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## Attitudes Arising from Buddhist Nurture in Britain

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# Attitudes Arising from Buddhist Nurture in Britain<sup>1</sup>

Phra Nicholas Thanissaro<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Focus groups comprised of seventy-five self-identifying Buddhist teenagers in Britain were asked to discuss value domains that previous research has identified to be of special interest to Buddhists. These included personal well-being, the nature of faith, the law of karma, monasticism, meditation, home shrines, filial piety, generosity, not killing animals, and alcohol use. The findings suggest that some attitudes held by teenagers were conscious and intrinsically nurtured (“worldview”) while others involved social constructs (“ideologies”). The study finds that parents and the Sangha are mainly responsible for shaping “ideological” patterns in young

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Buddhists whereas informal nurture by “immersion” (possibly facilitated by caregivers) may be responsible for “worldview” patterns.

In the words of a 12-year old Thai Buddhist girl commenting on how she learned about Buddhism despite growing up in the UK (Thanissaro “Preliminary” 71):

I start with questions by talking to my mum. If I want to find out more, I ask at the temple. And at school, when I learned about it, I had a better view of it.

Such an observation indicates some sort of awareness in Buddhist children about the mechanism by which they pick up an understanding of Buddhism from the world around them. However, a more systematic study of how Buddhist values are transmitted to children when the tradition is passed down to a new generation, and speculation about the mechanisms facilitating this, requires examination of previous research concerning mechanisms of nurture, Buddhist child spirituality, and identifiers of Buddhist religiousness.

### **Nurture of Religious “Values”**

Although there is only modest empirical evidence for transmission of values from parents to their children, it is most evident for political orientation, religious beliefs, and lifestyle (Kohn). In a multicultural context, for example, parents might portray their religion to their children in a positive light in order to instill in them the view that their

own religion is superior to others (Goodnow 350). It used to be assumed<sup>3</sup> that religious values were instilled uni-directionally from parents to children. More recently, however, the transmission of values has come to be considered a more bi-directional process with parents as facilitators (Kuczynski, Marshall, and Schell). This would recognize that children are not merely passive recipients of values, but have an active role in socializing their parents into accepting a more “contemporary” set of attitudes. If the transmission is bi-directional the negotiation process may have to navigate alternative values that often compete with parental goals. Parents either may condone intergenerational change or may actively foster differences between their own socialization attainment and those of their children (Kuczynski, Marshall, and Schell 34). Whatever the process may be, it has been shown that children have the resiliency to grow up as competent adults even in adverse surroundings if they have a warm and affectionate relationship with an adult who cares for and supports them (Benard).

### **Buddhist Child Spirituality**

The scarcity of discourse on children and adolescents in Buddhism, not to speak of general theories of nurture mechanism in Buddhists, has been attributed to Western scholastic bias and to a preferential emphasis on Western converts to Buddhism (Gross 412). Whatever the reason might be, there is so little field data about child spirituality in Buddhism that most scholars are forced to draw on textual exegesis to present a Buddhist stance on childhood (Nakagawa 33). Nonetheless, even without considering the training of novice monks, a handful of studies have

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<sup>3</sup> It has also been debated whether children have simply inherited their parents’ social status (religious affiliation, race, class) and hence the embedded values.

touched on the lay education of children through parental guidance or “immersion” in Buddhist culture that deepens the child’s experience of religion (Gross 417; Rinpoche 180).

In my small scale study in 2011 of the contrasts between school and home presentation of Buddhism in the UK, I found that daily nurture at home included thinking of the Buddha, keeping the Five Precepts,<sup>4</sup> tending a home shrine, bowing to parents, chanting, and meditation. Weekly practices included visiting the temple to present meals to the monastic community and keeping Eight Precepts.<sup>5</sup> Buddhist temples were also visited on special occasions, often for festivals in the Buddhist calendar or for the anniversaries of the passing of relatives. Mothers were found to have a major role in answering the questions children asked about Buddhism and in nagging them to practice. They hoped that their efforts would instill in their children good moral values, a sense of right and wrong, ambition, good educational results, respect for the elderly, the wish to look after aging parents, modesty, gratitude, and humility (Thanissaro “Preliminary” 65-66). Part of parental nurture may involve the introduction of a child to someone who can be their spiritual friend or guide (Rinpoche 182).

Informal nurture in the home was contrasted to the monk-led formal nurture at the temple, since in some Buddhist temples, particularly Sri Lankan ones, Sunday school arrangements are provided. One means of nurture is the age-old tradition of retelling of stories, especially about the life of the Buddha. In the West, there is no clear nurture

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<sup>4</sup> Refraining from harming, from stealing, from lying, from sexual misconduct, and from intoxicants.

<sup>5</sup> The Eight Precepts training involves adopting a meditation retreat-like regime, including voluntary celibacy and abstaining from an evening meal, for a certain period of time.

tradition to be followed and the way in which Buddhist teens, even heritage<sup>6</sup> teens, are brought up in a country like the UK, is still unfolding (Rinpoche 181). It is often not clear in the West who should take responsibility for child nurture and many convert Buddhist parents tend to have a “hands-off” approach, hoping that their children will decide to be Buddhists on their own (Loundon, Kim, and Liow 347). It seems to be worth finding out how at least some children perpetuate their Buddhist affiliation or convert to Buddhism despite the challenge of competing mainstream worldviews such as the Judeo-Christian tradition or logical positivism (Rinpoche 188).

### **Identifiers of Religiousness**

In order to track the aspects of religiousness acquired by children and to discern the mechanisms and (social) forces that are involved in this, it is necessary to define a variable that can be taken as an operational identifier of Buddhist religiousness. Religiousness can be measured empirically in four different ways—by affiliation, belief, participation, and attitudes (Francis “Comparative” 129)—and to understand the nurture of religiousness it is likely that researchers would need to concentrate on one or all of these four aspects. If commentators are quick to dismiss aspects of behavior by Buddhists as naïve, immature, or “cultural” Buddhism—without declaring the basis on which the choice has been made—there is

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<sup>6</sup> The term “heritage” Buddhist (or variously the near-synonymous “immigrant,” “migrant,” “ethnic,” “cradle,” “old-line,” or “indigenous” Buddhist) means Buddhists ethnically connected with countries where Buddhism has a dominant presence and who strive to preserve and perpetuate the Buddhist tradition in the Western country to which they have migrated.



a danger of arbitrarily passing over aspects possibly held dear to a sense of religious identity by the Buddhists themselves (Smith 97).

Religiousness has been measured in different ways, but it has also been differentiated by its orientation: “extrinsic religion” such as church-going is focused on external objects, while “intrinsic religion” (sometimes referred to as “spirituality”) has a more internal focus (Allport and Ross 434). Intrinsic religion has been found not to be affected by parents, unlike extrinsic expressions (Francis “Parental” 250). Moreover, when a child has friends who are Buddhists, it is likely that peer influence on attitudes would be stronger than the influence of parents (Francis and Craig).

Defining particular aspects of Buddhist religiousness as “typical” is problematic since such definitions may narrow the range of attitudes and behaviors considered acceptable to a religion to the point where a number of members are excluded as “atypical” even when their religiousness might not necessarily be anti-social.<sup>7</sup> For certain applications, however, the essentialization of Buddhism has undoubtedly proved useful as a hermeneutic in understanding identity difference—for example, in teasing out the religious thread of identity as separate from ethnicity and in showing degree of practice to be more important to the view teens have of their identity than their affiliation (Thanissaro “Almost” 10). Operationally, Buddhists can be defined by their self-identified affiliation, degree of practice, and attitudes, allowing us to unpack more critically the term “Buddhist.”

Defining what is typical for a Buddhist is complicated by the wide degree of internal heterogeneity within Buddhism. Nonetheless, my recently published “Scale of Attitude towards Buddhism” (Thanissaro

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<sup>7</sup> Compare the current vocabulary of radicalism, extremism and violent extremism in reference to Islam.

“Measuring” 800), abbreviated TSAB, has arranged Buddhist attitudes on a single linear axis and mapped this intersectionality with worldviews of other Dharmic religions and those without religion (Thanissaro “What” 339). Questionnaire items from the TSAB are particularly interesting for Buddhist identity since they have been picked statistically from a much larger set of possible questions by virtue of scoring more highly in terms of uniqueness to Buddhist identity; that is, they have the *least* overlap in positive attitudes with the attitudes of non-Buddhists. The TSAB questions deal not with attitudes in general, but attitudes toward Buddhism itself. They are particularly characteristic of those self-identifying as Buddhist.

This study sets out to explore the likely provenance of the attitudes highlighted in the TSAB, likely to be key to Buddhist identity, giving clues about the mechanisms of Buddhist nurture. As the direction of causality is often difficult to ascertain in quantitative exploration of attitudes,<sup>8</sup> the rationale of the research has been to explore these attitudes qualitatively in focus groups comprised of teenagers to allow these young people to express the origins of their attitudes wherever possible.

## Methodology

Focus groups were chosen as a research methodology because they allow themes to emerge more exploratively than is possible by semi-structured interviewing. A total of seventy-five teenagers participated in

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<sup>8</sup> Teenagers who go to a temple more often may do so either *because* of their pious attitudes toward Buddhism or as *the reason for* their pious attitudes. Quantitative research can indicate only a statistical correlation that is strong or weak, but is unable to show which factor is the cause and which the effect.

focus groups at seven different Buddhist locations in Britain. Each focus group was comprised of six to eleven self-identifying Buddhist teenagers. The groups met at Buddhist events in the period July 2011 to August 2012.

The twenty-four questions discussed (see Appendix 1) were chosen in part from previous focus group research with religiously-undifferentiated teenagers (e.g., Halsall) and in part from Thanissaro's TSAB. The focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. The dialogues were analyzed by coding them under thirty-five subheadings that emerged from the data using NVIVO software (QSR); they were summarized in tabular form to allow themes to emerge in overview. Reliability was achieved by running the focus groups to saturation. Validity depended on consensus within and between groups but was further consolidated by triangulating through "member checking" (Richards 140) where participants were given the chance to comment on the accuracy with which their views had been written up in a pre-press draft of this article. For focus groups, data are generally expressed as the "voice of the group," although where participants are quoted as examples, they have been identified individually by pseudonyms.

A convenience sample of seventy-five teenagers in the age range thirteen to twenty volunteered to take part in this study. Sixty-five of the teenagers were drawn from Britain's Sri Lankan, Thai, Burmese, Cambodian, and Nepalese communities, including teenagers of mixed race from intermarriage of Asian and Black or Asian and White parents. These teens are *heritage* Buddhists and are mostly adherents to Theravāda Buddhist practice. Since previous research on Buddhists in the West (e.g., Numrich; Baumann) has shown there to be two distinct styles of religiousness, termed "convert" and "heritage," special efforts were made in sampling to include both styles. The relative difficulty in finding

willing convert participants of the specified age range is reflected in the stratified nature of the sample.

The remaining ten teenagers were self-identified Buddhists brought up in *convert* Buddhist families. (For the record, in respect of interpretive data, it should be stated that the researcher is a “convert” to Theravāda Buddhism.) Because the group is also likely to be representative of the new generation of young Buddhists in the UK, their attitudes can probably be extrapolated to a wider Buddhist teen population of over 20,000.<sup>9</sup> The choice of young people rather than adults for this research may have some features that would differ from an adult sample. Nonetheless, teenagers seem to have a reliable understanding of the topics discussed, being able to define Buddhist terminology accurately and without help. The study was calculated to interrogate a freshness of religious worldview (Pressey and Kuhlen; Rinpoche 179) not present in adults while offering ready comparison with values profiling young people of other religions in the tradition of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (e.g., Francis *Values*).

## Findings

Findings are presented under ten broad headings: personal well-being, the nature of faith, the law of karma, monasticism, meditation, home shrines, filial piety, generosity, not killing animals, and alcohol use. As can be seen from comparison with the actual questions fielded in the focus groups (Appendix 1), the headings in this section represent emergent themes rather than direct answers to questions.

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<sup>9</sup> The UK national census dataset for 2011 (CT0116\_tcm77-335860.xls) totals 22,715 teens between the ages of 10 and 19 who self-identify as Buddhist.

*Personal well-being*

The first broad theme that emerged touched on personal well-being, happiness, and aim in life. Where problems stood in the way of happiness, Buddhists tended to think resolution came by adjusting their attitude to the problem rather than by tackling the problem itself. Most of the teenagers thought telling a depressed person to cheer up would be the best way of helping them overcome their depression, since, according to Anne, a 13-year-old mixed-ethnicity girl, “If they are upset, they can’t help but think of the world in a bad way.” When asked what gave their life meaning or made them feel worth something as a person, Sachin, a 15-year-old Sri Lankan boy invoked, “accomplishing your dreams and goals”—which in the words of Vari, a 20-year-old Thai male included contributing worth to society:

When you like, help others to be better . . . and in the future you see them *actually* successful . . . you will feel like “Yeah!”—if it wasn’t because of you, that person wouldn’t be there . . .

Recognition from significant others was also an important motivator as in the words of Tishi, a 16-year-old Sri Lankan girl:

The words coming out of your parents’ mouth where they say, “I am proud of you” . . . is like . . . winning a thousand pounds on the lottery.

None of the teenagers admitted ever having let their depression go far enough to consider suicide—but thinking of death, far from being morbid, reminded them of their urgency to live—in the words of Tea, a 15-year-old Thai girl:

Sometimes when I think of the possibility of death, it helps put things back in perspective—especially the way our mother still needs to depend on us.

Depression seemed to arise when great effort and persistence were demanded even though they had lost sight of their true goal—even if this was a transcendental one. According to Tishi, “it is not just studying (all the time)—you need something to push you a little bit . . . to tell you you are doing it for a reason.” In the long term, for Buddhists, one possible “reason” was to attain *nirvāṇa*<sup>10</sup>—where according to Maung Kyaw, a 16-year-old Burmese boy, “You’d be free from suffering”; according to Sam, a 19-year-old Thai boy, *nirvāṇa* is, “above heaven”; and in the words of Alex, a 19-year-old Thai boy, is, “the place where you go after you reach enlightenment.”

#### *Nature of faith*

The second broad theme concerned the nature of the Buddhist teenagers’ faith—particularly in relation to Buddhist scriptural stories. The teenagers unanimously thought Buddhism was not dependent on blind faith—raising two groups of observations—that Buddhism encourages questioning and that Buddhism does not tend to spread itself by coercion. On the subject of questioning according to Maya, a 15-year-old Sri Lankan girl:

I am one of those people who needs to know *why*, otherwise it just won’t click in my head. People who do it (Buddhist practice) for themselves . . . kind of grasp it better

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<sup>10</sup> A comparatively complex term for a teenager’s vocabulary, but yet defined accurately by respondents.

than if they are doing it because someone else told them to.

In addition, Tishi commented:

Our parents know it (Buddhism), but they don't know how to explain it in a way we should want to know . . . If you are asking questions, that means that you are interested. It is not like you want to *question* the religion . . . your interest is what matters.

On the subject of coercion, Joseph, a 17-year-old Sri Lankan boy explained, “. . . When you take part in practice, it is the *outcome* of the practice that matters . . . that gives them the religion.” Or, in the words of Rosaly, a 13-year-old White girl, “I think it (Buddhism) is the opposite of blind faith—it is all about finding out more about yourself and looking at things in a different way.”

When asked about their favorite Buddhist stories, most of the teenagers favored Jātaka Tales—in Maya's words, “those stories that have a moral,” or stories of the life of Buddha before his renunciation. For example, in Ma Phyu, a 14-year-old Burmese girl's words, “. . . the story when Buddha learned to walk when he was just born and when he realized the suffering of the world (the Four Signs),” or Angulimāla—the Buddha seeing good in a wicked person.

### *The law of karma*

The third broad theme that emerged concerned attitudes to karma. Teenagers such as Tony, a 13-year-old mixed-ethnicity boy, defined the law of karma as meaning, “What goes around comes around,” or according to Jessica, a 15-year-old Cambodian girl, “If you *do* bad things, you will *get*, like, bad things.” According to Sam, the outcome of the karma,

“sticks . . . in your afterlife (too).” Asked to give examples of the law of karma from experience, they gave examples including bad karma in this lifetime, such as that of Ma Phyu who told of having, “shouted back at . . . (her) mother, and then . . . (breaking her) arm . . . (by falling) down the stairs.” Jessica gave an example of good karma with fruits in this lifetime, saying, “If you help someone, when you are in trouble, there will be many people to help you.” In a final example, given by Annie, a 13-year-old Thai girl, karma was also expected to affect lifetimes to come, “if you do good, you will go to heaven. If you do bad, you go to hell.”

### *Monasticism*

The fourth broad theme concerned attitudes toward monasticism. Heritage teens recognized value in taking ordination. According to Manisha, a 14-year-old Sri Lankan girl, becoming a monk, “is a big sacrifice . . . you sacrifice a lot . . . the whole of your life . . . into Buddhism.” The teenagers distinguished between temporary and lifelong ordination.<sup>11</sup> Most of the Thai and Burmese boys in the groups had already experienced temporary ordination by becoming novice monks in their summer vacation and all the heritage girls had kept Eight Precepts for an extended period. On the level of lifelong ordination, although two girls had considered entering a nunnery and one boy expected to take lifelong ordination at some time in the future, the rest did not want to make such a commitment. Convert Buddhists in whose tradition a resident monastic community was absent were even more averse to the idea of renunciation. According to Rhiannon, a 14-year-old White girl:

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<sup>11</sup> Temporary ordination is to “adopt the robe” as a fully-ordained monk or as a novice monk for a period intentionally limited to a few days, weeks or months, to allow a lay person to deepen their understanding of Buddhism, later returning to the lay life.



Instead of ordaining, I would just prefer to go on with the singing. I don't think you have to commit to anything to be things . . . just believe in a religion.

Even the heritage Buddhists claimed ordination was not among their ambitions. In the words of Anusha, a 13-year-old Sri Lankan girl:

. . . because all the teachers are going on about choosing things for your exams and stuff . . . and you're reading books about your choices—this sort of thing (the possibility of ordaining) never crops up, so you sort of forget about it.

None of the heritage groups thought being a monk or nun was selfish, unless it entailed abandoning family responsibilities without their agreement. Only in the case of some convert Buddhists was there a difference of opinion. According to Freya, a 18-year-old White girl, becoming a monk or nun may be selfish because:

They are shutting themselves off from the world and . . . it is sort of like they are creating a bubble for themselves in a monastery . . . and it *does* seem like they are ignoring the rest of the world—but it is mostly people, isn't it, who have had a life crisis? . . . not always . . . but when something dramatic happens, it is like the rest of the world is pushing them into it.

#### *Meditation and Buddhist practice*

The fifth broad theme concerned meditation and other forms of Buddhist practice. The teens had slightly differing understandings of meditation. In the words of Manisha, meditation was a *practice*, specifically, “Breathing in and out with your mind on your breath . . . or you could do

loving kindness . . . radiating love.” According to Mike, a 13-year-old White boy, meditation was a *state of mind*, specifically, “. . . trying to see yourself without impurities.” The results of meditation were important to being a Buddhist. According to Ma Ni, a 15-year-old Burmese girl, those who meditate, “. . . achieve, like, a better mental ability.” According to Maung Kyaw, meditation is:

. . . something that can help you in tough times when you have lot of stress. Like, I had exams a few months ago and, like, I was just really stressed with it. If I just meditated, I would be better, like straight away.

According to Vari, meditation, “. . . is a method of getting to *nirvāṇa*,” and for Mike, meditation is:

. . . the way to change yourself to be more of a pleasure to be with for other people, er . . . I dunno . . . just sort of like, trying to be a better person.

Despite their differences, all the groups, heritage and convert alike agreed that meditation was not sufficient *in itself* as a practice. In the words of Bob, a 15-year-old White boy, what is important, “. . . is meditation *and* putting it into practice . . . in your life.” And for Anusha, meditation is, “. . . an important *part* (of Buddhist practice)—but not the *only* . . . thing: it’s . . . something that you do in order to understand everything else.” The Eightfold Path seemed to put meditation in its proper context for Buddhists, alongside Right Action and Right Speech. Some of the teenagers were able to reel off the components of the Eightfold Path from memory, saying it was the way to *nirvāṇa*. Ma Ni explained that the Eightfold Path is, “. . . the right way of living.”

### *Home shrines*

The sixth broad theme that emerged concerned Buddhist shrines in the home. Teenagers differed as to the importance they invested in having a shrine. Those such as Ma Phyu who thought shrines important explained, “You can meditate in front of it. If you didn’t have one, you’d be sort of praying to *nothing*.” Similarly, Manura, a 13-year-old Sri Lankan girl thought, “It creates a good feeling in your house and shows some religious intelligence and virtue in Buddhism.” Those who thought shrines unimportant also had their own reasons. Harry, a 13-year-old mixed-ethnicity boy said, “Incense (on the shrine) just makes the house smell nice.” According to Shauna, a 14-year-old White girl:

It would be better if it (offering) was for poor people or something, rather than just putting it on a shrine. I think it would make you feel more fulfilled afterwards—that you have actually *helped* someone—rather than to give food to someone who doesn’t actually need it.

Some said that having a home shrine might be of particular importance to you if you were in trouble—but in general, the shrine came into its own on full-moon days. Anusha explained, “. . . when the full moon comes . . . (we replace) the candles rather than just relighting them.” Manisha explained, “. . . on some days we would put milk rice—every birthday and for the Buddhist Vesak.”

### *Filial piety*

The next broad theme that emerged concerned filial piety. Answers touched on three different aspects of filial piety—gratitude, bowing to parents and caring for them in old age. In the words of Ma Phyu, “Because they’ve done so much for you, I would want, like, to give them

everything they gave to me—well, not everything . . . but like the love . . .” In the words of Jasmine, “I’m going to send them money.” On the practice of bowing to parents, Anne added, “On your (own) birthday, you do like that (makes a bowing gesture with two hands together)—because on your birthday, you mum may (have) die(d) . . . in childbirth.” The practicality of caring for parents in old age was explained by Anusha:

. . . helping them with the things they are unable to do themselves . . . probably not in an old people’s home—but if nearby . . . if their family couldn’t look after them by themselves, you’d take them into your own home and try to look after them.

Care of parents in old age did not equate with putting them in an old peoples’ home. In the words of Maung Pyar Zang a 14-year-old Burmese boy:

If you send them to a retirement home, it would be like them having sent you to an orphanage. You would take them to your house and care for them there.

Similarly, according to Manisha:

The idea of putting them in a care home goes against (my principles) . . . but if needed, you get someone to come and look after them. It wouldn’t be nice to leave them by themselves. It would be good if they had people around them who could keep them happy.

### Generosity

The eighth broad theme that emerged concerned generosity. The teenagers thought that they should reduce their greed and increase their charity to the poor and needy. Anusha reasoned:

If you don't give anything away, then there'd be like a certain number of people who wouldn't have *anything*. So, like, with charities and things, it's *because* you give things away that there are other people who are able to have *some* things.

One 13-year-old Sri Lankan girl, Amaya, felt so positive about such giving that she said, "I felt that I'd like to give *all* my money to an orphanage in Sri Lanka." Nonetheless, among the heritage Buddhists, there was a preference to seek out monks rather than the poor and needy, as recipients for their gifts. According to Ma Phyu, giving food and money to Buddhist monks is,

. . . a good thing because they've given up the rest of their lives so that they can like do good for the world and so they won't be able to get (earn) the money because they're too busy concentrating on the right things that they are doing.

And for Anusha:

. . . it's a way of paying them back, because they're . . . sort of giving you their knowledge . . . . They're giving it to you and to pay them back, you are giving them the food which is something they need.

Part of the preference seemed due to suspicion that the donations would be misappropriated, since, according to Manisha, the needy:

. . . might be poor because they have spent their money on drugs and alcohol—but if it is a person who is genuinely born in poverty, it *would* work to help them.

### *Not killing animals*

The ninth broad theme concerned respect for living beings. The most unanimous expression of compassion for animals seemed to be catching and releasing pests found in the home rather than destroying them. According to Ma Ni:

We had mice in our house, but we don't kill them . . . my dad just catches them and puts them into the field, 'cos I don't really like mousetraps.

The larger proportion strictly avoided killing animals. In the words of Tony, "I wouldn't kill for my own survival because I wouldn't want to go to hell anyway. . . . I would rather die of starvation than kill an animal." By contrast, a minority expressed laxer attitudes, such as that of Jasmine, who claimed, "Killing animals is okay for food—but if you are killing them for fun, it is foul." Others mentioned that they would not eat meat slaughtered specifically for them but were not sure why some were vegetarians.

### *Alcohol use*

The final broad theme emerging saw teenagers expressing their attitudes to alcohol use. The teenagers mentioned they were mostly under legal age anyway, so the question of drinking alcohol was largely academic. In the words of Tishi, "I think our opinions might change as we grow up . . . . we might say this, but we might do it differently in the

future.” Nonetheless, attitudes toward alcohol consumption varied on a spectrum from heritage views where half claimed zero-tolerance to convert views which tended toward moderation. The heritage Buddhists thought drinking alcohol pointless as it made you hyperactive, drunk, out of control, depressed, and unpopular with the community. They felt pressured by non-Buddhist peers to drink to be social, but several said they would rather drink soft drinks and *pretend* to be drunk. In the words of Maya:

If I were going to drink alcohol . . . in my mind I would be thinking, “This is wrong. If my mum saw me, I would be dead” . . . and that would then result in my . . . going, “I’ll . . . have some orange juice, thank you very much!”

In the words of Tea, “I’d rather give it (alcohol) to the cat than drink it myself!” By contrast, convert Buddhists of the same age thought, in the words of Ruben, a 15-year-old White boy, that he would, “drink it (alcohol) *not* to get drunk,” or according to Shauna, drinking alcohol was only *unacceptable*, “. . . if you do it to, like, hide bad stuff—like you’re unhappy . . .” Situations of compromise mentioned by some of the heritage teenagers where they might drink alcohol despite their principles included initiations by parents designed to put them off alcohol for life—in the words of Amaya, “. . . my dad asked me to try some . . . a tiny bit of alcohol to see if I liked it—and it was like ‘Eugh’ (makes a face).” For others, compromise came in the form of peer-pressure. In the words of Jasmine:

Sometimes you go to a restaurant and there is this wine that is really expensive—you feel kind of obliged to drink it—otherwise it’s a waste of money for whoever is buying it.

## Discussion

What might at first sight appear to be no more than the views and attitudes of a few young Buddhists, can, if examined more deeply, actually help clarify the mechanisms of Buddhist nurture. For some researchers (e.g., Francis and Penny) such patterns of attitudes are thought to indicate the *values* held by a person. According to Rohan, however, components of values should be nuanced further into consciously-held, attitude patterns (“worldviews”) arising from within the mind and the values taken more for granted that are more likely to have arisen through direct social intervention (“ideology”). This dichotomy is helpful when interpreting the findings of this study since it offers clues as to how the children are acquiring their attitude patterns—pointing to the “prime sites” for the emergence of “values” (Goodnow).

For the findings of this particular study, there seem to be two aspects to the way attitudes are nurtured: (1) those concerning *extrinsic* aspects of religion—patterns of attitudes perhaps concerning religious aspects such as participation in ceremonies, which might be referred to as “ideology” or “social forces”; and, (2) those concerning *intrinsic* aspects of religion— patterns of attitudes perhaps concerning religious convictions or spirituality, which might be referred to as “worldview.”



**Table 1. Categorization of nurtured attitudes by likely provenance**

<i>Worldview (intrinsic religion)</i>	<i>Ideology (extrinsic religion)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are things that make life worth living.</li> <li>• It is beneficial to recollect death.</li> <li>• It is beneficial to seek <i>nirvāṇa</i>.</li> <li>• Buddhism is not blind faith.</li> <li>• The afterlife depends on karma.</li> <li>• Personal life events may be due to karma.</li> <li>• Meditation is a practice or a state of mind.</li> <li>• Meditation helps with exam stress.</li> <li>• Meditation is central to attaining <i>nirvāṇa</i>.</li> <li>• One should go to great lengths to avoid killing animals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buddhism encourages questioning; it is not based on coercion, but on outcome-based proof.</li> <li>• It is valuable to retell Buddhist stories.</li> <li>• For a Buddhist, meditation is important.</li> <li>• It is important to put meditation into practice.</li> <li>• The focus of home practice is the shrine.</li> <li>• One should express filial piety.</li> <li>• Killing for fun or sport is distasteful.</li> <li>• Alcohol in social situations will compromise ethics.</li> <li>• Attitudes to alcohol use are led by parents.</li> </ul>

*Differences of style between Heritage and**Convert teens:*

- Heritage teens are more accepting of social control.
- Heritage teens place greater importance on monasticism and respect for monastics.
- Convert teens consider charitable giving more important than supporting the monastic community.
- Only Heritage teens express filial piety by bowing to parents and by their intention to care for parents in their old age.

*Attitudes concerning extrinsic aspects of religion*

In dealing with attitudes that show features of representing extrinsic aspects of religion, i.e., the outward expressions of religion such as church-going, this section discusses the role of parents and monks—the social forces shared by the identified attitudes and the way in which adaptations of these to mainstream culture is negotiated. The expected influence of peers on attitudes, not commented upon in the focus groups, might be accounted for by the fact that most of the “friends” for these Buddhist teens were not Buddhists.

Parental approval seemed to be a major source of motivation for these teenagers. An awareness of their mother’s future dependence on them in old age was powerful enough to reinforce the teenagers against suicidal thoughts. The direct intervention of parents in nurture was seen in the example of Amaya deliberately being put off the consumption of alcohol at an early age by her father. Parents were also an object of humility and gratitude. The things Buddhist parents nagged their children about included practicing meditation, tending the shrine, showing proper respect, and going to the temple. If, as it seems from findings, the parents have an important role in values nurture into the Buddhist religion, this data supports the facilitation paradigm particularly when warm relations with parents are known to facilitate “exchange” (Benard)—a warmth found in Buddhist homes but commented on as comparatively lacking in the non-Buddhist homes of peers (e.g., Thanissaro “Preliminary” 66). Monks were recognized as important to heritage Buddhists as givers of knowledge and as those taking responsibility for the formal socialization of the young into Buddhism, secondary only to the parents themselves.

Differences in attitudes *socially* instilled might be expected to differ according to Buddhist style. Indeed, the findings noted slight differences in attitude patterns between heritage and convert Buddhist

teens. Some of the attitudes probably instilled by social forces would include acceptance of social control derived from traditional social structures, recognition of the importance of monasticism more among heritage teens than the convert-raised group. Convert-raised teens thought that respect is less virtuous than social work. Heritage teens gave details as to how the home shrine is used in practice. Filial piety was seen as an expression of gratitude, practiced widely by bowing to parents and giving rise to the intention to care for parents in old age. Charitable giving to the poor and needy was put on a par with giving to monks in terms of importance. Both heritage and convert teens expressed distaste for killing for fun or sport. Heritage teens often found themselves in situations of compromise when mixing socially or with non-Buddhist friends. Their parents had trained them to dislike alcohol; zero-tolerance for consumption of alcohol was considered typical by many of the heritage teens. Convert-raised Buddhist teens were more likely to espouse moderation in the consumption of alcohol. Monasteries seemed to play a more important role in the nurture of heritage Buddhist teens than convert-raised ones.

There were some issues where heritage and convert-raised Buddhist teens seemed to agree. Both heritage and convert groups of teens enjoyed readings from Buddhist scriptures that included *Jataka*, *Buddhacarita* (the *Life of the Buddha*) and the Angulimala story. Buddhism was not thought to be based on blind faith but encouraged questioning; i.e., not being spread by coercion but by outcome-based proof. Results of meditation were considered important to “being a Buddhist.” But both heritage and convert groups agreed that Buddhism was more than just meditation; they included putting Buddhism into practice in life according to the Eightfold Path. The shrine was thought to give focus to home practice of Buddhism, affecting the home positively and reflecting well on you as a good Buddhist.

Although parental expertise in Buddhism was acknowledged among the teenagers, they also maintained that this knowledge needed to be negotiated and interpreted in the light of contemporary mainstream culture. For example, alcohol in a Western social context presented a dilemma that teenagers had to work out for themselves, whereas catching and releasing household pests instead of exterminating them seemed to have been resolved more easily. A message for parents of Buddhist children with these particular forms of attitudes is that they need to be raised as issues and discussed by parents in the home and subject to social pressure if Buddhist teens are to acquire them.

#### *Attitudes concerning intrinsic religion*

In dealing with attitudes that show features of representing intrinsic religiousness, i.e., the internalized aspects of religion more commonly referred to as “spirituality,” this section discusses the way immersion in Buddhist culture influences the development of worldview. Worldviews seem to “grow” in the same way an acorn grows as the result of water and sunlight. A teenager’s own insight develops as the result of immersion in the Buddhist ethos. These intuitions may be facilitated *indirectly* by amenable features of the culture in which the teens find themselves rather than by direct social interventions. Teens also would be more aware of such insights, unlike the socially-constructed ideologies which they may take more for granted.

Immersion in Buddhist culture may occur through regular temple-going and hence exposure to the ethos there. Intense immersion occurs through temporary ordination and eight-precept training. Immersion was also brought into the home by activities involving the home shrine.

Aspects of intrinsic religion expressed but not seeming to be derived directly from parental or other social interventions were the Buddhist attitude to problem solving, the things which make life seem worth living to a Buddhist teen, the benefits derived from recollection of death, the Buddhist understanding of *nirvāṇa*, seeing meditation as an important way to help with exam stress and as central to attaining *nirvāṇa*, and the extension of karmic causality to the afterlife.<sup>12</sup> Spiritual or mystical experiences arising from meditation would also belong in this category. The message for parents of Buddhist teens seeking to instill such attitudes toward intrinsic religion is that teens need to be encouraged<sup>13</sup> to become immersed in Buddhist ethos by the parents facilitating temple visits, lending importance to a home shrine, or merely exemplifying behaviors such as compassion.

### Suggestions for Further Research

Although it is not the main purpose of this paper (and a quantitative cross tabulation would be a clearer test of this), the qualitative data presented in this article lend support to the validity of questions used on the TSAB whereas previously only the reliability of the scale has been shown. Ideally, however, a *quantitative* test of the scale's validity needs to be made by comparison of answers to questions on the TSAB by Buddhist and non-Buddhist teenagers. Although this study provides "thick" description for the worldviews of Buddhist adolescents, it might also be useful to extend the research beyond the teen age-range, and to more

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<sup>12</sup> The presence of such views in heritage Buddhist teens is significant since it has been claimed that even after much Buddhist training, most Westerners tend not to believe in rebirth (Gross 413).

<sup>13</sup> Previously, Buddhist children have preferred the word "nagged."

Mahāyāna Buddhists where available, to encompass some of the “typical” concerns and values of adults and for the full diversity of Buddhists. It would also be instructive to return to parents with the same questions looking at the other side of the nurture question.

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**Appendix 1: Focus group questions**

1. Supposing someone told a depressed person to cheer up and look at the world in a better light—do you think that would be good advice? Why (not)?
2. What do you feel gives you a) meaning in life? b) purpose in life? c) satisfaction in life?
3. What makes you feel worth something as a person?
4. Do you feel you are free of depression?
5. Have you ever had thoughts of suicide?
6. What does the word *nirvāṇa* mean to you?
7. What would you explain to a person who thought Buddhism depended on blind faith?
8. Are there any Buddhist stories you heard which captured your attention?
9. What does the law of karma mean to you? Could you give an example?
10. Have you ever thought about becoming a monk or nun? Why (not)?
11. Would you say being a monk or nun is selfish? Why (not)?
12. What does the word “meditation” mean to you?
13. What do you think a Buddhist achieves by meditating? Is this important?

14. Have you heard of the “Eightfold Path”? (If yes,) How would you explain it to someone who was new to Buddhism?
15. Some people say if you’re Buddhist, meditation is the only really important thing—how would you respond to that?
16. What importance would you say a shrine has (if any)?
17. Can you think of any special situation when it might be important to offer candles and incense on a Buddhist shrine?
18. Do you have a particular way you would show respect to your parents?
19. Do you have any particular plan for how you’d treat your parents in their old age?
20. Supposing you didn’t share what you had with others—would that change anything?
21. Is there any point in giving support to the poor and needy? Why (not)?
22. What do you think of Buddhists giving food and money to monks?
23. Where would you draw the line with killing animals?
24. Where would you draw the line with drinking alcohol?