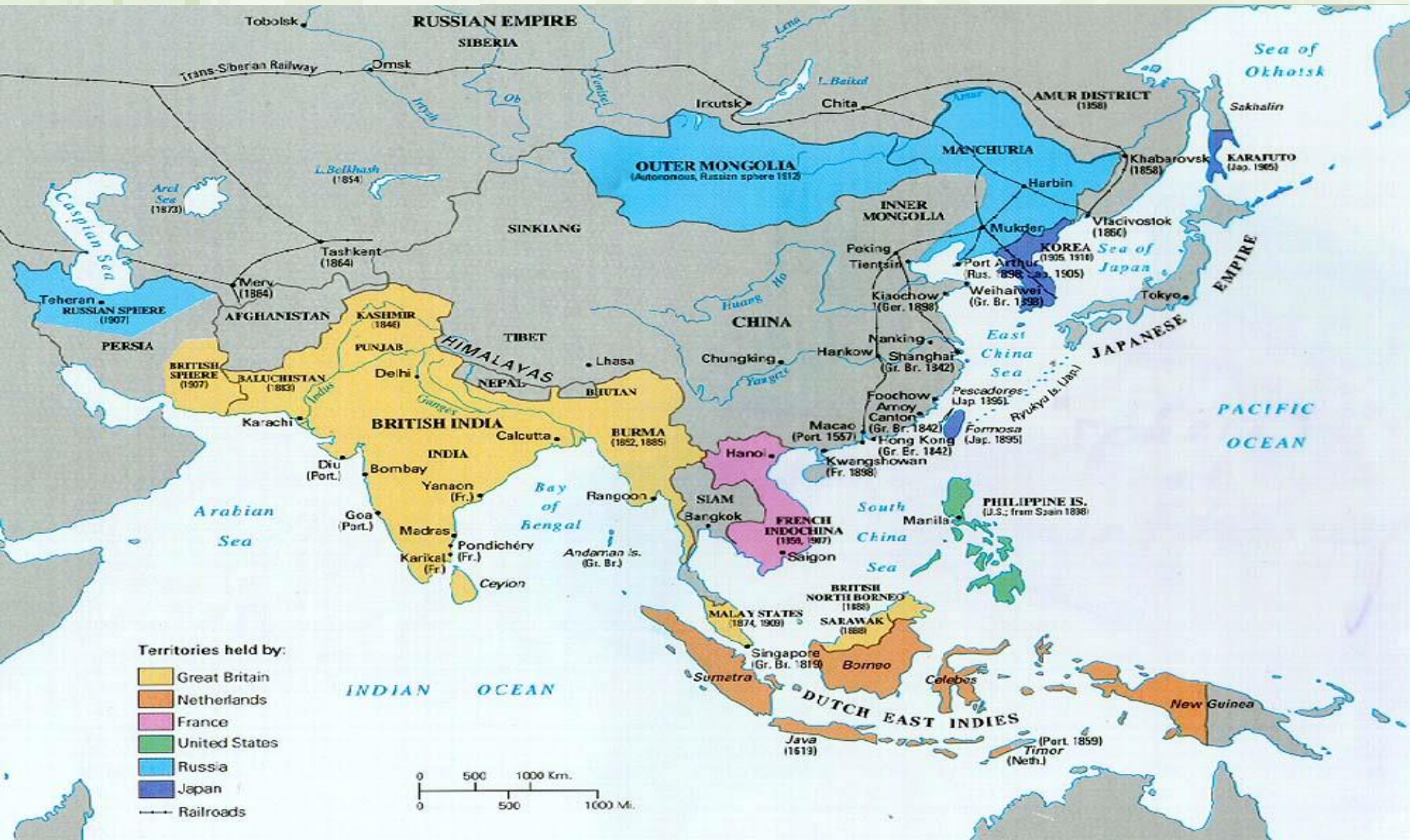


# Buddhism at the End of the Colonial Period

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*Jonathan S. Watts*  
*Keio University*  
*Tokyo, Japan*

# *Historical Development of SEB:* Asian Colonial Era 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries



# 4 Responses to Modernity

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- ❖ **Buddhist Nationalism:** Modern Nationalism is most often characterized by the fusing together of a specific ethnic group and their religious heritage to a nation-state with specifically defined borders. Buddhist Nationalism was initially part of the anti-colonial struggle against the West, but after Asian emancipation, it became a force against minority groups and cultural diversity as part of the complex renegotiation of national borders and identities in the Post WWII Era.
- ❖ **Socially Engaged Buddhism (SEB):** SEB also arose as a response to the colonial domination of the West. However, it has been a more open minded movement that has not allied itself with the state and sought solutions to social problems through pan-Asian solidarity, inter-religious cooperation, and alliances with progressive forces in the West.

# 4 Responses to Modernity

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- ❖ **Buddhist Socialism:** The early development of socialism and communism in Europe had an important impact on Asians as a modern but anti-colonial and liberative ideology. Many Buddhists found socialist concepts to be in line with Buddhist teachings and the rules of the monastic order.
- ❖ **Market Buddhist:** In Asian nations that did not embrace communism, some Buddhist groups have tried to align Buddhist teachings with capitalist values of economic growth and enjoying a prosperous life as a sign of virtue.



# Anti Colonial Movements 1890-1949



❖ Sri Lanka

Anagarika Dharmapala 1864-1933

Anti-ritual, promoted Buddhist schools

Mahabodhi Movement

❖ Burma

Burmese non-violent activism

U Ottama 1889 & U Wisara 1929

generation of monks studied socialism  
and Gandhianism in India



# Buddhist Liberalism

Rev. Kaikyoku  
Watanabe  
(1872–1933)  
Jodo Pure  
Land sect



Monk Tai Hsu (Tai Hsu Fa Shi)

太虛法師

- ❖ In Japan, the Buddhist Enlightenment Movement (1880s) & the New Buddhist Movement (1890-1900s) tried to show the modern characteristics of Buddhism and its suitability for the nation state by combining Western liberal and scientific thought with Buddhism.
- ❖ In China, Humanistic Buddhism 人間佛教 criticized ritualism for funerals and the afterlife while promoting humanism, altruism, spiritual practices as part of daily life, joyfulness, timeliness and the universality of saving all beings.



# Humanistic & Rights Movements

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Buddhist Movement Against Caste Discrimination  
in India 1920s →

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar  
Drafter of  
Indian Constitution



# Buddhist Socialism



Gudo Uchiyama  
From “Taigyaku  
Incident” by  
Maruki Iri

- ❖ Japanese Buddhists were the first in Asia to seek a fusion of Marxism and socialism
- ❖ Rev. Gudo Uchiyama (1874-1911) Soto Zen sect priest who advocated “anarcho-communist evolution”
- ❖ Rev. Giro Seno-o (1889-1961) Nichiren sect priest who advocated “popular Buddhism”
- ❖ Rev. Kenmyo Takagi (1864–1914) Jodo Shin Pure Land Otani sect priest who was anti-imperialist and advocated for



# Fascism & Nationalism



Harada Daiun Sogaku

## ❖ JAPAN

- ❖ Priests were drafted into the military as common foot soldiers and not just as chaplains
- ❖ East Asian Buddhist teaching of “repaying benefits” (報恩 *ho-on*) to parents and all sentient beings was shifted to emperor and state.
- ❖ Zen teachings were fused with Bushido (武士道) to teach giving up one’s life in battle; there is no-self that kills; and meditative fearlessness in the face of death.
- ❖ Doctrine of Two Truths (眞俗二諦 *shinzoku nitai*), key to Pure Land, Buddhists was twisted to say that the absolute truth of the Buddha was expressed in the relative truth of the Emperor in this world.
- ❖ Nichiren Buddhists developed “Nichiren-ism” which raised the law of the emperor to the level of the universal law of the *Lotus Sutra*.

[If ordered to] march: tramp, tramp, or shoot: bang, bang. This is the manifestation of the highest Wisdom [of Enlightenment]. The unity of Zen and war of which I speak extends to the farthest reaches of the holy war [now under way]

# Buddhist Socialism 1950s-60s

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❖ **Burma**  
**U Nu (Prime Minister 3x 1948-1962)**  
**1960 Buddhist Socialism policy**  
**Based on Ashokan statecraft**



❖ **Thailand**  
**Buddhadasa**  
**Dhammic Socialism**  
**Clarified cooperative socialism vs.**  
**Revenge of the underclass**  
**in Vietnam War Era**

# Democracy & Peace Movements

Vietnam 1960s

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Engaged Buddhism • Le Bouddhisme Engagé

Violence vs. Non-Violence      Thich Nhat Hanh





# Democracy & Peace Movements

Cambodia 1980s:  
The Dhammayatra

Maha Ghosananda and the Nipponzan



# Democracy & Peace Movements

Korea 1980s →

The Jungto Society & Ven. Pomnyun Sunim





# Democracy & Peace Movements

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The Saffron Revolution  
2007



Aung San Suu Kyi  
Nobel Peace Prize 1991





# Independence & Rights Movement

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- ❖ Non-violent resistance & Politicized Buddhism in Tibet & China 1959 →

