generally associate with the proclamation of a new gospel or missionary enterprise'.

<sup>2</sup> Ananda Metteyya returned to London in 1914 with the intention of continuing to America. By this time ill-health had obliged him to disrobe and he remained in the UK until his death in 1923.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Harris (1998). The Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland (BSGBI) was founded by T W Rhys-Davids and others in November 1907 solely in anticipation of Bennett's arrival and the BSGBI is similarly regarded as the first of its kind.

<sup>4</sup> Tweed (2012) documents an intriguing musical link between the 'other' Irish Buddhist U Dhammaloka and the earliest Japanese 'Buddhist Missions of North America' established in California from 1899.

<sup>5</sup> And to a wider Japanese public – the national *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper ran an article on the BPS in London on July 10, 1890. Our thanks to Okazaki Hideki for this and several other items of information.

<sup>6</sup> Nakanishi Ushiro *Shin Bukkyoron (On New Buddhism)*, 1892.

...[a]nother Western Buddhist, C. Pfoundes, also supported Japanese Buddhists against Christianity. He had first come to Japan in the 1860s as an officer in the British navy and remained for about twelve years, of which he reportedly spent seven or eight years in Buddhist temples. As an admirer of the ancient Japanese civilization and of Buddhism, he had dedicated much of his time to lecturing on Buddhism in the United States (1876-1878) and in England (1878-1893). He served as secretary of the London branch of the Buddhist Propagation Society and came to Japan again in 1893 at the invitation of his Buddhist friends. In his many meetings he appealed to the national sentiment and attacked Christian missionaries for slighting Buddhism and despising Japan as a barbarian country. Both Olcott and Pfoundes left Japan after controversies with their Japanese sponsors.

Thelle deserves credit for drawing attention to Pfoundes, who had remained unnoticed by other scholars, but Thelle had only limited information, some of which has been superseded by recent discoveries. For example, Pfoundes did not leave Japan after his return from London in early 1893 but remained there, resident and working in a variety of roles in the port city of Kobe where he died in 1907 and is buried in the foreigner's cemetery.<sup>7</sup> Thelle portrays Pfoundes as little more than a transient foreigner, a pale version of the exotic Theosophical 'White Buddhist' Olcott, but in fact by 1890 Pfoundes had become a fierce opponent of Theosophy. Far from being a transient visitor like Olcott, Pfoundes spent a total of 26 years of his life in Japan and in 1899 even applied for Japanese nationality (Ruxton 2008, Bocking 2013). Ironically, it is because Pfoundes did *not* return to London but instead died alone in Kobe that his pioneering activities on behalf of Buddhism in the West were forgotten, while Ananda Metteyya's brief visit almost two decades later came to be remembered, through his later colleagues in London, as the 'first' Buddhist mission to the capital.

Beyond Thelle's brief depiction, Pfoundes' name has been remembered elsewhere but for a quite different reason. A collection of his newspaper columns on diverse aspects of Japanese art, folklore and customs was published by *The Japan Herald* in Yokohama in 1875 under the title *Fuso mimi bukuro or A Budget of Japanese Notes*. This work, similar to and subsequently overshadowed by Basil Hall Chamberlain's *Things Japanese: Being Notes on Various Subjects Connected with Japan* (1890), remains widely available and is still cited occasionally in modern scholarship, for example by Hendry (1981).

With the very recent advent of digital technologies which enable searches for lost fragments of information across thousands of local newspapers, popular magazines and archive collections, many new details of Pfoundes' remarkable life have now come to light.<sup>8</sup> In 2013, Bocking offered a first brief biography, based on some of this new evidence (Bocking 2013). That article was however concerned mainly with Pfoundes' activities between his return to Japan from London in 1893 and his death in 1907. Of the putative 'London Buddhist Mission' Bocking could say at the time only that:

[a]bout this time [the early 1890s] Pfoundes became the London representative of the modern Jōdo Shinshū-backed Japanese Buddhist missionary society the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai*, in which role he reportedly warned

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<sup>7</sup> Okazaki Hideki, "Meiji no airurandojin jukaisō C.Pfoundes ni tsuite" (On C. Pfoundes, an ordained Irish priest) p.6 *Sekihō* no.19 (*Nomi Yutaka Kenkyūkai*, March 2014).

<sup>8</sup> A signal advantage to the digital researcher is that Pfoundes is the only man ever to have held that surname – he was baptised Charles Pounds but amended his name to Pfoundes soon after 1863 when he first became resident in Japan.

the young scholar Takakusu Junjirō away from the London Theosophists and hence towards Max Müller (Akai 2009, 190); a significant Weberian moment in the history of Japanese Buddhology, if so. The other activities, if there were any, of Pfoundes' London Japanese Buddhist outpost remain undocumented; perhaps an unwritten - and very early - chapter in the history of Buddhism in the UK.

Further research since 2013 has generated a great deal of new material specifically on the BPS in London, and the present article attempts to write that 'unwritten' chapter, at least in outline<sup>9</sup>.

The role of Mr Okazaki Hideki, a researcher from Matsue who had become interested in Pfoundes' connections with that city, should be acknowledged here. Mr Okazaki first found (in Nakanishi, 1892) a reproduction of the decorative 2-sided leaflet in Japanese and English used by Pfoundes in London to advertise the 'Buddhist Propagation Society'.<sup>10</sup> With confirmation that the English name of Pfoundes' London organisation was simply the 'Buddhist Propagation Society' and with his name and address indicating that the BPS had more than a nominal presence in London, we began searching new sources and were able to unearth numerous fragmentary references to the BPS in newspapers and magazines of the time and to uncover the remarkable extent of Pfoundes' engagement in Buddhist missionary work in London.

The main sources of information on Pfoundes' London Buddhist mission are:

- Reports from London in the magazine *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō* (a journal published in Kyoto which reported on Buddhism in the West for Japanese Buddhists);
- Articles by Pfoundes and announcements and reports of his lecture meetings in *The Two Worlds* (UK weekly spiritualist newspaper);
- Announcements in *The National Reformer* (weekly secularist / radical newspaper);
- Notices in *Reynolds' Weekly Newspaper*, published each Sunday with news of forthcoming public talks and events across London;
- Other local London and provincial newspapers;
- Material submitted by Pfoundes in 1902-3 to the organisers of the Lewis & Clark centennial exposition planned for Portland, 1905 ('President's Office Correspondence').

### Who was Charles Pfoundes?

In letters written after his return to Japan, Pfoundes described himself as follows:

"Captain Charles James William Pfoundes F.R.G.S., R.I. U. Service Inst., Corr. Memb. Geog. Soc. Japan, Hon. Fel. Soc. Sc. Lit. & Art, Fel. R.I. Asiatic Soc., Fel. R.I. Historical Soc., Fel. R.I. Colonial Soc., Founder, Orientalists' International Union of the Pacific Hemisphere, Author, Orientalist, Lecturer, Initiated to Buddhist Sects, by Executive at Chief Monasteries, Esoteric &c., &c., Author of *Fu-so mimi bukuro*, Contributor to Current Literature in Japan and Abroad, Europe, America, &c., Specialist in Japanese History, Religion, Art, Literature, Olden Time Customs, Life of the People, &c."

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<sup>9</sup> See also Cox 2013.

<sup>10</sup> There is another version published in *KBJ* no.10 1890-5-27 (fig 1).

Pfoundes' life can be divided into four fairly distinct periods: (1) early life up to age 23 when he landed in Japan; (2) his first period of residence in Japan, 1863-1876; (3) the London years, 1878-1892 and (4) return to Japan, 1893 to his death in 1907.<sup>11</sup>

Pfoundes was born Charles James William Pounds in 1840 in Waterford or Wexford, Ireland, to Irish Anglican parents bankrupted during the 1845 Famine. His father James Pounds and mother Caroline Elam separated in 1846 when Charles was 6, leaving him motherless. He emigrated alone to Australia in 1854 aged about 14 and promptly joined the colonial (Australian) navy, subsequently captaining a Siamese naval sailing ship and spending some time in China.

Pounds changed his name to 'Pfoundes', which reflects the Japanese spelling of 'Pounds'<sup>12</sup> soon after arriving in Japan in 1863, five years before the epochal Meiji Restoration. For employment reasons he may have added some years to his age.<sup>13</sup> He quickly became fluent in Japanese and was fascinated by Japanese customs and culture, topics that preoccupied him for the rest of his life. He also began collecting Japanese art and sculpture. Beginning as a (British) policeman in Nagasaki port, he worked in a variety of roles in different parts of Japan, finding a niche as a cultural mediator between the Japanese and foreign diplomats and as an interpreter/guide, newspaper columnist, importer and lecturer.

In 1870-71 Pfoundes accompanied some high-ranking Japanese government and business figures to Europe and America. This was part of a wider wave of early Meiji-era missions to the West, which played an important role in Japanese reflections on religion and society and relationships between Buddhism and Christianity (Hayashi et al. 2014). By the early 1870s, capitalising on his naval experience, he had been appointed to a senior (Director's Office) position in the embryonic native Japanese steamship industry. He lived in several parts of Japan, later listing these as "Nagasaki 1863-4-6; Yedo (Tokyo) 1866 & 8, 71-6. Hakodate 1865 &c.; ..." <sup>14</sup>

Pfoundes left Japan in 1876, tasked with setting up an exhibition of Japanese art in America, later writing that:

I assisted in purchasing and had charge of the packing and shipping, of a very large quantity of valuable goods chiefly fabricated for Exhibition at the Philadelphia Centennial; and went with them to New York, managing their exhibition in Old Chickering Hall &c. and subsequent disposal. ...<sup>15</sup>

The 'disposal' took the form of a substantial auction of 627 items<sup>16</sup> which made

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<sup>11</sup> See Bocking (2013) for more detail on each phase of Pfoundes' life mentioned here.

<sup>12</sup> On the name 'Pfoundes' and his Japanese name *Omoie Tetsunosuke* 重井哲之助 see Bocking 2013, 32, n.9.

<sup>13</sup> Reports of his death in 1907 as Kobe's 'oldest resident' put his age at 79 (the British Consul) or 81 (the *Straits Times*); in fact he was 67. Bocking (2013) speculated that Pfoundes added these years in 1893 to explain to his Japanese sponsors his (otherwise premature) 'retirement' from the Admiralty, but he may simply have been reoccupying his earlier Japanese *persona* from the 1860s. Pfoundes' 1878 Liverpool marriage certificate shows him (correctly) aged 38.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis and Clark Papers, Pfoundes handbill, ca.1902.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis & Clark papers; typescript from Pfoundes headed 'Pfoundes, Kobe, Japan' and stamped 'Licensed Guide', ca. 1903.

<sup>16</sup> Each item catalogued by Pfoundes in *Japanese Art Treasures* New York, 1876 with an introduction to the various types of Japanese art (Bronzes, Ceramics, Lacquer Ware, Shippo or Cloisonne) and an appendix comprising an A-Z glossary of Japanese art and culture.

Pfoundes a significant amount of money, though not enough to buy property or relieve him of the need to earn a living. By his own account Pfoundes travelled extensively in Europe during 1877-8. In March 1878 he married 22-year old Rosa Alice Hill in the Liverpool Registry Office and the newlyweds set up home in London. He secured a lowly clerical position at the Admiralty; an appropriate employer but a far lower position than he might have hoped for, given his colonial navy background and experience in the Japanese shipping industry (Bocking 2013, Cox 2013). For the next fourteen years Pfoundes worked in London as an Admiralty scribe or clerk but in his private capacity gained admission to a wide range of London's learned societies and made a considerable name for himself as a prolific speaker on mainly Japanese and Oriental topics and would-be organiser of various cultural projects, including a Nipon (*sic*) Institute or Japan Society that began promisingly in 1879 but failed to flourish.

### **How Captain Pfoundes became a Buddhist**

Thelle says that Pfoundes 'reportedly' lived 7-8 years in Buddhist monasteries in his first period in Japan, but gives no source. This may rely on Madame Blavatsky, whose *Secret Doctrine* (1881) quotes Pfoundes' account of the Shinto creation story and asserts that "Captain C. Pfoundes studied for nearly nine years in the monasteries of Japan the religion underlying the various sects of the land. ...".<sup>17</sup> Writing from London in 1889, Pfoundes told his potential Japanese sponsors that he had stayed in at least three monasteries ('Tozenji, Sengakuji, and Daichuji') in the Shiba area during his residence in Japan. However, while he may have stayed in monasteries there is no evidence that he became a Buddhist in any meaningful sense before 1875, nor indeed that he took any formal Buddhist ordination or initiation before his return to Japan in 1893.<sup>18</sup> He did study the history of Buddhism and current religious practices during his first period in Japan, as reflected in his *Japan Mail* articles republished in *Fuso mimi bukuro*. However, there is nothing in *Fuso mimi bukuro* to suggest anything but the view of an attentive and curious outsider who has read up on Japanese Buddhist history and observed at first hand the day-to-day customs and practices of different classes. Pfoundes' approach to Buddhism in these early pieces is neutral and descriptive when talking about the past, and condescending when he refers to the condition of Buddhism amidst Japan's rapid modernisation. The very first item in *Fuso mimi bukuro* is entitled 'Superstitions' and includes Pfoundes' opinion of modern Buddhism and Buddhist priests.

A full description of the superstitions of any nation involves no easy task, and the delineation of those of such a nation as this, in such a manner as to enable the reader to realize their hold over the native mind, is more than we can expect to accomplish. In giving a sketch of some of the most common, we are only selecting exemplars from a thousand forms that are either local, temporary or of but slight consideration. An instructive and amusing essay on this subject might be written, which would throw no little light on the real depth of the religious feeling of the Japanese and of their capacity for entertaining a higher form of faith than any they now possess. There is a large class of

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<sup>17</sup> Blavatsky presumably got the Shinto creation material from Pfoundes' 1875 *Fuso-mimi bukuro* (p.79ff 'Japanese Cosmogony'). The source of her comment that he 'studied for nearly nine years in the monasteries of Japan' is unknown.

<sup>18</sup> The Shiba monasteries are mentioned in his first letter from London to Matsuyama (dated Oct 4 1889, published in *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō* no.5, 15 December 1889, 15). On 25 October 1889 (letter published in *KBJ* no.8, 1890) Pfoundes wrote asking if he needed to receive *kanjō* (initiation), indicating that he lacked any such qualification.

young students growing up who sneer at anything and everything native; but the great majority still resort, as did their ancestors, to all kinds of charms, prayers, incantations, amulets &c. to bring good luck, or ward off evil. In Sintoism [*sic*], as we term it, there is but little room for superstition or ghost stories, so that we are thrown upon the conclusion that the Buddhist priesthood are more or less the supporters of the gross follies which, in the form of superstitions, exist among all classes in this country. (Pfoundes 1875, 1-2)

He recognises that Buddhism had suffered egregiously in the process of Japan's modernisation, with multiple reforms designed to disestablish Buddhism and marginalise the role of the clergy in the modern state:

'Until the last few years the priests drew large revenues from the Government and from high officials – latterly they have been thrown on their own resources and become beggars literally' (Pfoundes 1875, 132)

The old-fashioned institutional Japanese Buddhism that Pfoundes encountered at first hand before 1868 thus seems to have held little personal attraction for him and it is not until 1888, when he had been living in London for almost 10 years, that we find any suggestion of a personal engagement with Buddhist texts, ideas and practices. In an article headed 'Divyatchakchus: The "Infinite Perception" of Japanese Esotericism by C. Pfoundes (OMOIE)'<sup>19</sup> published in the first (May 1888) issue of the journal *Theosophical Siftings*, he argues that modern science has its role, but true wisdom does not change through the ages. It can be attained only by those few advanced truth-seekers who are prepared to look beyond the narrow confines of their own religious tradition and pursue a higher path.

... Passing through the stages of scientific teaching of modern times, we learn minor details, unknown of yore, it is true; but the great principles still remain absolutely unchanged. The merely mechanical sciences, chemistry, geology, and other branches give us details; of matter we have a little more knowledge, but of LIFE we have learned absolutely nothing, while of psychology we know less than the ancients.

Will it therefore not well repay the true sincere student to hearken to the wisdom of old? The attainment of Transcendent Intuitiveness is not utterly beyond the capability of some, though to many so high an ideal may be hopeless.

From the Amitabah [*sic*] (Sutra) we learn that there are five faculties of intellectual power. ...

A comparison of the 1888 'Divyatchakchus' article with his writings on Buddhism over the following summer of 1889 throws some light on the stages in Pfoundes' transition over a 12-month period from his fairly conventional position during the 1880s, as peripatetic speaker on Japanese and other topics, to his self-declaration as an officially appointed Buddhist missionary in October 1889. 'Divyatchakchus' shows that Pfoundes did engage positively, if briefly, with Theosophical thought during the late 1880s and presumably knew some of the leading Theosophists in London.<sup>20</sup> In

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<sup>19</sup> Divyatchakchus (Sanskrit) is the divine eye, the first abhijñā or 'supernatural' knowledge. *Omoie* refers to Pfoundes' honorary Japanese name.

<sup>20</sup> *TTW* 13 Nov 1891, p. 629 talks of Pfoundes 'having much personal knowledge of [them]'; see below.



fact during 1888 he contributed half a dozen other articles on topics including Genghis Khan and Japanese folklore to the Theosophical journal *Lucifer*. However, a final *Lucifer* letter on 'Is the Bud(d)hist an Atheist?' (June 1889, Vol. 4, 351), marked the end of any friendly relations with the Theosophist camp.

'Divyatchakchus' is markedly different in tone and content from Pfoundes' next significant publication on Buddhism for an English audience, produced a year later. 'Buddhism, What it was, and is' appeared in three parts between May and August 1889 in the Spiritualist periodical *The Two Worlds* and can be regarded as Pfoundes' Buddhist manifesto. *The Two Worlds*, a nationwide magazine owned and edited since 1887 by the renowned spiritualist Emma Hardinge Britten described itself as 'A Journal Devoted to Spiritualism, Occult Science, Ethics, Religion and Reform' and had a negative view of Theosophy from the outset.<sup>21</sup> There is no evidence that Pfoundes was an active spiritualist himself, but evidently he found a sympathetic editor in Hardinge Britten<sup>22</sup> and as we shall see he later used Spiritualist venues in London for talks on Buddhism which were advertised in *TTW* alongside the regular notices of spiritualist meetings.

In 'Divyatchakchus', Buddhism had been presented in characteristically Theosophical fashion as but one expression of a larger abstract and universalist conception of wisdom or enlightenment for which Buddhism provides a conduit. By contrast, the following year's *TTW* article seeks with increasing urgency to clarify those features of Buddhism which distinguish it from other traditions. In the first part, titled 'Buddhism, What it was, and is', Pfoundes argues that:

BUDHISM<sup>23</sup> is not a religion in the strict sense of the word, though it is religious, and in many of the sects, so numerous, there is much admixture of religion. It is now so frequently alluded to by writers and speakers amongst spiritualistic circles to a very large extent, that some brief account of this ancient and wide-spread faith is offered to our readers.

Pfoundes then offers a brief historical account, with the proviso that what matters is the practical use to which Buddhism may be put today:

Buddhism must be considered a successful effort to restore the purity of religious thought, the freedom of human action in spiritual matters, and we are more concerned in knowing what has come down to us for our use, than in the discussion of the exact dates. (*TTW* 17 May 1889 p326)

He goes on to make a special appeal to the sympathy of ordinary Spiritualists, who constituted the readership of the journal and whose belief in 'the two worlds' was for the most part conditioned by a Christian world-view.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For *TTW*'s critique of Theosophy see e.g. 'Theosophy, Occultism and Spiritualism' by 'Sirius' in *TTW* Vol 1, 13, 10 Feb 1888 pp, 198-199. A stronger refutation is offered in 'Spiritualism, Theosophy and Reincarnation No.1' in *TTW* Vol II, 91, 9 August 1889, 470-71. Hardinge knew her enemy; in 1875 she had been one of the six founder members of the Theosophical Society in New York.

<sup>22</sup> Pfoundes may have known Hardinge Britten from New York days; he auctioned his oriental art collection there in 1876 only a few months after the TS, initially a Spiritualist society, was founded.

<sup>23</sup> Sic in original; this was originally a Theosophical usage distinguishing "universal knowledge" from what might be called actually-existing Buddhism.

<sup>24</sup> Although Barrow (1986) shows that there were competing freethought ("scientific") and religious orientations within late C19th spiritualism, most *TTW* writers saw Spiritualism as correcting the inadequacies of 'orthodox' Christianity.

To spiritualists it will be of interest to know that much of what is now openly advocated by their leaders is BUDHISM pure and simple - temperance in diet, abstinence from stimulants and coarse food, vegetarianism, kindness, gentleness, courtesy, charity, all the Christian virtues included. (*TTW* 17 May 1889 p326)

The second part of Pfoundes' *TTW* article appeared in July, under the simple title 'Buddhism'. It was this time prefaced by an enthusiastic note from the editor of *The Two Worlds* positioning Pfoundes as a learned authority on Buddhism, uniquely placed to refute spurious representations of the tradition. This is evidently a reference to Theosophy's controversial presentation of itself as 'Esoteric Buddhism' and the *TTW*'s editorial comment reflects the widening rift with the growing body of Theosophists whose belief in reincarnation was particularly offensive to Spiritualists. Hardinge Britten wrote:

We have once more the pleasure of welcoming an article by our honoured contributor, Cpt. Pfoundes, long a resident in Japan and other Eastern lands: the present paper being a brief supplement to his former treatise on the TRUTHS of original Buddhism. Capt. Pfoundes (a member of several learned societies, whose chief object is the correction of error, as well as the diffusion of knowledge) is a high authority on the real primary teachings of Buddhism, and in this day, when all sorts of vague fantastic theories and spurious doctrines are being foisted on the public under the synonym (*sic*) of "Buddhism," Capt. Pfoundes' timely papers cannot be too carefully studied, or thankfully accepted by the Editor and readers of *The Two Worlds*.

In the first part of the article, back in May, Pfoundes had sought to find commonalities between Buddhism and Spiritualism. In the second instalment he draws the two even closer, reinforcing the main Spiritualist objection to Theosophy by stating that in Buddhism

(t)he doctrines of transmigration and re-incarnation, were some of the mistaken ideas that true enlightenment tended to dissipate.' (*TTW* July 26 1889, 447)

By August 1889, when the third part of the article appeared, the title had pointedly changed to 'BUDDHISM: WHAT IT IS NOT.' Here Pfoundes is explicit in his rejection of Theosophy, but also distances himself from Christianity 'or anything else' (which, since it is diplomatically unspecified, probably includes Spiritualism). He says:

BUDDHISM is not identical with the Esoteric Buddhism, of which so much has been said and written of late, much less is Theosophy of the day Buddhism pure and simple. It is Buddhism, and that alone, that we are now dealing with, and allusion is made to Christianity, or to anything else, no more than is absolutely necessary to the elucidation of the matter in hand.

The writer is neither a Buddhist, nor a Theosophist;<sup>25</sup> certainly not a follower of the individuals now most prominent in these movements; and it may be just as well to make it clear also that he is not a hostile critic to what is true and admirable in anything put forward under these, or any other, distinctive titles. The task will be essayed, however, to present the truth, if not exhaustively as

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<sup>25</sup> An interesting claim, given that Pfoundes began his mission to teach 'pure Buddhism' only a couple of months later. He probably means that as a proponent of 'Buddhism pure and simple' he stands above the sectarian fray, Buddhist or Theosophical.

to detail, certainly not mutilated or garbled, like so much that has been put forward on these subjects. (*TTW* 23 Aug 1889, 494)

In closing, Pfoundes sets out his stall as someone who has Buddhist truths to impart to those who are genuinely interested and eligible. This seems to be the point at which Pfoundes, realising that he possessed a knowledge of Buddhism exceeding that of the Theosophists, first decided to make a stand for Buddhism 'pure and simple', perhaps even making a dig at spiritualism by distinguishing between 'the trained spiritualist' and 'mere spiritist':

... "The great Master" gathered in his hand a few withered leaves, and asked his disciples: "Are these in my hand few, and those of the forest many?"

"True, oh great teacher; the leaves in the Bhagavat's hand are few, those of the forest are innumerable," answered they.

Then said the Tathagate (*sic*), "My words are but as the leaves in my hand. What you have yet to learn are as the leaves of the forest."

These gleanings are but the crude ore, and the rough pebbles, bright from the inexhaustible mines, are yet to be explored. In fitting hands, the pebbles become brilliant gems; the ore precious metal wherewith to make suitable settings.

To those who seek will come knowledge; to the worthy ENLIGHTENMENT. (*TTW* Aug 23 1889, vol 2 n.93, p495)

In less than twelve months, then, Pfoundes had moved from publishing in Theosophical magazines through endorsing Spiritualism and finally to criticising Theosophy and distancing himself from any other tradition than Buddhism 'pure and simple'. Yet Pfoundes knew that Buddhism as actually practised in Japan or anywhere else was by no means 'pure and simple'; he identified even in his *TTW* articles the malign influence of both 'a theocratic class' and excessive mystification of the teachings shading into 'superstition' (*TTW* Aug 23 1889, vol. 2, n.93, p494). Now, as a potential apostle of Buddhism 'pure and simple', Pfoundes had to decide, like every discerning missionary, what was core and what was peripheral to the Buddhism he would propagate to a new audience and, equally, how to lend authority to the core teachings.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Japanese roots of Buddhist globalisation**

In the history of Meiji Buddhism, the years 1885-1899 are those of "Buddhist revival", in that many Buddhist societies, journals and schools appeared, most of which were trans-sectarian and anti-Christian in their character (Yoshinaga 2009). In effect, the common enemy, Christianity, forced Buddhists to unite without regard to sectarianism. The period from 1887-1893 was distinguished by the rise of "international communication", when Japanese Buddhists came into direct contact with European or American "Buddhists" or Theosophists. Numerous Theosophical articles were published in Buddhist outlets and at least three "white" Buddhists or

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<sup>26</sup> In his first letter as BPS London representative to Matsuyama, written on 4 October 1889, Pfoundes shows a high level of awareness of missiological issues. He identifies his problems as 'What part of Buddhism I should take and how to criticize Christianity' (*Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō* no.7, 1890-02-25, p.28) and cautions that 'we should learn from the failures of Christianity' (*ibid.* p.30).

sympathisers, Henry Steel Olcott (in 1889), Lafcadio Hearn (1890) and Pfoundes (1893), came to Japan. This “globalizing” tendency was related to one of the earliest modernizing movements, the Temperance organisation Hansei kai. Hansei kai was established in Futsū Kyōkō (‘Normal School’), the Western-style middle school opened by the Nishi Honganji True Pure Land sect in 1885. The *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* was born of this modernizing and globalizing element within Japanese Buddhism.

In March 1887, Matsuyama Matsutarō, a teacher of English at the Futsū Kyōkō, and two others wrote a letter of inquiry to the Aryan Theosophical Society, USA, to ascertain the truth of a Russian newspaper article report that “Buddhism has lately been introduced into New York and Brooklyn, and its followers are increasingly in number very rapidly”<sup>27</sup>. In response to this inquiry, the Theosophist William Q. Judge wrote as follows:

“I am a Buddhist but am not of a particular sect. I was made a Buddhist by Col. H.S. Olcott, in India, under the authority of the High Priest of Ceylon, and I try in every way to spread Buddhism... The account you read in the newspaper was in part true. There is no temple in this country. But there are many Buddhists. They do not properly understand it however, because there are no teachers, and many wicked lies are told against Buddhism by Missionaries and other people. The people need that religion because their own has not succeeded in making them honest or kind to each other. They are always fighting and going to law with each other although Jesus their prophet told them not to do so, but to love one another, and although they are not very happy, because the illusions of life make them slaves of the senses. So do tell your young men not to desert the law of Buddha for this religion but to try to spread Buddhism again over the face of the world.”<sup>28</sup>

Through the network of the Theosophical Society, Matsuyama’s letter evoked responses from America, Europe, Australia, and India. The number of letters from abroad reaching Matsuyama was large enough to encourage him and some of the staff of his school to organize a new group called *Ōbei Tsūshin Kai* (Society for Corresponding with Americans and Europeans) to deal with those letters, many of which asked for some guidance on Buddhism. Matsuyama contributed a series of articles from the first issue onwards of the group’s magazine *Hansei Kai Zasshi*. The *Ōbei Tsūshin Kai* seems to have been run on its members’ own money. On Aug 11, 1888, they enlarged their small group into the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai*. Though its founding members - Matsuyama Matsutarō, Dōtsu Kojirō (editor-in-chief), Hino Gien (secretary) and others - were all from Futsū Kyōkō, it proclaimed itself to be a non-sectarian organization. Its aim was “to propagate Japanese Buddhism abroad”<sup>29</sup>, not just the teachings of the Jodo Shin sect. Akamatsu Renjō, a high priest of Nishi Honganji, was the society’s first president but his role seems to have been little more than nominal as he did not contribute an article to their organ, *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō* which reported on the state of Buddhism overseas.

The first issue of the association’s English/French language magazine *The Bijou of Asia* was distributed in 1888 to 270 locations in America, Britain, India, Siam<sup>30</sup> and France<sup>31</sup>. The parallel Japanese-language journal, *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō*, had started in December 1888, its first issue reprinted at least three times. The early issues of

<sup>27</sup> *Hansei Kai Zasshi* no.1, (Aug 1887) p.32.

<sup>28</sup> *Hansei Kai Zasshi*, no.1 (Aug 1887) p.33.

<sup>29</sup> *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō*, no.1 (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), 1889-03, p.129

<sup>30</sup> In this article country names are as used in the relevant historical period.

<sup>31</sup> *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō*, no.1 (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), 1889-03, pp.133, 134

*Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō* contained articles and letters by Buddhists and sympathisers in America, Europe, Australia and Southern Asia such as Philangi Dasa (Carl Herman Vetterling), Francesca Arundale, Charles Johnston, Laura C. Holloway, Josephine W. Cables, Elliot B. Page, Edward Wolleb, Alexander Russell Webb, Dharmapala, and so on. Over the life of the journal Philangi Dasa was the most prolific contributor; second was Charles Pfoundes.

The founders of the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* were inexperienced in missionary work. “As to the propagation of our faith, we think, it would be best for us to make our friends in Europe and America, and this could be performed by correspondence and the publication of tracts and books regarding our religion”<sup>32</sup>. Sometime in the summer of 1889, Matsuyama and his colleagues received an interesting proposal from Pfoundes in London and a sample of his articles on Buddhism. The *Kaigai Senkyō Kai*, it seemed, had a Japanese-speaking British missionary ready and willing to set to work propagating Buddhism in London.

### The London Buddhist mission is born

For Pfoundes, a solution to the twin problems of what constituted ‘Buddhism Pure and Simple’ and how to lend authority to a non-Theosophical version of Buddhism providentially appeared in the form of the reformist Buddhist Propagation Society. *Bijou of Asia*’s 1888 appearance was noted in both the Japanese and English press<sup>33</sup> and welcomed, initially at least, by Theosophists. The Theosophical magazine *Lucifer* in March 1889 had:

... great pleasure in recommending to such of our readers as are interested in Buddhism, the *Bijou of Asia*, particulars of which we give below. It is an encouraging sign for the future of Buddhism in Japan that it already possesses an organ of its own in English.—[Ed.]

*Lucifer* went on to provide readers with subscription and contact details for *Bijou of Asia*. Pfoundes may already have known of the founding of the BPS in Japan or himself submitted the notice to *Lucifer*, in which he had published half a dozen articles during 1888.<sup>34</sup> At any rate, news of the BPS and *Bijou of Asia* came at just the right time to remedy his growing despair over the existing channels of communication and quality of information available for Londoners interested in Buddhism, of whom there were many.<sup>35</sup> He was particularly concerned about the misrepresentation of Buddhism by leading Theosophists.

This growing discontent is reflected in his three-part *TTW* article, published over the ensuing summer of 1889. The timing is significant: Pfoundes’ frustration with Theosophy’s distortion of Buddhist teachings coincided with the launch in Japan of the BPS which, since it had no overseas agents of its own, in turn suggested the possibility that he might become its official London representative. Pfoundes seized the initiative and during the summer of 1889 wrote to Matsuyama introducing

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<sup>32</sup> *Bijou of Asia*, no.1, p.2

<sup>33</sup> In January 1889 regional newspapers in Birmingham and Bristol commented under the heading ‘A Japanese Buddhist Propaganda’ on a *Japan Weekly News* report of the appearance of *Bijou of Asia*.

<sup>34</sup> Six articles by Pfoundes are listed in The Campbell Theosophical Research Library index at <http://www.austheos.org.au/indices/LUCIFR.HTM> .

<sup>35</sup> On Oct 25 1889 Pfoundes wrote to Matsuyama ‘There are many who don’t believe in Christianity. It is easy to have large audiences with Buddhism lectures.’ *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō* no.8, 1890, p.24

himself<sup>36</sup> and enclosing copies of his *TTW* pieces on Buddhism<sup>37</sup> in time to receive a reply by October 4<sup>th</sup>, when he wrote to Matsuyama thanking him for sending books and confirming that he wished to be the representative of the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai*. This letter, subsequently published in *KBJ*, also asked for guidance:

“I would like to start missionary work immediately, but it would be more convenient to act with the right to be the representative of your society than to do the work privately by myself. If you would give me the right to be your representative, I will immediately set up the British branch of your society here. And I will give a lecture on the prospects and the teachings you approve. If you agree with this, would you please let me know what task you think is appropriate for me.”<sup>38</sup>

This letter suggests that the Japanese side had not specified the nature of any missionary work, in keeping with Matsuyama's comments above. There seems to have been no plan for placing missionaries overseas and this was understandable, considering how little of Japanese Buddhism was known to the West. Before Pfoundes made himself known, the idea of setting up an organized missionary society in London run by a British person must have seemed inconceivable. The London mission was 'immediately set up', as we shall see. On Saturday October 12<sup>th</sup> 1889<sup>39</sup> Pfoundes wrote to *TTW* to announce his new missionary role - evidently omitting, in his excitement, to provide his address:

Saturday. Dear Editor,-You will, I am sure, be pleased to hear that I have received letters from abroad where I sent copies of your paper with my articles. The Buddhists are very much pleased with my views, and like your paper; indeed, the leaders of the Buddhist revival have made very complimentary remarks, and express surprise that a foreigner has grasped the native ideas so like what they appreciate. I am desired to stand forward as a representative of Eastern (extreme Oriental) Buddhism, and to actively proceed with the propaganda. The societies of Buddhists' priests, &c., also cordially approve, so I shall take the platform as an exponent of "Pure Buddhism, the doctrine of enlightenment," and will be glad to hear from societies wishing a lecture, or individuals anxious to enquire. Buddhism has so much in common with spiritualism on the higher planes of thought, that I feel I am doing both causes good by bringing them together. I am, truly yours, C. PFOUNDDES.

[NOTE BY EDITOR.-Capt . Pfoundes, to make his offer available to societies, should send his address. Some societies, at least, might be glad of the opportunity to place a highly intelligent and travelled gentleman on their platform, if they knew where to address him.]

By the time he launched the London branch of the BPS in October 1889, Charles Pfoundes had acquired a wealth of experience and skills useful to his new role as the first Buddhist missionary to London. He had lived in Japan for more than a decade and was fluent in Japanese. Due to his undoubted intellectual curiosity and passion for Japanese culture he possessed a deep fund of knowledge about Japan, its religions, history, art and customs. He had extensive experience as a cultural

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<sup>36</sup> A profile of Pfoundes presumably based on this letter was published in *KBJ* no.3, 15 Oct 1889.

<sup>37</sup> They were published serially in Japanese in *KBJ*, starting with no.3, 15 Oct 1889.

<sup>38</sup> Letter of Pfoundes Oct. 4, 1889, published in *KBJ* no. 5, Dec. 15 1889.

<sup>39</sup> The letter was published on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

mediator; the 1870-71 delegation's exploration of how Japan should relate to the West was paralleled by his more mundane work as a Western maritime specialist in the modernising Thai navy and the developing Japanese merchant fleet. He had written for very different publishers and audiences<sup>40</sup> and was a seasoned public speaker, well used to lecturing either at the invitation of artistic, spiritualist, progressive, freethinking, mercantile or orientalist etc. organisations, or through planning and advertising his own lectures at one of the many public meeting halls around London which could be hired for the purpose.

If not exactly famous, Pfoundes had certainly proved himself capable of holding the attention of fairly large London audiences on a great variety of topics. While he did not completely abandon his wider role as lecturer on Japanese culture and other topics after the launch of the London BPS in October 1889, he focused his skills and energies on the propagation of Buddhism, increasingly from March 1891 onwards in the form of a criticism of Theosophy.

Visiting Pfoundes in April 1890, by which time he had been settled in London for twelve years and the BPS had been in operation for six months, the young Japanese Buddhist scholar Kobayashi [=Takakusu] Junjirō offers, in a letter published in *KBJ* 11 (June 1890), a rare glimpse into the home life and daily habits of the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai*'s sole representative in London. Takakusu reports that Pfoundes is about 50 years old and his wife 30 years and more<sup>41</sup> and that Pfoundes is not a man of property and lives only with his wife; meaning presumably in rented accommodation with no children, servants or lodgers. Takakusu is impressed that Pfoundes not only can speak Japanese fluently and use French, Dutch and German but has in his home around 3,000 books in Japanese and more than a decade's worth of his own lectures.<sup>42</sup> Relying no doubt on conversations with Pfoundes, Takakusu reports that Pfoundes is a respected authority on Japan and had attended the opening ceremony of the School of Oriental languages.<sup>43</sup>

Although Pfoundes tells Takakusu that he does not criticise Theosophy, London sources show that Pfoundes was already well known as an energetic and hostile critic of Theosophy and its leading representatives. On the vexed issue of Theosophy's relationship with Buddhism, Takakusu reveals that Blavatsky herself has written to Pfoundes, arguing that her thought is not Buddhism but 'esoteric Buddhism', while Pfoundes takes the different view that 'Theosophy is Theosophy, Buddhism is Buddhism' (ibid. p26). The relationship between Theosophy and Buddhism was also a live issue for the nascent *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* in Japan. While in the second issue of *Bijou of Asia* (November 1888) Matsuyama had strongly

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<sup>40</sup> In addition to the *Japan Mail*, Theosophical and Spiritualist journals, these included *The Folk-Lore Record*, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* and the *Young Folks' Paper*. A comprehensive Pfoundes bibliography has yet to be compiled.

<sup>41</sup> Pfoundes was then 50, Rosa 34.

<sup>42</sup> A pamphlet (undated) used by Pfoundes up to the early 1900s lists more than 160 *topics* on which he was prepared to lecture. Lewis & Clark Exposition, Oregon papers, pamphlet entitled 'C Pfoundes; Kobe, Hiogo, Japan'

<sup>43</sup> Presumably the School for Modern Oriental Studies [or Languages] established by the Imperial Institute in Union with University College and King's College, London, commencing in Autumn 1889 with 'practical rather than academic' classes deliberately aimed at ICS recruits and business students. See <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/13732203> and [https://digitised-collections.unimelb.edu.au/bitstream/handle/11343/23381/104375\\_UMC%201892%2028\\_School%20for%20Modern%20Oriental%20Studies.pdf?sequence=29](https://digitised-collections.unimelb.edu.au/bitstream/handle/11343/23381/104375_UMC%201892%2028_School%20for%20Modern%20Oriental%20Studies.pdf?sequence=29). T W Rhys Davids served on its first Managing Committee (see <http://www.ames.cam.ac.uk/library/archive/rhys/>).

advocated setting up a Theosophical Society in Japan to foster Buddhist unity<sup>44</sup>, Pfoundes wrote to Matsuyama on 25 October 1889 advising that Buddhism should dissociate from Theosophy, adding that he himself wished to come to Japan where he could - unlike Olcott - lecture without a Japanese interpreter and promote the cause of Buddhist unity (*KBJ* No.8, 1890, p.25).

Pfoundes' effort to convince his sponsors in Japan to reject any association between Buddhism and Theosophy was an attempt to influence the (Kyoto) centre from the (London) periphery. It shows that while Pfoundes was in one sense 'merely' the agent of the BPS in the capital he had an agenda of his own, arising from the specific circumstances of the mission field of 1890s London, namely to counter the influence of 'the Theosophic boom', as he described it in 1891<sup>45</sup>. Moreover, while Pfoundes was in formal terms only the 'secretary' or 'organising agent' of a branch office of the Japanese *Kaigai Senkyō Kai*, the founders of the *Senkyō Kai* had no experience of running foreign missions. In London, a vast, sophisticated city and the hub of a global empire, the BPS was in practice largely Pfoundes' own creation – and evidently funded by his own efforts, no doubt largely through the voluntary collections which were a normal feature of public meetings. More than once, while requesting books or materials only available in Japan, Pfoundes reminds his Japanese sponsors that he does not ask for any funds.<sup>46</sup>

### **The world of the Buddhist Propagation Society**

The London BPS leaflet has survived in at least two versions.

Fig 1 below, reproduced in *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō*, shows the more decorative version, printed to Pfoundes' specification, the text surrounded by *juzu* rosary beads with the Buddhist swastika symbol at the top.<sup>47</sup> It can be dated to late 1889 or early 1890. Both versions of the leaflet which have survived give Pfoundes' home address of 7, Artillery Buildings, Victoria Street, Westminster as the 'Bureau' of the BPS. Two years later, in November 1891, Pfoundes would issue a public invitation to anyone interested in his ideas to invite him to speak on the subject, giving as his address 29 Doughty Street. This was the address of 'The Fellowship of the New Life', a radical communitarian group with which Pfoundes was temporarily associated, probably after separating from his wife. The BPS therefore had an address, but no headquarters building beyond Pfoundes' home. For the most part the Buddhist Propagation Society, in the person of Pfoundes, engaged face-to-face with its intended audience through public lectures, followed by discussion, at well-known public venues around London. An (upmarket) example of such venues was the 'Zephyr Hall' in Kensington, West London, advertised in *The Morning Post* of 2 May 1888 as follows:

ZEPHYR HALL, 9, Bedford Gardens, Kensington, W., is a fashionable Private Assembly Room, to LET, with every convenience for Concerts, Balls, Bazaars, Exhibitions, Clubs, Religious Services, &c. Terms on application.

We have so far traced at least 26 venues throughout the capital used by Pfoundes, often on multiple occasions, for lectures delivered during his time as BPS missionary.

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<sup>44</sup> 'A Branch Theosophical Society in Japan' *Bijou of Asia* Vol.1, no.2, 1888, p.9.

<sup>45</sup> 'SPIRITUALISTIC ETHICS, &c' *TTW* 1891-11-13 p.631.

<sup>46</sup> E.g. letter of Dec. 11 1889, in *KBJ* no. 9 1890-04-29, p. 29.

<sup>47</sup> On Oct 4 1889 Pfoundes wrote to Matsuyama "Please send me the wood block for printing the handbill of BPS and *Bijou of Asia*. I propose the design of the handbill. Please put "juzu" (prayer beads) around the poster and put the mark of Buddhism on the upper area. ..." (*KBJ* no.5 1889-12-15, p.17)



Many of the engagements we have been able to trace took place in Spiritualist meeting halls, reflecting Pfoundes' continuing engagement with a Spiritualist audience. Others were on the freethinking (atheist) circuit, such as branches of the

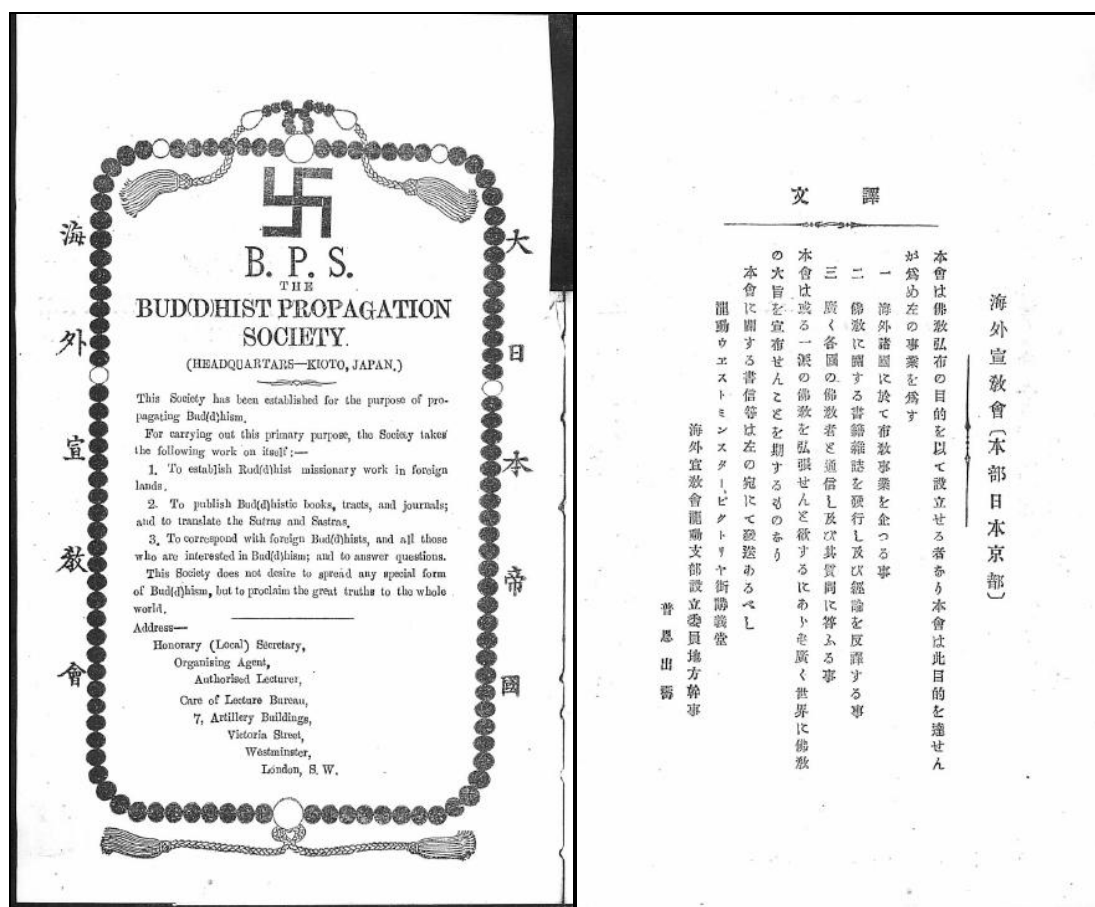


Fig 1. Bilingual leaflet of the Buddhist Propagation Society, London, produced in Kyoto about December 1889 and used by Pfoundes from 1890. Photo from KBJ courtesy of Prof Nakanishi Naoki

National Secular Society (NSS) and the South Place Ethical Society. Pfoundes also mentions Socialist audiences and by this period such an audience certainly existed; we have not yet however found the relevant listings comparable to the *National Reformer's* for freethought and *TTW* for spiritualism. In some cases the venues appear to have been 'neutral' spaces available to anyone who wished to hire them for any kind of political, religious, artistic etc. meeting. Each venue would have attracted a different clientele<sup>48</sup> and Pfoundes' comments show his awareness of this in seeking to build an audience for Buddhism:<sup>49</sup> "Spiritualists, socialists, free thinkers, and secularists respect me. Even some Christians agree with me." (Letter to *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō* 18 November 1889; elsewhere he added Unitarians to the list).

<sup>48</sup> There is little overlap between the meetings announced in *The Two Worlds* and those announced in *The National Reformer*; they seem to have taken their meetings listings from information supplied by spiritualist and secularist venues respectively.

<sup>49</sup> Pfoundes seldom followed other freethought circuit speakers in venturing outside London (presumably because of his Admiralty job); he also avoided the outdoors venues which were used during the summer season by those speakers with the voice and personality to handle such events.

The culture of public talks was extremely widespread in the London of this day, part of a very broad process of popular self-organisation, social movements and self-education (Thompson 1968, Rose 2001; see Cox 2010). On October 27 1889, the *National Reformer* listed eight branches of the NSS, nine “open-air propaganda” (this was the end of the open-air season) and eleven lectures. In June 1890, at the height of the outdoor season, it listed 17 outdoors events (not all NSS ones). This wide range of entertainment, education or debate was paralleled by the relatively tight organisations of spiritualists, socialists and other religious and political groups, but also by a looser world which we would today think of in terms of adult or popular education.

Shiple (1971) has examined the related world of working men’s clubs in this period, characterised by wide reading and a culture where polemic and debate were art forms as well as participatory entertainment. Secularism and socialism were popular here: the atheist Charles Bradlaugh was elected vice-president of the national Club and Institute Union in the 1880s (Taylor 1972: 47), with a turn to socialism developing during this decade and mass working-class audiences: the NSS’ central venue, the Hall of Science, had roughly 1000 members in the 1870s, while the Hackney Secular Association had 800 (Shiple 1971: 37-8). Spiritualism too was not restricted to the middle classes but had a broad working-class attraction (Barrow 1986).

Further up the social ladder, Gandhi (2006) has noted

“For those whose heterodoxy manifested itself expressly against mainstream Christianity, Theosophy and its contiguous offshoots offered a spiritual alternative in eastern religions, one that demanded a corresponding disavowal of the claims of “modern” western civilization. It was this tendency that brought the movement and its largely middle-class adherents into intimate commerce with parallel, secular, avant-garde critiques of western civilization, exemplified in the linked projects of dress and sexual reform, and homosexual exceptionalism; dietary politics, anti-vivisectionism, and vegetarianism and aestheticism, or the repudiation of bourgeois materialism and philistinism in the form of class or colonial avarice.” (2006: 122).

Along with these and other social movements (most obviously the “New Unions” from the 1880s, left organisations such as the Social Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society, and organisations geared towards exile politics), London at this period also included a vast range of public talks of a more familiar kind. Pfoundes, with his substantial experience of lecturing and public speaking, had much to offer. The BPS ‘propagandist’ could address some important concerns for many of the thoughtful, often self-taught people who were seeking to make sense of the world in this context: how to think about religion in a changing age – in particular, how to be ethical without fear of divine retribution; how to understand the relationship between western culture and the sophisticated Asian cultures then being colonised; and how other ways of living might be possible.

### **What did the Buddhist Propagation Society propagate?**

On 14 October 1889, just after launching himself as an apostle of ‘Buddhism pure and simple’, Pfoundes wrote to Matsuyama that he had been lecturing recently on the differences between Buddhism and Theosophy because Theosophy was becoming unpopular. The title of a lecture he was about to deliver shows that the ‘hook’ used to attract his audiences in the weeks just before the London BPS was

launched was the promise of a critique of Theosophy.<sup>50</sup> In the very same issue (Friday 18<sup>th</sup> October) of *TTW* in which Pfoundes announced his appointment as BPS representative, *TTW* gave notice of a Sunday lecture two days later:

“The Occult Society, Carlyle Hall, Church Street, Edgware Road.- Oct. 20th, at 7 p.m., Capt. Pfoundes will lecture on “Theosophy: its follies and fallacies.” (*TTW* 1889-10-18 p.596).

The same lecture had been given on the previous Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> at the Spiritualist hall at King’s Cross. (*TTW* 1889-10-11 p.ii).

The next Pfoundes lecture advertised in *TTW* reflects a change in approach, following his appointment to head the BPS. There is no reference to Theosophy in the title; the talk is entitled simply ‘Buddhism’. This lecture, delivered in the Beaumont Rooms, Mile End Road<sup>51</sup> at 7pm on Sunday November 10, 1889, may be considered the very first public talk given in London – or for that matter the west - by a Buddhist missionary.

The emphasis on ‘Buddhism pure and simple’ was continued in a subsequent lecture delivered on the following Sunday evening:

Progressive Association, Penton Hall, 81 Pentonville Road. - November 17, at 8, Captain Pfoundes, F.R.G.S., “Buddhism: the doctrine of enlightenment”. (*NR* 1889-11-17 p. 318)

By the following weekend Pfoundes’ restraint in regard to Theosophy appears already to have weakened, for *TTW* announced two successive Sunday evening lectures in

LONDON (Notting Hill Gate, Zephyr Hall): ...Nov. 24, Captain Pfoundes, on “Theosophy-the truth about it” and Dec. 1st, “Buddhism-what it is and is not;”  
....

Back in the East End on December 8<sup>th</sup>, Pfoundes delivered another ‘Buddhism pure and simple’ lecture on behalf of the BPS. The *TTW* reported favourably as follows:

LONDON. Mile End. Assembly Rooms, Beaumont Street. -Capt. Pfoundes lectured upon "Buddhism-the doctrine of enlightenment." A most interesting lecture. He showed that Buddhism was a direct appeal to common sense, disclaiming all inspiration from a personal God. There were many points upon which Spiritualism and Buddhism were in perfect agreement - both teaching that it was impossible to escape from the consequences of any act, good or evil. Buddhists refused to dogmatize upon any subject whatever, recognizing liberty and respect of opinion as a fundamental principle of their ethical system. -a *TTW* reporter. (*TTW* 1889-12-18 p.53)

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<sup>50</sup> A strategy not without its risks. The Theosophical Society sued Pfoundes and several newspapers (at least two of them successfully) for libel over the Bertram Keightley affair. In the Spring of 1890 readers of *Lucifer* were asked to keep their eyes peeled for any comments on Theosophy and send these to the TS Press section in Harrow; Pfoundes was singled out as having already received a writ for libel. *Lucifer*, March to August 1890, p.521. Our thanks to Chris Heinhold for this reference.

<sup>51</sup> The Stepney/Mile End Road area had a long-established (since the 17<sup>th</sup> century) and influential Jewish presence, augmented in the 1880s by an influx of Eastern European Jewish refugees.

As this sample of lectures and discussions offered between October and December 1889 indicates, Pfoundes usually lectured weekly, typically on Sunday evenings, at a variety of locations. He seems to have kept up this rate steadily until January 1892, a period of over two years, while also speaking from the floor at other events and distributing (or at least requesting hundreds of copies of) *Bijou of Asia*. While audiences were known to fluctuate according to speakers, it seems that Pfoundes was a reasonable draw and he was often invited back. He wrote to *KBJ* "Every Sunday I give a lecture. The audience is sometimes over hundreds [more than 100] in number. Respectable citizens, scholars, workers with culture."<sup>52</sup> Even allowing for some exaggeration and a fair number of repeat listeners, the BPS must have succeeded in reaching thousands of people in this way. His talks lasted for an hour and were followed by questions and answers which could run to two further hours (undated letter reprinted in *KBJ*, 27 May 1890, p. 32).

On 12 November 1889, a month after his appointment as BPS representative, Pfoundes wrote to Matsuyama that he had already lectured in the following venues:

Zephyr Hall, Kensington; ... Sydney Hall, Wandsworth Road; ... Spiritualist Hall, Kings Cross Road; ... Beaumont Hall, Mile End Road; ... Carlyle Hall, Edgware Road; ... Progress Hall, Islington<sup>53</sup>

*TWW* announcements or reports offer more detail on the lectures given at all but the last, the Progressive Hall, which was a Secularist rather than Spiritualist venue. In December 1889 Pfoundes again delivered Sunday evening lectures at the Zephyr and Beaumont halls, and at the Winchester Hall, Peckham High Street. On Sunday 22 December the *TWW* was disappointed that Pfoundes had failed to turn up at the King's Cross Spiritualist hall but reported that '[i]n his absence Dr. [Bowles] Daly<sup>54</sup> gave an interesting sketch of Buddhism'.

Pfoundes' lecturing campaign continued in the new year, with a run of Sunday evening talks at NSS venues. On January 5<sup>th</sup> 1890 the *National Reformer* advertised at the "Woolwich branch of the N.S.S. 'Sussex Arms' Assembly Rooms, 60 Plumstead Road. – ... at 7.30, Captain C. Pfoundes, 'The gospel of Buddhism'." On 19<sup>th</sup> January at 7.30 Pfoundes addressed the "North-West London Branch of the N.S.S., Milton Hall, Hawley Crescent, Kentish Town Road" on 'Buddhism'. On 26<sup>th</sup> at the "Battersea Branch of the N.S.S., 'The Shed of Truth,' Prince of Wales' Road, the speaker at 7.15 was Captain Pfoundes, 'Buddhism'.

About this time, Pfoundes wrote to Matsuyama describing a typical London BPS lecture as consisting of 1) the purpose of the B.P.S., 2) the difference between Buddhism and Christianity, 3) the ancient religions of Persia, India, China etc, and the going eastward of Buddhism, 4) the application of Buddhist truth to everyday lives, 5) purity of its morals and 6) the merits to all people.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> He also noted "The poor people in the urban area are excluded from Christianity, so it is necessary to propagate Buddhism among them" (letter to *KBJ* 14 October 1889, p. 25).

<sup>53</sup> The names are in *katakana* in *KBJ*. Islington is rendered 'Ailington' which suggests Pfoundes wrote to Matsuyama in English. 'Progress Hall' means a venue of the Progressive Association.

<sup>54</sup> Another Irish Buddhist in the making; he formally became a Buddhist in Colombo the following July (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 28 August 1890, p.6). For more on Bowles Daly see Cox (2013) pp.229ff.

<sup>55</sup> Letter published in *KBJ* 10, 1890-05-27, p.32.

Pfouendes probably lectured during February 1890 but we have no record of his engagements. On March 9<sup>th</sup> at the “Progressive Association, Penton Hall, 81 Pentonville Road” at 7pm, Mrs. Frederika Macdonald (a gifted writer, intellectual and exponent of Indian philosophy who three years later publicly debated Theosophy vs Buddhism with Annie Besant and then donated her share of the evening’s takings to a poor children’s charity)<sup>56</sup> spoke on ‘Buddhism’. Since Sunday evening at the Penton Hall was one of Pfouendes’ regular slots, MacDonald may have been that *rara avis*, a close ally of Pfouendes and a Buddhist co-propagandist.<sup>57</sup> On Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> March the “Ball’s Pond Branch of the N.S.S. Secular Hall 36 Newington Green Road” heard a lecture on “Buddhism or enlightenment: its gospel and doctrines”. The speaker on this occasion was identified only as “the Representative of the Propaganda”, so could have been either Pfouendes or MacDonald. On 23 Pfouendes returned to the Beaumont Rooms, Mile End Road to expatiate on ‘Theosophy; its facts, fallacies, and false pretences’.<sup>58</sup>

In late April *Reynolds’ Newspaper* gave notice of a lecture on 27<sup>th</sup> at the “Buddhist Propagation Society Hall, Newington-Green Road, 7.30”. This might suggest the BPS had taken the significant step of investing in its own property, but an announcement for the same lecture in the *NR* makes clear this was really the “Ball’s Pond Branch of the N.S.S. at the Secular Hall, 36 Newington Green Road.” The speaker is described as ‘An Orientalist’, and the topic “Theosophy of the day: its autopsy and obsequies”. Takakusu Junjirō, who was staying with the Pfouendes’ during that month, confirms in a letter to the BPS in Japan that three Theosophists verbally attacked Pfouendes after the lecture, but by 11pm he had won the argument. Takakusu also reported that Pfouendes was booked up until late June.<sup>59</sup> The frequency of engagements and level of repeat bookings again indicate that Pfouendes was in considerable demand as a lecturer.

On May 11<sup>th</sup>, according to the *NR*, at the East London Branch of the N.S.S., Swaby’s Coffee House, 103 Mile End Road, Capt. Pfouendes, F.R.G.S., was due to speak on ‘Philosophic Buddhism’.” On May 25<sup>th</sup> at the “West Ham Branch of the N.S.S., West Ham Secular Hall, 121 Broadway, Plaistow,” Pfouendes spoke on ‘The ethics of Buddhism’ and back in the Beaumont Assembly Rooms, Mile End Road on Sunday June 1<sup>st</sup> ‘Captain Pfouendes. Member Rl. U. Service Inst., Corr. Memb. Geogr. Soc. Japan, Hon. Fel. Soc. Sc. Lit. & Art., London, Representative [sic] of Bud(d)hist Propagation Society, etc., etc.’ spoke on ‘Ancient & modern centres of spiritual activity. Admission was free, and ‘Courteous discussion invited’ (see Fig 2 below).

On June 15, in an unusual departure from his usual London lecture circuit, Pfouendes gave three lectures in a single Sunday in the Northern industrial town of Sheffield, presumably at the invitation of the local NSS. The advertisement read:

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<sup>56</sup> ‘London Correspondence: Theosophical debate’ *Coventry Evening Telegraph* Friday 16 June 1893,

<sup>57</sup> Frederika MacDonald deserves further research; she may be the first female Buddhist missionary in the West. A report of the summer 1893 debate with Annie Besant describes her as ‘a lady well-known as an exponent of Buddhism’. In a lecture delivered on 9 July 1893 MacDonald castigated Theosophy as secretive and backward (*Edinburgh Evening News*, 11 July 1893), suggesting she may have picked up the baton from Pfouendes when he left London in late 1892.

<sup>58</sup> *TTW* 1890-03-21 p.221.

<sup>59</sup> Takakusu also wrote from the Pfouendes home that ‘A Theosophist in Paris named Barb (Barbu?) is applying for the Paris branch of B.P.S. but there is a trouble between Gaborieau and Barb. So you (B.P.S. in Japan) should not take sides’ (*Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō* no.11 1890-06-30, p.27); a reminder that London was not the only great capital in Europe to be targeted by the fledgling BPS.

Sheffield: HALL of science, to-morrow (SUNDAY). LECTURES by CAPTAIN PFOUNDES, F.R.G.S., Mem. R.I.U. S. Inst., Cor. Mem. Geogr. Soc. Japan, Fel. Soc. Lit and Art, Lond., etc., etc. Subjects: At 11, "The Science of Religious Philosophies and Ethics"; at 3, "Theosophy : Its Follies, Fallacies, and False Pretences"; at 7, " Bud(d)hism: What it Was, Is, and Is Not." Admission: Front Seats, 6d. (tickets for all the lectures 1s.) Back Seats, 3d.<sup>60</sup>

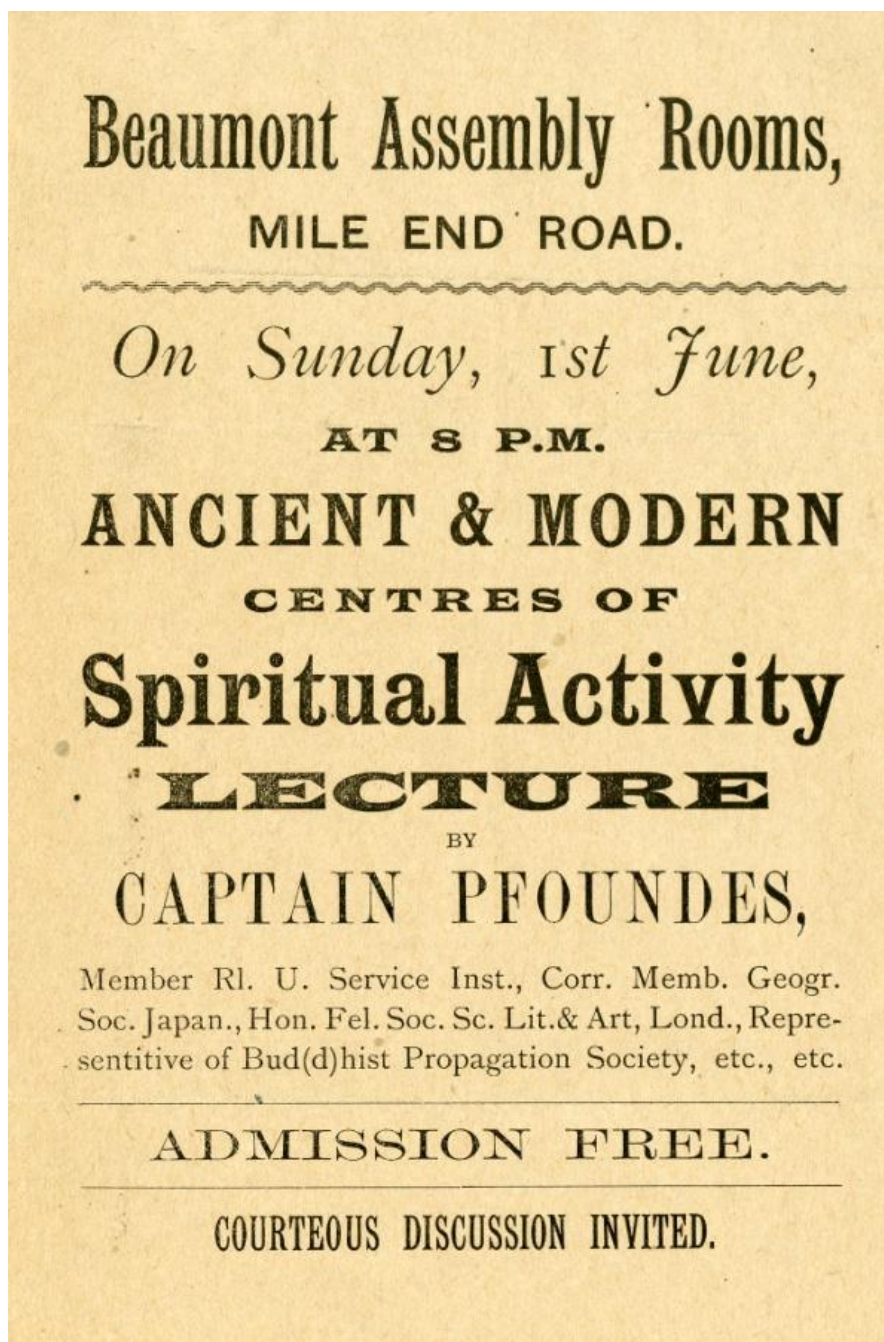


Fig 2. Flyer for Pfoundes' lecture on 1 June 1890. Reproduced by kind permission of the Oregon Historical Society (President's office correspondence. Mss 1609, Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition Records. © Oregon Historical Society Research Library).

<sup>60</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph 1890-06-14 p.1. Notice in same paper 1890-05-30 "June 15, Capt. Pfoundes".

Pfoundes' missionary work in the capital resumed in September with lectures followed by discussion. Throughout the autumn of 1890 and the winter and early spring of 1891 talks were delivered, almost invariably on Sunday evenings, at the venues mentioned above and others throughout London. On October 5<sup>th</sup> Pfoundes spoke on 'Bud(d)hist Ethics' at the Penton Hall (below).

❧ THE ❧

PROGRESSIVE + ASSOCIATION,  
A Society for Ethical Culture,  
PENTON HALL, 81 PENTONVILLE ROAD

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On SUNDAY, OCTOBER 5th,  
**A LECTURE**  
WILL BE DELIVERED BY  
**Capt. C. PFOUNDES**  
Memb. R.U.S. Ins.; Cor. Mem. Geo. Soc. Japan;  
Hony. Fell. Soc. Sc. Lit. and Art; etc., on  
**BUD(D)HIST ETHICS.**

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**Questions, after Lecture, invited.**

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The Committee earnestly invite those who are  
in sympathy with the Ethical Movement to become  
Members. Minimum Subscription 1s. per annum.

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DOORS OPEN AT 7 P.M.                      COMMENCE AT 7.30.  
**Admission Free.                      A Collection to defray Expenses.**

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Hon. Secretaries: George Mangerison, 4, Titchfield Terrace, N.W.; Walter Wilde,  
41 Canonbury Road, N.

Fig 3. Flyer for Pfoundes' lecture on October 5 1890 at the Penton Hall. Reproduced by kind permission of the Oregon Historical Society (President's office correspondence. Mss 1609, Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition Records. © Oregon Historical Society Research Library).

On occasion there was visual spectacle; in January 11<sup>th</sup> 1891 the audience at the NSS 'Secular Hall' near Battersea Park station looked forward to:

'Captain Pfoundes (accompanied by a Buddhist Priest in his robes), a Buddhist sermon.'<sup>61</sup>

As well as announcements of talks, we find occasional brief reports of BPS meetings, such as this for a lecture delivered the following Sunday, January 18<sup>th</sup> 1891:

LONDON. King's Cross. 182, Caledonian Road. Evening: Capt. Pfoundes gave a Buddhist sermon. There were many noteworthy points, but space does not permit as full a report as the subject and the lecturer deserve. The following precepts, known in Buddhism as "The Five Steps," must serve as a sample: "Respect for Life," "Honesty-the protection of property," "Truthfulness," "Chastity-equal purity being required of both sexes," "Temperance - total abstinence from intoxicants and injurious drugs."

For reasons unclear, Pfoundes' lectures on Buddhism in 1891 were suspended, after a March 18<sup>th</sup> 'Buddhist Sermon by the Propagandist' at the Woolwich branch of the NSS, in favour of lectures from April to the end of June devoted to India, with titles such as 'India's Rights and England's Duty' or, on June 7<sup>th</sup>, at a newly established Marylebone Spiritualist venue, a lecture on "India, 'tracing its development from 1499 under the East India Company to the present time, its invaluable literature, the population, and their rights Spiritually'."<sup>62</sup>

In August, Lloyds *Weekly Newspaper*, in its report on a meeting of the Bread and Food Reform League<sup>63</sup>, singled out Pfoundes' contribution for special mention:

BREAD AND FOOD REFORM. The closing meeting of the Reform League took place on Friday night, at the Memorial Hall, and during the three days the meetings have been largely and influentially attended. There were 34 stalls, presided over by various ladies and among the promoters were Lady Mount-Temple, Sir Spencer Wells, Mr. J.R. Diggle, and a number of medical gentlemen. Various addresses were given, among them one by Captain Pfoundes on "Food in Many Lands." In the course of his remarks he said that as the chairman had introduced him as one who had travelled in many lands, he would just say that in contrasting the people who lived on carnivorous food with those who were restricted to vegetarian diet he could testify to the amount of the physical and intellectual activity of the latter. The colonists of Australia were largely a meat-eating people, but they were not superior in endurance to some of the Oriental peoples who abhorred flesh, and among whom he would mention certain of the Chinese, Indians, and Arabs. He concluded by recommending his hearers to consider the question of food reform and cooking.<sup>64</sup>

From late September to December of 1891, there is no mention of Buddhism in the titles that have come down to us of Pfoundes' lectures; all are badged as criticisms of

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<sup>61</sup> NR 4 Jan 1891, p. 15. Presumably this was one of two travelling Nishi Honganji priests who a few weeks later on 22 February performed a Buddhist ceremony at the Musée Guimet in Paris ('Parisian Topics' *The Standard* 23 Feb 1891, p.5).

<sup>62</sup> TTW 1891-06-12 p.366

<sup>63</sup> This was allied to vegetarianism but campaigned in particular for wholemeal bread on health grounds.

<sup>64</sup> Lloyds Weekly Newspaper 1891-08-23, p.9



Theosophy, as discussed further below. However, we may safely assume that one of Pfoundes' key arguments was that Theosophy was not authentic Buddhism. After a short break in January 1892, allegedly due to a health breakdown, Pfoundes once again referred to Buddhism in the title of a lecture (this time with music) hosted by the Progressive Association at Penton Hall, one of his regular BPS venues:

January 31, at 7, Captain Pfoundes, 'Bud(d)hism not theosophy: critically contrasted'; preceded by vocal and instrumental music."

This is the last record we have of a 'missionary' lecture by Pfoundes on Buddhism. A few days later he gave a general lecture on life and customs in East Asia, no doubt similar to dozens he had delivered to audiences of all kinds between his arrival in London in 1878 and the launch of the London BPS in 1889:

Recreative Evening. –One of the numerous interesting lectures organised by the Recreative Evening School association was delivered on Tuesday evening at Mowlem schools, Bishops-road, Hackney. Captain Pfoundes gave some of his experiences of China and Japan, the lecture being illustrated with dissolving views. It was said to be a mistake to suppose Orientals illiterate – on the contrary, there is a very high ideal of intellectual life; and practical ethical standards that would do credit to the highest type of society are closely followed by a large percentage of the people.<sup>65</sup>

After this, we have no record of any public lecture by Pfoundes until September 1892, when he presented a paper on 'Buddhism in Japan' at the prestigious Oriental Congress held at London University.<sup>66</sup> True to form, Pfoundes displayed his detailed knowledge of East Asian Buddhism partly in order to show that:

[a]nyone who studied the teachings of the Esoteric school would see the gross mistakes made by people who called themselves Esoteric Buddhists, and professed the hotch-potch misnamed Theosophy.<sup>67</sup>

### **How did the BPS propagate Buddhism?**

The name of Pfoundes' mission, the 'Buddhist *Propagation Society*', was derived directly from the *senkyō* in *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* and highlights the importance of the idea of 'propagation' (or sometimes 'propaganda', then a term without negative connotations) as a key religious activity.<sup>68</sup> While Western audiences today generally expect Buddhist teachers to convey teachings derived from Buddhist scriptures and to provide authoritative instruction in meditational techniques, Buddhist ethics and ritual deportment with, perhaps, some emphasis on social engagement, Pfoundes' immediate aim, like that of his Japanese sponsors, was to *propagate* Buddhism; to multiply its influence. The BPS leaflet identifies three ways in which the Society intended to bring this about: (1) to establish Buddhist missionary work in foreign lands, (2) to publish books, tracts and journals and to translate the scriptures and (3) to correspond and answer questions from foreign Buddhists and those interested in

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<sup>65</sup> Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper 1892-02-07, p.7

<sup>66</sup> This was the start of Pfoundes' interest in oriental congresses (see Bocking 2013)

<sup>67</sup> The Bristol Mercury, Fri 1892-09-09 p.8

<sup>68</sup> A newspaper account of the first publication of *Bijou of Asia* was headed 'A Buddhist Propaganda'. The Latin term Propaganda originally referred to a committee of cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church responsible for foreign missions, founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV. It was used in the sense of foreign missionary activity up to the 1930s when it acquired the meaning of false or biased information.

Buddhism. Like U Dhammaloka, who around 1904 from his Japanese-inspired 'English Buddhist Mission' in Singapore planned to send newly-ordained Western monks to multiply his impact in various parts of Asia (Bocking 2010), Pfoundes hoped to ignite sufficient zeal for propagating Buddhism among his hearers in London that some would become, like him, propagandists in foreign parts.<sup>69</sup> Shortly after starting the BPS in October 1889, he wrote to Matsuyama in Japan:

"I am instructing some young men. They will go to Europe and America to teach Buddhism. And I will send them to China, Siam, Burma, Ceylon, India to do missionary work." (*KBJ* no.7, 25 Feb 1890. p.29)

From a historical perspective, this "propagandist" approach to Buddhism in fact aligns it more closely with an international movement like freethought, whose basic activity consisted in publications and talks. Spiritualism and socialism, the other movements Pfoundes piggy-backed on in London, both added a practical component (albeit of very different kinds), while what we would now expect to be "religious" activities played a very limited and tentative role in Pfoundes' activities. This reflected contemporary Japanese debates around Buddhist reform as well as Pfoundes' own assessment of what was feasible or even meaningful in the London context.

In any case, "propagation" did not work as hoped. There is nothing surprising about this: the Buddhists of the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* were confident that the Westerners would be converted to Mahayana Buddhism without great effort because the Southeast Asian form of Buddhism – which they thought of as Hinayana and theoretically inferior to Mahayana – was apparently prevalent in Europe.<sup>70</sup> Pfoundes observed at one point "We should learn from the failures of Christian missions" (letter to *KBJ*, 14 Oct 1889, p. 30). This probably refers to his earlier first-hand observations of Christian missions in Japan.<sup>71</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising that Pfoundes could comment "There is no one who is openly committed to our movement. [However] there are many who regularly attend my meeting" (letter to *KBJ*, 25 October 1889).

How could interest be turned into commitment? Pfoundes attempted various strategies. On 27 July 1890 he offered lectures in "practical philanthropy" (meaning first aid), apparently in association with the St. John's Ambulance Brigade. On 13 November 1891 he offered a class in "spiritualist ethics". There was apparently little take-up for this: from 3 December he was offering a free Thursday class in "psychology". These could perhaps be read as attempts to translate traditional Buddhist concerns around ethics and right action into western contexts.

Another strategy was to offer ritual: as early as 25 October 1889 he wrote "At least every Sunday, we want to have Buddhist services. We want Buddhist ceremonies which satisfy those people accustomed to the ceremonies here". Later in the same letter he requested "Buddhist ceremony modified for Britain" (letter to *KBJ*, p. 22). In January 1891 he was able to put this into practice: on the 4<sup>th</sup> he appeared in the "Monarch" Coffee House under the auspices of the Bethnal Green branch of the NSS "accompanied by a Buddhist Priest in his robes", presumably the same individual

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<sup>69</sup> Pfoundes did not appear to think that London needed more missionaries in addition to himself.

<sup>70</sup> See Shimaji Mokurai "*Kaigai senkyō kai ni tsugu*" (An address to the members of BPS), *KBJ* no.24 1892-03-27 pp.7, 8. This assumption was soon to be challenged by the experience of the Japanese delegates to the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions in 1893.

<sup>71</sup> Letters sent to the *Japan Herald* mention missionaries living the good life and the poor calibre of converts. Living modestly himself, Pfoundes valued sincere seekers after truth.

previously mentioned with whom he appeared at the Battersea Park branch a week later on the 11<sup>th</sup>, offering “a Buddhist sermon”.

Yet Pfoundes’ mission lacked both the migrant base of the later missions to California and the BSGBI’s later orientation towards ordination (of course neither was much more successful long-term). It would be decades before the modernist meditation trainings developed by Asian reformers for lay, urban contexts would become available in the west (e.g. Christmas Humphrey’s 1935 manual).

### **What *kind* of Buddhism did the BPS propagate?**

We might also want to ask, in the spirit of Tweed’s *American encounter with Buddhism*, how to interpret Pfoundes’ own engagement with Buddhism. The discussion of *Fuso mimi bukuro* above suggests that he was not able to relate effectively to existing Japanese Buddhism in the 1860s and first half of the 1870s. The combination of disestablishment, reform and Theosophy perhaps made it possible to renegotiate his relationship with Buddhism and identify as a Buddhist in the late 1880s. The sequence of events between 1888-1889 which led to his emergence as Buddhist missionary suggests that at some point it dawned on him that he knew more about Buddhism – and was himself by experience and inclination more Buddhist - than the self-styled ‘esoteric Buddhists’ of the Theosophical Society and that he could (and being Pfoundes, therefore should) confront them in defence of ‘Buddhism pure and simple’. It is probably also significant in this period that he could approach Buddhism in his familiar role as cultural mediator – Orientalist interpreter of Japan for Western audiences, but also expert provider of practical services to Japanese organisations engaging with the West. By the late 1880s, with the declining power of the traditionalist Buddhism he had once decried, he could express his undoubted love for Japanese culture through a claim to knowledge of “old Japan” grounded in his pre-Meiji experience and long residence<sup>72</sup>. It was only after his return to Japan that he would claim esoteric knowledge by virtue of the initiations and ranks he collected after 1893 in a variety of sects (Bocking 2013).

This perspective may explain some of the apparent contradictions in his own approach, in particular how a hostility to priestly superstition, claim to textual knowledge and appreciation for modernist / rational readings of Buddhism<sup>73</sup> could coexist with a later ecclesiastical positioning (in Japan) and orientation to Japanese authenticity and esoteric knowledge. However this eclecticism may also represent his position as an active mediator: rather than simply reading Buddhism within one of several pre-existing western frames, he was actively seeking in this period to engage with potential converts. Just as he explored multiple (spiritualist, freethinking, socialist, general) audiences for his talks and tried out various (lecture, polemic, practical, ritual) strategies, so too perhaps he explored different “takes” on Buddhism to see what might work in the west.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> There are similarities to Irish Buddhist sympathiser, Lafcadio Hearn. There is as yet no evidence of any direct connection though the two very likely knew of each other in Japan after 1893.

<sup>73</sup> He notes “The stories of yogis or miracles seem not to be liked by people here” (letter to *KBJ* 14 October 1889, p. 27).

<sup>74</sup> While an earlier generation of scholarship (Almond 1988, Snodgrass 2003) paid particular attention to the influence of western academic interpretations of Buddhism, Tweed (2000) has shown that even within purely western contexts this “rationalist” approach was but one among many. Franklin (2008) shows just how ubiquitous the reference to Buddhism was within Victorian culture (see Dolce (2006) for perceptions of Japanese Buddhism in particular), while Cox (2013) and Bocking et al. (2014) emphasise the role of Asian agency, and individual westerners within Asian contexts. It can be seen from the evidence presented here that

## **Conclusion: Charles Pfoundes, the London BPS and the history of global Buddhism**

### **Crisis and return to Japan**

Pfoundes' mission proved harder than anticipated. This appears most clearly in his personal life: while in the 1880s Mrs Pfoundes was recorded as accompanying him to various cultural events, by June 1891 they were seemingly separated (the 1891 census shows her 'visiting' a female relative on the South coast) while he was living in the Doughty Street commune.<sup>75</sup> On 15 January 1892 *The Two Worlds* carried the following notice:

"CAPTAIN PFOUNDES' LECTURES. - We are requested to announce that all engagements must be cancelled for the present, in consequence of breakdown of health, our climate being very trying to one who has travelled and resided so much abroad." (p.36).

By Autumn 1892 Pfoundes had lost or perhaps resigned from his Admiralty job and he left for Kobe on the *Monmouthshire* on November 28<sup>th</sup>, never to return to Europe. The Buddhist Propagation Society's mission to London was over.

Pfoundes' personal crisis and the failure of the BPS mission went hand in hand. The real challenge, it seems, was Theosophy; and in particular Annie Besant. This brilliant, beautiful and dramatic figure had been a leading light of freethought, feminism and socialism (she is recorded as "de-arresting" a banner during a police attack on an 1877 demonstration) before encountering Theosophy in 1890 – 91, parallel to Pfoundes' mission. Her future role as President of the Theosophical Society (from 1907) and Indian nationalist leader was yet to come: in this period she was using her close friendship with the NSS' leader Charles Bradlaugh to enable her to speak on Theosophy at secularist venues and use his *National Reformer* (of which she was temporary editor in early 1890) to publicise her books. Opposition to Theosophy remained muted within the NSS until Bradlaugh's death in January 1891, at which point her opponents within the Society were able to attack Theosophy publicly. She finally broke with the "Secular Platform" in September (*National Reformer* 13 Sept 1891, p. 164). The same issue of the *Reformer* carried a notice of a meeting in the NSS' main venue where Mr G W Foote spoke on "What does Mrs Besant mean?"; there were other, similarly personalised titles.

As noted, Pfoundes had already spoken against Theosophy's claim to represent Buddhism in 1889 but he became prolific on the subject from 1891, giving at least 17 talks with titles like "Theosophy, theology and sophistry: dangerous humbugs". On 5 November 1891, for example, he "treated largely on the many questionable acts of the leaders of Theosophy, having much personal knowledge of them. He completely deprived Theosophy of any attractions it may have previously possessed for any of his hearers. Our [spiritualist] rooms were filled, many persons being present who do not usually attend." (*TTW* 13 Nov 1891, p. 629). Annie Besant was a tough opponent and present in the same networks as Pfoundes (spiritualist and socialist even after she had broken with secularism); she was also an extraordinarily popular public speaker, and an extended polemic with her was likely to be exhausting at best. However delighted Pfoundes may have been in 1891 to see Besant leave the freethought circuit, the developing conflict between Theosophy and secularism in

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Pfoundes, who was well acquainted with scholars such as Max Müller and T W Rhys Davids on the London scholarly circuits, was far from simply reproducing a single, western (let alone academic) frame of interpretation of Buddhism.

<sup>75</sup> See Cox (2013, p 224).

1891 posed a problem for Pfoundes' *Buddhist* work, which entailed carving out a "third space", one neither Theosophist nor non-religious. He remained welcome at secularist venues as an anti-Theosophical speaker as the split developed, but it is hard to imagine that many of those remaining would have been attracted to Buddhism in this context. In some ways, perhaps, the ignorance of what Buddhism *really* was, which he inveighed against, carried the day, with Londoners mostly content to accept either Besant's version or reject all such follies on secularist or socialist grounds.

### **Failure and continuity**

The BPS certainly "failed" in a number of senses. Most obviously, Pfoundes was unable to find a mechanism to convert his audiences into "Buddhists" in any sense he, or the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai*, were happy with. He was also unable to break through the more powerful arguments between Annie Besant's Theosophy, freethinkers, socialists, and scholarly Orientalists. Secondly, of course, the BPS did not continue after Pfoundes left for Japan and it has been omitted from the "official" history of UK Buddhism for precisely this reason (Turner, Cox and Bocking 2010 and 2013): organisational survivors projected back their own history as *the* history, and researchers until now have largely started from these organisational sources.

This reliance on internal histories has considerably skewed our understanding of the early years of global Buddhism. Because most studies look at organisations which 'succeeded', in the sense of continuing, the explanations offered for this success are rarely based on any systematic comparison with those which did not continue<sup>76</sup>. On the face of it, Pfoundes' mission was better-organised than either Ananda Metteyya's or even Dharmapala's (leading to the foundation of the BSGBI and the London Maha-Bodhi societies respectively). Pfoundes was able to draw effectively on existing networks (spiritualist, secularist, socialist); he understood the world of London public meetings and was an experienced and evidently successful speaker. He had a clear strategic direction and his topics spoke to key issues of the day (Theosophy vs rationality and ethics without God). Furthermore, he put in a consistent and substantial effort over a significant period. An organisational explanation for his failure does not seem convincing.

However, the *institutional* lack of continuity does not mean that the BPS had no influence on UK Buddhism. There was widespread popular (Franklin 2008) as well as scholarly (Almond 1988) interest in Buddhism in this period, which also saw a number of individual converts to Buddhism and Buddhist sympathisers (see Cox 2013 for Ireland, at this point part of the UK). It is not impossible that some of these – even some who subsequently supported Ananda Metteyya's 1908 visit – had heard Pfoundes speak.

Pfoundes' own larger point – that Buddhism could not be understood within Theosophical terms – was, however, certainly forgotten, under the influence not only of Allan Bennett's own Theosophical past (Harris 1998) but also the positioning of Christmas Humphrey's later Buddhist Society as the Buddhist Lodge of the Theosophical Society. By the 1920s and 1930s, the bitter arguments *within* Theosophy and *between* Theosophists and spiritualists, Hermeticists and others (Cox 2013 ch 4) were largely forgotten and Theosophy stood as a surviving organisation, from which a new generation of Buddhists was formed.

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<sup>76</sup> See Bocking et al. 2014 and Cox 2013, ch 5 for a range of examples of early Buddhist "might-have-beens".

Nonetheless, the London branch of the BPS should now be firmly reinstated in the history of Western Buddhism. Its existence is significant in itself. It also sheds light on the immense *difficulties* faced in developing what with hindsight seems like the 'obvious' structure of any Buddhist mission to the west; a focus on practice (whether meditation, chanting or ritual) rather than doctrine as a point of entry, which underpins the development of a global Buddhism in the post-WWII period. The BPS also shows the complex interactions between Buddhism and atheism, spiritualism, Theosophy and socialism in a period *before* Buddhism's identification within the categories of "world religion" was an automatic one.

### **From the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* to the 1899 California missions**

Pfunder's mission to London is linked, indirectly at least, to the later 'first' Western Buddhist missions of 1899 in California. As it turned out, the London BPS was the only overseas operation successfully established by the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai*. Shimaji Mokurai, a leading intellectual in the modernisation of Jodo Shinshu, took over its presidency between August 1891 and March 1892,<sup>77</sup> but the society had already started to decline. Nakanishi Naoki points out that the rapid demise of *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* had three main causes. Firstly, because it was, at least nominally, a trans-sectarian enterprise, Nishi Honganji could not take full responsibility for it. Secondly, the decline of Christian influence in Japan made it unnecessary for the sects to cooperate in such trans-sectarian missionary organizations. Thirdly, the Japanese economy experienced a panic in 1890 and when *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* faced economic difficulties it did not get enough financial support, either from the different sects or from Nishi Honganji.<sup>78</sup>

In addition, the favourable atmosphere toward foreign Buddhists turned hostile after 1890. This is clearly seen in the editorial articles of a leading Buddhist newspaper, *Meikyō Shinshi*, no. 3197 (1893-02-20) and no.3198 (1893-02-22) entitled "Gaikoku Bussha" (Foreign Buddhists). These severely criticised 'worship of the West' and claimed that all the Japanese needed to do for Westerners was give them the chance to learn Buddhism. In 1893 the last issue of *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō* was published, and the final project was to send English books on Buddhism to the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Matsuyama seems to have left Kyoto after the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* was closed; he was killed in the March 1906 Meishan earthquake in Taiwan. But if it failed as an organisation, the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* was certainly a success as a hub of the networks linking Japanese and foreign Buddhists. Even after the *Senkyō Kai* was closed down and the related Kyoto Theosophical lodge - if it was ever more than a paper organisation - ceased to be active, personal relationships would continue, such as that between Dharmapala and young Japanese Buddhists. In addition, imported Theosophical ideas influenced some reforming Buddhists connected with Hansei Kai.<sup>79</sup>

Moreover, although the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai* as such had declined by 1893, the Nishi Honganji subsequently resumed the spirit and work of Buddhist propagation under new leadership, supporting not only the Hawaiian Japanese community and the later West Coast American missions but operating or planning other - as yet largely undocumented - overseas Buddhist missions elsewhere, including in Singapore where, as we know from research on Dhammaloka,<sup>80</sup> the Japanese mission in the

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<sup>77</sup> KBJ no.23 (1891-08) p.40.

<sup>78</sup> Nakanishi Naoki, "*Kaigai senkyō kai to sono jidai*" (*Kaigai Senkyō Kai* and its era) in *Reprint Edition of Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō* (Kyoto, Sannin sha, forthcoming).

<sup>79</sup> See Yoshinaga (2012).

<sup>80</sup> Bocking 2010

colony was led from ca. 1899 to at least 1904 by a 'Reverend Ocha'.<sup>81</sup> As late as December 1902, Shimaji Mokurai and others from Nishi Honganji (by now operating from Takanawa University as the short-lived 'International Young Men's Buddhist Association') were envisaging missions for the Philippines (Pinan), Hong Kong, China and Australia (Brisbane) which, if successful, might have matched Pfoundes' achievements in London.<sup>82</sup> It is significant that the priests who were sent abroad during this period were mostly related to, or graduated from, Futsū Kyōkō (or its successor Bungaku ryō) and shared the global perspective of the *Kaigai Senkyō Kai*. The best example here is Imamura Emyō, who propagated Buddhism in Hawaii. He was a nephew of Satomi Ryōnen and a son-in-law of Hino Gien, both of whom were founding members of *Kaigai Senkyō Kai*.

### Afterword: Charles Pfoundes and Ananda Metteyya?

On the surface, there seems to be no connection at all between Pfoundes' 1889-92 Japanese-sponsored mission and Ananda Metteyya's much later Burmese-supported visit from Rangoon to London between May and October 1908. However, an analysis of the venues at which Pfoundes propagated 'Buddhism pure and simple' in the early 1890s shows that he lectured on Buddhism in at least three locations very close to Clapham Junction, a major railway station in South London. According to surviving records of the Theosophical Society of 1893, the youthful Allan Bennett was then living in London, in Dorothy Road, close to Clapham Junction and within easy walking distance of any one of Pfoundes' three venues (Crow 2009: 24). We have no direct evidence of Bennett being present at one of Pfoundes' BPS lectures but it seems almost inconceivable, given Bennett's well-documented interest in Eastern religions, that he would not have attended at least one talk by Pfoundes, whose name was well known to Theosophists. It may even be that Bennett was one of the 'young men' whom, Pfoundes reported to Matsuyama, he was instructing in Buddhism and would he hoped 'go to Europe and America to teach Buddhism. And ... to China, Siam, Burma, Ceylon, India to do missionary work.'<sup>83</sup>

Tracing Allan Bennett's interest in Buddhism to the Japanese-sponsored BPS may at first appear far-fetched, given that Bennett found Buddhism in Ceylon and was ordained in Burma. However, an intriguing and otherwise inexplicable statement made (and repeated) by Bennett's most devoted colleague J F McKechnie suddenly acquires relevance in light of Pfoundes' activities on behalf of the BPS in 1890s London. Speaking on Bennett's tenth death anniversary in 1933, McKechnie stated that, while he could not himself understand the reasons for it, Bennett was actually intending to go to Japan and only stopped off at Colombo.<sup>84</sup> If Bennett first encountered 'Buddhism pure and simple' in the person of Pfoundes, then a latent ambition to visit Japan, the home of an authentic yet modern, pure and global form of Buddhism, makes perfect sense. However, without further evidence we cannot know for certain whether such a concrete link exists between Pfoundes' activities on behalf of the BPS and the much later 'first' Buddhist mission to London of Ananda Metteyya.

<sup>81</sup> Bocking 2010

<sup>82</sup> See Bocking 2010 and *Ryūkoku Daigaku Shuppanbu* 1939, p. 822. In 1902 the KS was superseded by the short-lived 'International Young Men's Buddhist Association' formally launched at a September 1902 ceremony in Tokyo attended by various Pure Land luminaries - and the 'other' Irish Buddhist, U Dhammaloka, visiting from Burma.

<sup>83</sup> *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō* no.7, 25 Feb 1890. p.29

<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth Harris, 'Ananda Metteyya: controversial networker, passionate critic'. *Contemporary Buddhism* 14:1, 78-93, p.82, citing Crow 2009, p. 44.

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### Abbreviations

BPS	Buddhist Propagation Society
BSGBI	Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland
FMB	Pfoundes: <i>Fuso mimi bukuro</i>
KBJ	<i>Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō</i>
KS	<i>Kaigai Senkyō Kai</i>
NR	<i>National Reformer</i>
NSS	National Secular Society
TS	Theosophical Society
TTW	<i>The Two Worlds</i> (online via <a href="http://ehbritten.org/bibliography.html">http://ehbritten.org/bibliography.html</a> )

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