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Wisteria, Cherry Trees, and Mountains: A New Model for Understanding Buddhist Communities in the United States

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WISTERIA, CHERRY TREES, AND MOUNTAINS: PRESENTING A NEW MODEL
FOR UNDERSTANDING BUDDHIST COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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B.A., Drew University, 2002

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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This thesis entitled:
Wisteria, Cherry Trees, and Mountains: A New Model for Understanding Buddhist Communities in the United States
written by Claire Miller Skriletz
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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
This thesis critiques the existing binary categories applied to American Buddhism, that of *ethnic* and *convert*. First, a critique of existing models and the term *ethnic* is presented. In light of the critique and the shortcomings of existing models, this thesis presents a new model for studying and classifying Buddhist communities in the United States, *culturally-informed Buddhisms*. Chapter Three of the thesis applies the *culturally-informed Buddhisms* model to case studies of the websites for the Buddhist Churches of America organization and the Tri-State/Denver Buddhist Temple. The goals of the *culturally-informed Buddhisms* model are: to create an adaptable and specific methodology and terminology for scholars to use when researching communities which accounts for change over time, and to re-orient the conversation away from the assumed ethnic and racial heritages of community members to a nuanced discussion of the various cultural strands that have influenced and shaped the communities.
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Chapter One: Introduction

On a wet, chilly November day in San Francisco, we climbed up the hill from the bus stop to the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) temple on Octavia Street. Since the temple looked much like other buildings on the street, especially in the pouring rain, I almost walked by the entrance. After pausing at the bottom of a steep flight of stairs to catch our breath and shake as much water off our shoes and umbrellas as possible, we went up the stairs to the vestibule area. We were greeted by the people standing there, talking, before the service started. Unexpectedly we were immediately the center of attention. With most of my experience of religious centers being in the Catholic tradition, I expected the main temple of the Buddhist Churches of America to be large, and that we could slip in relative unobtrusively. While the temple building is large, the space where services are held (the Hondo), is an intimate setting. Everyone was very polite but obviously curious as to what a couple of unfamiliar faces were doing at the temple in time for the 10am service.

It was the service – a memorial service for Eshinni, Kakushinni, and the women of the BCA – that drew me to the temple on that wet Sunday morning.¹ Since it was an interest in gender and the roles of women in religious traditions that drew me to Religious Studies initially, and my awareness of the scarcity of female ministers within the BCA currently, my curiosity was piqued by this service. Details on the temple’s website about the service were few; I didn’t know what might make this service different than an ordinary Sunday service. Once we had found seats in the Hondo, I took a minute to absorb my surroundings. The smell of incense was strong; we were sitting in pews with padding; the altar was larger than I expected and a beautiful, ornate representation of Amida’s Pure Land was mesmerizing; most of the people in other pews were women or older couples, there were only a couple of children.

¹ Eshinni was the wife of Shinran, founder of the Jodo Shinshu tradition. Kakushinni was their daughter. Both women played important roles in preserving and continuing Shinran’s teachings. For an excellent discussion of Eshinni, consult James C. Dobbins’ work, Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004.
Even though I know that the BCA has adopted many elements of Protestant Christianity throughout its time in the United States, what I viewed at the temple was an integrated whole.

In keeping with the theme of the service, the service was led entirely by women, and the Dharma talk was given by a young woman studying to be a minister at the Institute of Buddhist Studies (IBS). One notable aspect of the service was the way the service was conducted in both English and Japanese. One woman would walk to the podium and give an instruction in English, and then another woman would repeat the process in Japanese. The Dharma talk by the guest from the IBS was not translated into Japanese; instead, the second woman gave a shorter talk of her own from her podium. Given that the theme of the service was remembering women (especially mothers) no longer living, I can only assume that was the focus of her talk. Understanding Japanese wasn’t necessary to see how near to the surface her grief for a loved one was – when she had to pause in the middle of her talk because she was crying too hard to continue, the assembled community paused with her to dry their own eyes, perhaps remembering their loved ones. At the end of the service was an announcements period and it happened to be the day they were celebrating November birthdays; one woman was celebrating her 90th birthday and I couldn’t help but think about how many changes she had seen in both the world of Jodo Shinshu and the world at large. After the service we were urged several times to join the group for refreshments, to sign the guestbook, and to come back anytime. Even though, when asked, we said that we live in Colorado and are not members of the Denver temple, we were made to feel like part of the community for that short hour we were there. It is that impression of a welcoming atmosphere and a close-knit community that has stayed with me in the intervening months.

The focus of this thesis was in the early stages of formation when I visited the BCA temple on Octavia Street last November, and because of that, I was unusually aware of the group of people assembled at the temple for the service. Visiting the temple and speaking to people informally reinforced in my mind the overemphasis on ethnicity and race present in some of the academic
discourse surrounding Buddhist communities in the United States. Scholars have looked at a community on the surface, seen non-Caucasian faces, and declared the community to be *ethnic*. It would be easy for me to casually observe that ours were the only Caucasian faces, but ultimately, that does not provide much information of lasting value. I am three generations removed from my maternal Irish heritage, yet to look at me, I’m not immediately assumed to be (Irish) Catholic, know how to step-dance, or speak Gaelic. Many of the members of the BCA are three generations removed from their Japanese heritage, but they are not afforded the same neutral designation of *American* as I am – they are *Japanese-Americans* instead. If a fourth generation BCA member of Japanese descent chooses to self-identify as *Japanese-American*, it is important for scholars to understand the implications of that self-identification. However, it is also crucial for scholars to recognize when members of a religious community choose to claim (only) an *American* cultural identity.

This thesis explores several interrelated topics: first, the uses of *ethnic* as a classification for Buddhist communities in the continental United States in academic discourse from the late 20th and early 21st Centuries; second, the ways in which the concept of *ethnic Buddhism* has been applied to the Buddhist Churches of America communities in the continental United States; and third, how the Buddhist Churches of America communities represent themselves on organization- and community-level websites. In response to the scholarly conversation regarding *ethnic* and *convert* Buddhisms, and the notions of *Buddhism in America* and *American Buddhism*, this thesis proposes a new model for understanding and representing Buddhist communities in the United States, which I call *culturally-informed Buddhisms*. The *culturally-informed Buddhisms* model has several goals: to move away from classification models based upon the presumed or hereditary ethnicity of the membership base; to introduce a flexible terminology that will allow for both continuity in academic discourse and flexibility in the self-identification of the Buddhist community over time; to create a terminology (i.e. classification scheme) based on the self-identity of the group that is also transparent to a broader audience; to
identify, document, and accurately represent the dominant and secondary cultural influences shaping Buddhist communities; and finally, to create a classification model that distinguishes between geographic region of origin, ethnic heritage, and current geo-cultural location, and that can be broadly applied to Buddhist communities in the United States.

This Introductory chapter has provided the basic framework for the discussion to follow. The next chapter provides a genealogy of the *ethnic/convert Buddha* classification models, beginning with the work of Charles Prebish in the late 1970s and continuing to the present day with the work of Wakoh Shannon Hickey. Due to the scope of this thesis, I have chosen to only critique those scholars and models most immediately relevant for my purposes here – the ways in which the various models of *ethnic Buddhism* have been applied to the Buddhist Churches of America. (Readers interested the conversation in its entirety are encouraged to consult the bibliography at the end of this thesis.) Prior to explaining my model of *culturally-informed Buddhas*, I establish how this thesis uses key terms such as *culture*, *ethnic*, and *race*. The model of *culturally-informed Buddhas*, as I outlined above, has many goals, not the least of which is to provide a way for scholars to study and represent Buddhist communities in a language that does not rely on the concept of *ethnic Buddhism* or ethnicity in general.

The third chapter of the thesis presents the results of applying the *culturally-informed Buddhas* model to case studies of selected websites of the Buddhist Churches of America. A comprehensive textual and visual analysis of the sites reveals diverse and vibrant Buddhist communities which incorporate elements from multiple cultural spaces.

Through both a theoretical discussion and case studies, this thesis demonstrates how the application of an alternative model of naming and classification for Buddhist communities in the United States can better account for the diversity of Buddhas in the United States as well as development over time. It is the dynamic nature of these Buddhist communities that renders the framework of *ethnic* and *convert* obsolete, and the model of *culturally-informed Buddhas* enables scholars to better reflect
the dynamism and vibrancy of the communities while placing the communities’ sense of self-identity at the forefront.
Chapter Two: Ethnic Buddhism, Scholarly Discourse, and Culturally-Informed Buddhisms

In this locative approach there are more or less acceptable interpretations of those narratives, artifacts, and practices, where acceptable here means internally coherent and contextually useful. And it means more: a persuasive interpretation is one that would be found plausible by any fair and self-conscious interpreter who engaged in the same sort of research practices - listening, observing, read, and so on.

There are no culturally unmediated experiences, and religions mediate encounters with corporeal and natural limits.

-- Thomas Tweed, Crossing and Dwelling (2006)

In the first chapter of Crossing and Dwelling, Thomas Tweed writes that he “set out to find a new language that might make sense of the movement, relation, and positionality” he observed at the Catholic Festivals in Miami. This chapter is undertaking a similar endeavor with respect to the BCA, although it does not present nearly as broad a theory of religion and culture as Tweed’s theory. Working on a smaller scale, I introduce a new approach to studying Buddhist communities in the United States, culturally-informed Buddhisms. The first section of this chapter looks critically at existing models of classification. The conversation about how to identify Buddhist communities in the U.S. generated a flurry of publications in the 1990s and early 2000s and I will review and comment upon the most salient contributions to this conversation. Of the models presented, Stuart Chandler’s constellation of identity model offers the most possibilities for going forward. The model I present draws on Chandler’s as well as on Tweed’s notions of location across specific times and spaces while taking the next step in refining the way scholars study Buddhist communities in the United States – by taking seriously and accounting for the multiplicity of cultural influences that have come into contact with, and often been absorbed by, Buddhist communities.

2 Thomas A. Tweed, Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 2006, 26. The epigraphs to this chapter may be found on pages 17 and 138, respectively.
Ethnic Buddhism and Other Classification Models

The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘ethnic’ in the following ways:

A – adj.
1. Pertaining to nations not Christian or Jewish; Gentile, heathen, pagan. [First recorded use, c. 1470]
2.a. Pertaining to race; peculiar to a race or nation; ethnological. Also, pertaining to or having common racial, cultural, religious, or linguistic characteristics, esp. designating a racial or other group within a larger system; hence (U.S. colloq.), foreign, exotic. [First recorded use, 1851]
2.b. ethnic minority (group), a group of people differentiated from the rest of the community by racial origins or cultural background, and usu. claiming or enjoying official recognition of their group identity. [First recorded use, 1945]

B – noun
1. One who is not a Christian or a Jew; Gentile, heathen, pagan. Obs. [First recorded use, c.1470]
2. Ancient Greek History An epithet denoting nationality, derived from or corresponding to the name of a people or city. [First recorded use, 1828]
3. A member of an ethnic group or minority, orig. U.S. [First recorded use, 1945]^3

As we can see from definitions 1 and 2a above, the earliest uses of ‘ethnic’ were as a means of defining otherness, a meaning that was painfully illustrated by the internment of thousands of Japanese-Americans during World War II. In scholarship in the post World War II era, one may expect that the uses of ‘ethnic’ would be more consistent with the definition presented in 2b, a subset of a larger group with distinct characteristics from a particular region or cultural space of origin. In broad sociological terms and employed properly, ‘ethnic’ is a useful designation for categorization.

At no point in this discussion is it my intention to advocate against the use of ‘ethnic’ in general. As I will discuss in more detail shortly, the way in which ‘ethnic’ is used in the conversation debating the classification of Buddhist communities in the United States is problematic due to the pejorative overtones inflecting the distinction between ethnic Buddhism and other forms of Buddhism. Ethnic Buddhism is presented as staid, ritualistic, and an undifferentiated whole, ignoring sectarian, geographic, and other distinctions. It is the Saidian Orientalist ‘other’ to dynamic, convert, American Buddhism. In these formulations, traditional rituals indicate a backward mindset. The implications

behind the idea of *ethnic Buddhism* are not unlike the criticisms leveled at the devotional Catholic Church by Protestant reformers. Furthermore, as Wakoh Shannon Hickey expertly demonstrates in her 2010 article “Two Buddhisms, Three Buddhisms, and Racism,” the formulation of *ethnic Buddhism* contains overtones of racism and reinforces power differentials between ‘white’ and non-‘white’ Buddhists in the United States. And, as Hickey keenly observes, “because we cannot link nationality or ethnicity to religion so tidily, we cannot assume that any ethnically Asian person who begins to practice Buddhism in the United States is reverting to a heritage faith.”

It is, in part, the pejorative tone and potentially racist rhetoric that I seek to eliminate by presenting a model that does not rely on *ethnic* as a designation.

In the late 1970s, three works were published that we may consider as the starting point for the question of categorizing Buddhist communities in the United States. The first work is by Emma McCloy Layman, *Buddhism in America* (1976). Next is a sociological work by Tetsuden Kashima, *Buddhism in America: The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Institution* (1977). And finally is Charles Prebish’s 1979 work, *American Buddhism*. Prebish quotes extensively from Layman’s work, but only makes passing reference in his introduction to Kashima’s work. The difference in titles between these three books is an excellent representation of the debate that would come to fruition over a decade later: how many Buddhisms exist in the United States, and how should they be classified? Prebish’s *American Buddhism* is often credited with laying the foundation for the later conversation, since he presents characteristics for two “types” of Buddhism. The first type is characterized by traits associated with established, tradition-oriented religious groups, such as an emphasis on doctrines shared across the various schools of Buddhist thought and “solid religious practice.”

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teaching.”6 The second type of Buddhism, in contrast, encompasses communities that more closely resemble what would now be called ‘new religions’ or ‘new religious movements.’ They are characterized by emerging in response to “radical social movements,” gathering as members those who have been disenchanted or ostracized by recent social upheaval. 7 The group reacts strongly to communities of the first type, viewing such communities as old-fashioned, backward, and out of touch with the needs of a modern audience. Finally, these groups are generally organized around a charismatic figure and may thrive on being seen as “hip” (Prebish’s word) and also thrive on attention from the media. Groups of the second type are seen as unstable and their success is not guaranteed. Prebish does not provide much additional information about these two types of Buddhism in the United States, and leaves the topic in favor of providing a tradition-based overview of Buddhism in the United States at the time.

As Prebish explains in his 1999 book *Luminous Passage*, he does not consider this typology again until he has an unexpected conversation about it with Rick Fields in the early 1990s.8 The flashpoint for the renewed discussion appears to be an editorial by Helen Tworkov in a 1991 volume of the Buddhist magazine *Tricycle* in which Tworkov wrote, “the spokespeople for Buddhism in America have been, almost exclusively, educated members of the white middle class” and that Asian Americans “so far...have not figured prominently in the development of something called American Buddhism.”9 In the wake of Tworkov’s comments, the issues of how to define *American Buddhism* drew a fair amount of attention and Charles Prebish, Rick Fields, Jan Nattier, Paul Numrich, Stuart Chandler, and Kenneth Tanaka, among others, provided theories and models about how best to describe Buddhist communities in the United States. The ideas of ethnicity and *ethnic Buddhism* are central to this conversation, as one

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7 Ibid.
of the “Buddhisms” is almost always a model of non-English speaking, Asian immigrant practitioners. This grouping of Buddhists, generally made without any distinction between the geographic region of origin or tradition of Buddhism practiced, is contrasted with English-speaking, middle class Americans of Western European descent – characterized as convert Buddhists – who practice various types of adapted Buddhist meditation that is neither thoroughly lay nor thoroughly monastic. These two types of Buddhism share more than a passing resemblance with Prebish’s typology from 1979, drawing dichotomies between traditional and modern, unchanging and updated, and backward and progressive.

When responding to critiques of her statements in Tricycle, Tworkov “held her ground, contending that her statements were not at all racist...but simply made ‘an accurate distinction between Buddhism in America and American Buddhism’.”  

Tworkov’s dichotomy equates American Buddhism with the practices and communities of Euro-Americans, practices that have been modified to suit a Western audience; Buddhism in America refers to everything else, i.e. everything that isn’t American Buddhism. American Buddhism is presented as progressive, adaptive, and modern and contrasted with a lumped category of anything that is not American Buddhism, namely ethnic Buddhism. On a larger scale, this is uncomfortably similar to imperialistic sentiment, rhetoric that has been used in the past to present Asia as unchanging whereas America is dynamic, adaptive, progressive, and above all, modern. Given the range of attitudes, styles, and practices within the large umbrella of either of these Buddhism, Tworkov’s model is especially problematic.

While it is not possible to review all of the published materials on the subject of Buddhisms in the United States, it is necessary to remark on the key models offered and issues raised by scholars over the past two decades in order to place the case studies, presented in the next chapter, in their proper context. Many of the contributions to the classification conversation initially took place as part of a lecture series sponsored by the Institute for Buddhist Studies (Berkeley, California) in the Fall of...

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10 Tworkov in Nattier, ibid, 191. The citation provided by Nattier for the quote from Tworkov is: Letter of May 14, 1992, reprinted in The Sangha Newsletter on page 9.
The lecture series was titled “Buddhisms in America: An Expanding Frontier,” and the papers presented in this series were later collected and published in the 1998 volume, *The Faces of Buddhism in America*.  

As one of the frequent contributors to this conversation, and co-editor of the 1998 *Faces of Buddhism in America* volume, the work of Charles Prebish would seem a logical choice with which to begin our overview. In addition to his 1979 *American Buddhism*, he has contributed “Two Buddhisms Reconsidered” (*Buddhist Studies Review*, 1993), the Introduction to *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (1998), and *Luminous Passage* (1999) to this conversation. In “Two Buddhisms Reconsidered,” Prebish reviews an impressive amount of scholarship but does not truly present a new model of his own. Both “Two Buddhisms Reconsidered” and *Luminous Passage* discuss a model presented by Peter Williams in his 1990 work, *American Religions*. Williams presents a tri-fold model of “(1) ‘ethnic religions,’ or those practiced by Asian immigrants, and to an extent, by their descendents, (2) ‘export religions,’ or those popular among well-educated, generally intellectual Americans, and (3) ‘new religions,’ or those developing...often as revolutionary outgrowths of religions cited in the first two categories.”

In “Two Buddhisms Reconsidered,” Prebish assigns the Buddhist Churches of America to Williams’ first category of “ethnic religions,” while Zen and Tibetan “groups” are placed in the second category of “export religions.” Prebish infers from Williams’ remarks that the “on-going success of ethnic religions” may be evaluated based on the “degree to which they make the transition from past to present” and therefore by “their ability to become Americanised.” The closing remark – that of becoming “Americanised” or acculturated – is, in this conversation about Buddhisms in the United States, a key criterion for evaluation.

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13 Ibid., 192-3.
14 Prebish, “Two Buddhisms Reconsidered,” 193. Immediately previous to this quote, Prebish provided the context for “little traditions” and “great traditions” as coming from anthropologist Robert Redfield’s work, *The Little Community and Peasant Society* published by the University of Chicago Press in 1960.
In summing up his chapter in *Luminous Passage* on various Buddhist traditions and communities, Prebish writes, “I have tried to select American Buddhist groups with a stable history - in most cases, one of at least twenty years, and in some cases very much longer. I have tried to strike a balance between ethnic American Buddhist communities, Euro-American Buddhist communities, and communities that are racially mixed.”\(^{15}\) Based on this statement (as well as the ways in which Prebish describes various communities in *Luminous Passage*), I believe it accurate to say that this tri-fold categorization reflects Prebish’s view of Buddhisms in the United States: ethnically Asian-American Buddhists, Euro-American convert Buddhists, and communities that cannot be placed in either category (such as Soka Gakkai International-USA). The rigid divisions between ethnic and convert maintained by Prebish, and the addition of a miscellaneous category for anything else, depend upon a judgment of race and ethnicity by the researcher.

The model presented by Jan Nattier in two essays, “Buddhism Comes to Main Street” and “Who is Buddhist?” is similar to Prebish’s interpretation of the Williams model, including retaining the classification of ‘export.’\(^{16}\) Nattier’s stated intention in “Buddhism Comes to Main Street” is to “go beyond race and ethnicity” in order to understand the “landscape of Buddhist America.” Yet Nattier presents a parallel tri-fold model that focuses on the mechanisms by which Buddhism is transmitted to the United States, as import, export, and baggage, a model which as we will see, ultimately involves ethnicity as one of the defining features. Nattier explains,

> Religions - not just Buddhism - travel in three major ways: as import, as export, and as ‘baggage.' (They may also be imposed by conquest, which, happily, is not a factor in this case.) Religions transmitted according to the ‘import’ model are, so to speak, demand driven: the consumer (i.e. the potential convert) actively seeks out the faith. 'Export' religions are disseminated through missionary activity, while 'baggage' religions are transmitted whenever individuals or families bring their beliefs along when they...


\(^{16}\) Jan Nattier, “Buddhism Comes to Main Street” in *The Wilson Quarterly* Vol. 21, No. 2 (Spring 1997): 72-80.; Jan Nattier, “Who is Buddhist? Charting the Landscape of Buddhist America” in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. For this section I primarily quote excerpts from Nattier’s earlier publication, since the two publications are very similar and the 1997 article was published closer to the time when Nattier would have presented this model at the IBS lecture series in 1994.
move to a new place. It is these divergent styles of transmission, not matters of doctrine, practice, or national origin, that have shaped the most crucial differences within American Buddhism.\footnote{17 Nattier, “Buddhism Comes to Main Street,” 74.}

Nattier’s model seems reasonable on the surface: it accounts for transnational movements and the impetus behind such movement and it can be broadly applied to most Buddhist communities and traditions in the United States. Unfortunately, it is in the more detailed explanation of each type of transmission (and therefore, type of Buddhist community) that Nattier’s classification model displays a remarkable similarity to Prebish and Williams. We see an awareness on Nattier’s part of the problematic nature of relying on race and ethnicity as defining features of Buddhist communities in the United States, and then she goes on to unwittingly reinscribe those problematic concepts into her classification descriptions.

Import Buddhism, due to the economic status required to participate in this form of Buddhism, the “scanting” of non-meditative Buddhist practices, and the Euro-American constituency of the communities, is more “convenient[ly]” labeled “Elite Buddhism.”\footnote{18 Ibid., 75.} Export Buddhism, on the other hand, is brought to the United States by missionaries who are “underwritten by the home church” and whose purpose is “energetic proselytizing.”\footnote{19 Ibid., 76.} The ideal example of this type of Buddhism – and perhaps the only example – is Soka Gakkai International (now SGI-USA), a tradition of the Japanese Nichiren school of Buddhism. Citing a 1983 survey of SGI membership, Nattier writes, “it is in the ethnicity of its members that the distinctiveness of the Soka Gakkai is most obvious, for it has attracted a following that includes large numbers of Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans (not all of Japanese ancestry).”\footnote{20 Ibid., 76-77.}

Nattier’s third category, “baggage” Buddhism, is similar to Export Buddhism in that it travels from the home country to the United States with its adherents, but unlike Export Buddhism,
transporting Buddhism to a new place is not the driving force for relocation. It is worth noting Nattier’s full explanation of “baggage” Buddhism:

Baggage Buddhists span the full range of schools and national origins...but to the outsider, these organizations display remarkable similarities. Above all, they tend to be deliberately monoethnic in membership at the outset, for they serve not only religious purposes but operate as supportive community centers as well. Such temples may provide language lessons, a place to network for jobs, and above all a place to relax with others who share one's own cultural assumptions and to whom nothing needs to be explained. Though all Buddhists (of course) have their own ethnicity, it is only in Buddhist groups of this type that ethnicity serves as the primary defining feature. This type can therefore be labeled 'Ethnic Buddhism'.

In this short paragraph, Nattier clearly articulates two major criteria of ethnic Buddhism: first, the community is “monoethnic” and the identified ethnicity is the “primary defining feature” of the community. Second, the temple space is used for not only religious activities, but cultural activities (cultural activities of the monoethnic membership). With that final statement equating “baggage” Buddhism with “Ethnic Buddhism,” Nattier’s explanation of the third category ends. There is no discussion of how to classify generations born into Buddhism in the United States who may be of mixed racial heritage. If a member of the third generation is well-educated (by Nattier’s definition elsewhere in the article, this implies being college educated with at least a BA degree), and of the middle class in the United States, but born into a Buddhist family of non-Western ancestry, where does that person fit into Nattier’s typology? Further, for a typology that supposedly aims to go beyond race and ethnicity, both are dominant aspects of Nattier’s “Import Buddhism” and “Baggage Buddhism.” In her chapter for The Faces of Buddhism publication, “Who is Buddhist? Charting the Landscape of Buddhist America,” Nattier expands her remarks about “baggage” Buddhism to discuss the limitations of the “two Buddhisms” dichotomy, writing “the notion of ‘two Buddhisms’...is clearly inadequate to the task [of explaining Buddhism in America], primarily because it fails to account for the full spectrum of racial and ethnic diversity in Buddhist America.”

Her essay also acknowledges that ethnic Buddhist institutions change and adapt over time. She cites the adoption of Protestant elements by ethnic Buddhist organizations

21 Nattier, “Buddhism Comes to Main Street,” 78.
22 Nattier, “Who is Buddhist?” 189.
and importantly notes, “we should recall that in making such accommodations Asian Americans were not simply acting on their own preferences, but in many instances were deliberately attempting to present themselves in ways that might be acceptable to the Protestant majority.”

While the model she presents may not adequately address the problem of *ethnic Buddhism*, Nattier must be commended for her awareness of the problem, and her acknowledgment of the many adaptations and accommodations to Protestant norms undergone by Buddhist communities after arriving in North America. However, we also see in Nattier’s remarks that adaptation to a new cultural environment is held up as the goal for all *ethnic Buddhist* communities.

Two essays by Rick Fields, “Confessions of a White Buddhist” and “Divided Dharma: White Buddhists, Ethnic Buddhists, and Racism," are important not so much for presenting a new model for classifying Buddhisms in the United States, but for how Fields approaches the topic. In the 1994 entry for *Tricycle*, "Confessions of a White Buddhist," Fields writes from his perspective as an Euro-American convert Buddhist. He supports the "two Buddhisms" division, believing it to have theoretical merit as well as seeing it reflected in the real world of practicing communities. He writes, "much of this split [between ethnic and convert communities] probably stems from the natural ethnic fellowship of an immigrant community in which Buddhist temples have functioned first of all as cultural and community centers."

Aside from his support for the two Buddhisms model (which, as I hope is clear by now, I see as too limited), the value in Fields’ pieces is a recognition of the racism and racist attitudes often present in the conversation over *ethnic* and *convert Buddhism*. Fields notes on the second page of the article that "part - a very large part - of who and where you are in society is defined by what color you are. A deeper and perhaps equally powerful aspect of racism, however, is the power to define, always the paramount power in a racist society." He goes on to observe, "it’s hardly surprising, then, that in the

ongoing discussion about the meaning of an emergent 'American Buddhism,' it is mainly white Buddhists who are busy doing the defining. Nor is it surprising that they're defining it in their own image.\(^\text{26}\) In the article, Fields observes more than once that white Buddhists are missing out on something vital and fundamentally Buddhist by shunning the devotional practices that are a defining characteristic of ethnic Buddhist communities. I cannot help but wonder at the contradictions present in this essay by Fields and Nattier's articles discussed above - both scholars express concern over the focus on ethnicity (and the potentially racist overtones) found in the conversation, while at the same time promoting classification schemes which at their core, divide communities along racial and/or ethnic lines.

The complexity on the ground is acknowledged in another Fields article, published in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, "Divided Dharma: White Buddhists, Ethnic Buddhists, and Racism." Fields writes that his research on Buddhism in the United States,

[quote]
revealed a landscape of complex and bewildering variety: what might be called American Tibetan Buddhists, American Japanese Zen Buddhists, American Korean Buddhists, American Burmese (or Vipassana) Buddhists on one side; and immigrant Asian Buddhist and their often native-born bicultural children: Japanese American Buddhists, Korean American Buddhists, Vietnamese American Buddhists, Burmese American Buddhists on the other.\(^\text{27}\)
[quote]

Note that in order to make the distinction between the two overall types of Buddhism - *convert* and *ethnic* - Fields moves the placement of the word "American." For convert communities, "American" is placed ahead of the geographic region of origin; for Asian/immigrant communities, the country of origin (or the nationality of the practitioners, it is not necessarily clear which Fields intends) is placed first, then "American" is added. Except for maintaining the fundamental division between *convert* and *ethnic* Buddhists, this approach bears strong resemblance to the classification scheme presented by Stuart Chandler, to be discussed below. As a way of prefacing his decision to argue for a classification of *white Buddhism*, Fields writes about his above model, "even this attempt at a rough classification is problematic: the largely Japanese American Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), for example, includes

\(^{26}\) Fields, “Confessions of a White Buddhist,” 54.

\(^{27}\) Fields, "Divided Dharmas," 197.
thoroughly acculturated fourth-generation Japanese Americans, as well as at least a scattering of white Americans. In fact, five out of sixty BCA ministers are white Americans. In what sense, then, can this be considered an 'ethnic' or immigrant Buddhism?n\textsuperscript{28}

Yet once again, despite acknowledging the problematic nature of the categorization of ethnic Buddhism, Fields suggests the categorization of white Buddhism (one based on race and ethnicity) as a way out of his “definitional frustration.” He admits white Buddhism is not lacking in problems, but he believes it to highlight a facet of Buddhism in the United States that is often overlooked: “the fact that the so-called missionary or Euro-American Buddhism, in all its bewildering variety, is largely white and middle-class.”n\textsuperscript{29} Fields elaborates on his category of white Buddhism by setting out six defining traits of white Buddhism in America:

- it is largely a layperson’s movement...
- Second, it is based on a strenuous practice of sitting meditation associated with Zen or vipassana, especially mindfulness of breathing. Third, it welcomes Western psychology as a valid and useful, some argue necessary, adjunct...Fourth, American Buddhism is increasingly shaped by feminist insights and critiques...Fifth, it harbors an impetus toward social action...And sixth, it contains democratic and anti-authoritarian or antihierarchical sentiments.n\textsuperscript{30}

These traits are in agreement with Prebish’s remarks about Euro-American convert Buddhism in Luminous Passage and Nattier’s "Elite Buddhism." It appears that while the naming schemes of the categories shift depending on the model under discussion, progress away from ethnic Buddhism is not achieved - one constant across these models is the concept of a Buddhism based entirely on the ethnicity of the membership.

Kenneth Tanaka’s observations in the Epilogue to The Faces of Buddhism in America and his essay “Issues of Ethnicity in the Buddhist Churches of America” seem to be the lone, serious challenge to the application of ethnic to the Buddhist Churches of America at the time, although not necessarily of the ethnic Buddhism category in general. Tanaka observes that the scholarly division between convert and ethnic Buddhist communities cannot be “denied completely,” rather, that the “reality is not as

\textsuperscript{28} Fields, “Divided Dharmas,” 197.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 197.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 202.
serious as reported.” 31 Tanaka views the separation between the two “camps” as a “natural tendency to gravitate to those with shared background and interests” and that enclaves of immigrant Buddhists in the United States may be for practical rather than ideological reasons. 32 Tanaka does not present a classification model of his own, but based on these remarks his perspective is reminiscent of Paul Numrich’s model of parallel congregations. Numrich’s model attempts to account for instances of the same building housing two separate communities, one made up of practitioners recently arrived in the United States and another comprised of Euro-American (or non-immigrant) converts. 33 Tanaka also suggests that scholars may need to rethink the accuracy of “the sharp dichotomy drawn between the two camps [ethnic and convert], for the membership patterns along racial lines are much more ambiguous and fluid within some of the Buddhist communities” such as Soka Gakkai and Chinese Buddhist communities. 34 My model of culturally-informed Buddhisms brings to light both this fluidity in membership as well as a fluidity in representation, which in turn highlights the inflexible nature of the ethnic Buddhism categorization of earlier models.

In her 2010 article, “Two Buddhisms, Three Buddhisms, and Racism,” Wakoh Shannon Hickey observes about Paul Numrich’s “parallel congregations” model,

I will begin by acknowledging its value. Numrich has argued for [the parallel congregations model] because it accounts for the fact that Theravada temples perform different functions for first-generation immigrants and refugees than they do for converts. This model also points to the realities of race dynamics in the U.S., where Asian and white Buddhists may not interact very much, and where whites have more power and access to resources than recent Asian immigrants...These differing needs and race-based disparities of power and access are real and important, and Numrich is right to stress them. 35

Numrich and Hickey remind us that what is being debated is not just nomenclature, but the power structure behind the division between ethnic and convert Buddhist communities. I have chosen to

32 Ibid.
discuss Numrich’s research less than that of other scholars in part because the communities about
which he writes are so dissimilar to the Buddhist Churches of America that I felt the applicability of his
theories limited. The BCA is not an immigrant community and therefore does not have parallel
congregations, one made up exclusively of Japanese immigrants and the other of white/Western
practitioners. Nor do many – or any – of the other characteristics on the list apply to the modern BCA.

Stuart Chandler’s essay, “Chinese Buddhism in America: Identity and Practice,” provides the only
real departure from the ethnic/convert dichotomies. His is a compelling classification scheme, due to
its practicality, versatility, and acknowledgement that the nationality of origin of a Buddhist tradition is
distinct from the socio-cultural origins of its members. Chandler’s model, as well as his remarks about
the issues surrounding studying “Chinese” Buddhism, is vital for moving the conversation about
classification away from the ethnicity of Buddhists in the United States toward a model that is more
nuanced and that can adapt as the situation of the community changes. The purpose of his study, he
explains, is to examine "the highly complex issue of the interrelationship between the adjectives
Buddhist, Chinese, and American." Prior to presenting his model, Chandler considers a model by Will
Herberg:

Herberg noted that the first three generations of new Americans differed in their attitudes toward their
inherited religion. The immigrant generation gained strength from their imported religious beliefs and
practices because these maintained 'something of the old life,' thereby providing continuity and order in
what was otherwise a confusing new land. For the American-bred generation, however, the vestiges of
the old country were seen as a source of confusion and disadvantage...the third generation, fully
assimilated into the American way of life and therefore much more secure than their parents, recognized
that, while the language and many of the customs of their grandparents could not be perpetuated on
these shores, not only could the religion of one's forebears be maintained, but an important element of
American identity was precisely the preservation of one's religious legacy.

While Herberg felt these observations could not possibly apply to Japanese and Chinese immigrants to
the United States, Chandler disagrees, noting "it appears that the general thrust of the three-generation
model works as well for Buddhists as for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. The shifts in nomenclature and practice within the Japanese American Jodo Shinshu community are a case in point.” Examples of the shifts in nomenclature referenced by Chandler are such things as changing the name of the organization from the Buddhist Mission to North America to the Buddhist Churches of America, referring to religious gathering spaces as Churches rather than Temples (although, as we will see in the second case study, some local communities have returned to using ‘Temple’ and eliminated the use of ‘Church.’), and referring to some holidays by their English equivalents.

Chandler also observes that not all Chinese immigrants to the United States bring Buddhism with them as part of their "cultural baggage"; in fact, many first generation immigrants come to Buddhism only after entering the United States. This contests Nattier’s formulation of “Baggage Buddhism” as well as the more general category of “convert.” The important difference for Chandler in the case of the Chinese immigrants is that they are not "maintaining a directly inherited identity so much as reconstructing one," unlike many immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Chandler notes, "the current trend suggests that instead of exaggerating their American citizenship over their Chinese ancestry, they may increasingly regard themselves first and foremost as Buddhists, averring that the universal message of Buddhism transcends all cultural or ethnic dualism." With Chandler we begin to see that it is not only the category of ethnic Buddhism that falls short of fully accounting for the identity of a community – convert Buddhism lack nuancing as well.

These observations lead Chandler to a model that allows for multiple, shifting identities, which he refers to as constellations of identity. At its core, Chandler’s model functions by arranging identifiers – in the case of Chandler’s case study, the identifiers Chinese, Buddhist, and American – in the way most significant to the person or group in question. For example, arranging the identifiers as American

39 Chandler, 23.
41 Chandler, 24.
Chinese Buddhist is indicative of someone who first and foremost identifies as a resident of America (an “American” in both the cultural and geographical senses); the second two identities can either be separate – someone who is of Chinese ancestry and who practices Buddhism, or a person who is a member of a Chinese Buddhist temple. A person who considers their Buddhist identity more important than cultural or ethnic identity would place Buddhist first, and then American or Chinese to round out the constellation, and so forth, with each permutation creating a suitable constellation.

The benefit of this model is its broad applicability; it can be tailored to suit a range of identities. However, no model is without flaws. First, in the example from Chandler’s model, American Chinese Buddhist, it is unclear how the reader can determine if the practitioner about which Chandler is writing is Chinese-American in a cultural sense, or an American (of whatever heritage) member of a Chinese Buddhist temple. There is an inherent lack of specificity – American Japanese Buddhist could indicate any number of Buddhist traditions originating in Japan (assuming that it does not indicate an American of Japanese descent who is Buddhist) which undermines the utility of the model. Also, the constellation could become unwieldy for someone with multiple ethnic or cultural identities who also identifies as a member of Soka Gakkai International-USA. And while it removes the immediate dichotomy between ethnic and convert Buddhists in the United States, it still relies on words that can be interpreted as either ethnic signifiers or geographic signifiers, such as Japanese, Chinese, or Tibetan.

Now that we have reviewed the available models for classifying Buddhist communities in the United States, the characteristics of ethnic Buddhism, as it has been used in the literature to date, may be summarized by the following list.\textsuperscript{42}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Racial and ethnic heritages are non-Western (and generally assumed to be Asian), as is the nation/region of origin
  \item Main language of the group is non-English/non-Western
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{42} These characteristics are drawn from multiple sources. Individual scholars might have slightly different views of how ethnic is applied, but these are the qualities that seemed to recur across articles.
Communities are isolated and insular by their own choice; furthermore, they are static and slow to change. Members are hereditary Buddhists (born into Buddhism). Members engage in ‘popular’ or ‘devotional’ practices. The Buddhist temple space is the primary cultural space for the communities; cultural activities tend to overshadow the Buddhist use of the space.

The first three items in the list – racial heritage, geographic region of origin, and language – are the criteria most frequently invoked when discussing ethnic Buddhism. Ethnic Buddhists (in the context of the writings I have discussed above) are generally immigrants from an Asian country, although there is rarely any acknowledgement by the scholar that a Buddhist from Thailand will have remarkably different cultural and religious practices than a Buddhist from Japan; instead, scholars speak of Asian Buddhism as a cohesive and neatly packaged phenomenon. It also doesn’t account for Chandler’s point about Chinese-Americans rediscovering or converting to Buddhism after they are in the United States. As Rick Field’s observes:

‘Asian-American’ and ‘immigrant’ hardly reflect unified groups – deep historical and ethnic animosities exist between Vietnamese and Chinese, Koreans and Japanese, and Burmese and Thais, to name just a few. Furthermore, there do seem to be very real differences in style of practice, so that the division we see may be not so much racial as it is a continuation of sectarian dialectic about how best to realize liberation...43

We must question what, exactly, race is meant to indicate in the formulation of ethnic Buddhism and how the category of ethnic Buddhism avoids reinforcing racist structures. In this conversation race or racial appears to be used almost interchangeably with ethnic, which only serves to make the conversation more opaque.

The conception of ‘race,’ as it is used in relation to culturally-informed Buddhisms, is as a set of biologically-based characteristics that are in some way, large or small, passed from one generation to the next. ‘Race’ and ‘racial heritage’ in this conception of the terms, are not something participated in consciously – in other words, a person may have physical features common to others of the same racial heritage, but not identify as part of that racial group. Furthermore, all people have racial heritages. A

racist, therefore, is someone who essentializes a person or community down to a handful of perceived racial traits and/or reinforces essentializing thought patterns out of ignorance, fear, or a desire for power. ‘Ethnic,’ in contrast, is a social construct, which at some point in the group’s history has defined and agreed to a set of boundaries demarcating insiders and outsiders. Those boundaries may shift over time in response to internal or external pressures. Ethnic heritage may be central to an individual’s conception of their identity, or it may be put aside in favor of a new identity, should the individual have the freedom to do so. Many people born into an ethnic group may be unable, due to pressure from the group as a whole, to put aside their ethnic heritage. As it relates to this project in particular, members of the Buddhist Churches of America may or may not identify as either ethnically or racially Japanese; as scholars we must respect the identity claimed on the group and individual levels rather than uncritically reinforcing out-of-date classification models.

The next two items on the list – insular, isolated communities that fail to adapt or acculturate, and a refusal to adapt even when facing extinction – are two of the recurring critiques against the Buddhist Churches of America. Tanaka has eloquently argued against this misconception in his chapter “Issues of Ethnicity in the Buddhist Churches of America” and the information I will present in the case studies to follow will further reinforce how inaccurate those qualities are when applied to the BCA. The history of the BCA is replete with examples of adaptation and accommodation to prevailing cultural trends. However, as the early work of Tetsuden Kashima and Charles Prebish remind us, there was a time in the early and mid-20th Century that some of these criteria did apply to the Buddhist Mission of North America, as the BCA was originally known – Japanese was the primary language for services, and the first ministers sent to the United States in the early 20th Century were instructed to minister to only the Japanese population. As the case studies in the next chapter will reinforce, members of Jodo Shinshu communities in the United States have undergone remarkable transformations in order to adapt to the shifting political and social landscapes in the United States. The model of culturally-
informed Buddhisms is designed to account for the complex history and dynamic nature of Buddhist communities, and the BCA provides an excellent example of how the lens of culturally-informed Buddhisms can help to make sense of ever-changing group identities.

The problems of classification are not limited to communities that have once been designated as ethnic. Communities labeled as convert may also be misrepresented by the models presented in this section. Both “types” of communities are weighted down with painful, constricting stereotypes related to racial, ethnic, economic, and educational expectations. When I began this thesis, I asked myself, what do classification models hope to achieve? Are they necessary? As someone who is interested in educating not only other scholars, but a readership beyond the academic world, I desire a model that is adaptable enough to be used across the stunning variety of Buddhist communities in the United States. As this thesis is presenting a new classification model, I can only answer the second question by saying: yes, scholars must have a means of classifying communities. It must be a model, though, that dispenses with a classification based on race or ethnicity, one that adequately represents the fluid nature of community identity and the equally fluid geo-cultural space in which the community resides.
Culturally-informed Buddhisms

With all this in mind, I propose a new model for referring to Buddhist communities, and the members of those communities in the United States: *culturally-informed Buddhism*. I acknowledge that ‘culture’ is a contested term in many instances, and that my usage of it to refer to my model of classification may be as distasteful to some readers as ‘ethnic’ is for me. For the purposes of this thesis, I am not attempting to redefine ‘culture,’ nor is it my intention to replace ‘ethnic’ with ‘culture’ or ‘cultural.’ This model employs ‘culture’ in a broad sense, to represent the geographical, social, and political spaces in which a religious tradition was formed, developed, and currently exists. We could perhaps say *historically informed* or *geographically informed*, but the advantage of *culturally-informed* is that it can encompass historical narratives, sociological features of ethnicity and race, a range of religious practice, and linguistic divisions. I find Bruce Lincoln’s basic summation of ‘culture’ apropos to this discussion: “‘culture’ is the prime instrument through which groups mobilize themselves, construct their collective identity and effect their solidarity by excluding those whom they identify as outsiders, while simultaneously establishing their own internal hierarchy, based on varying degrees of adherence to the values that define the group and its members”\(^{44}\) If we recall the definition of ‘ethnic’ presented at the beginning of this chapter, two of the definitions indicate a similar process of defining groups of people with similar characteristics, and incorporate qualities such as racial heritage, language, and religious affiliation. Tomoko Masuzawa observes that “in the quintessentially ‘modern’ societies of Western Europe and North America, culture is envisaged as a vehicle, at its best, for the most profound and essential thoughts and attitudes underlying religion.”\(^{45}\) Since it is not my purpose to conflate ‘ethnic’ and ‘culture,’ the terms must be separated before we proceed.


While narrating the history of the uses of the term ‘culture,’ Masuzawa contrasts the views of 19th Century anthropologist Tylor’s inclusive sense of ‘culture’ with “the more contemporary sense of a culture as a distinctive, autochthonous entity belonging to a particular local group, however small or large such a group may be. It is this later articulation that has endowed the Tylorian ‘complex whole’ with a more explicitly interpretive significance.” While the idea of multiple autochthonous entities has the potential to take on the same discriminatory overtones as ‘ethnic’ (as the term ‘ethnic’ is used in the conversation about Buddhisms in the United States) if it is used to create a juxtaposition between the modern West and an Orientalist Asia, I find the notion of multiple cultures with their own identifying marks useful for my purposes here. And while Masuzawa seems dissatisfied with this idea of culture, Johnson presents a compelling argument for the continued use of a broad sense of culture when he writes about those who have followed in Boas’s notion of culture:

That this notion of culture is often dismissed as an imperial apparatus is shockingly misguided. It can and has been put to that purpose, but focusing only on this trajectory is to see neither its origin nor its principal applications and potential yield. Conceived generously, “culture” enables a double movement that is the condition of possibility for thick description and thick comparison. It does so because it relentlessly directs our attention to the local context...but, simultaneously, “culture” affirms the notion that, if carefully studied, humans are finally, if only approximately, intelligible to one another. Thus...culture is one register in which we can theorize similarity and difference, fit and not-fit, and which enables, on occasion, the obdurately other to be re-described as having an uncanny family resemblance, and vice versa.

This passage from Johnson highlights a number of traits central to my conception of culturally-informed Buddhisms – as a way to grasp fully the dynamics of Buddhist communities, both internal and external, as well as the small scale of individual temple communities. By focusing on the “local context” as it relates to culture, we can tease apart strands of cultural influence more accurately and easily than on the large scale. Once we have accomplished that on the smaller scale, a more general picture of Jodo Shinshu in the United States (for example) may be constructed. Also, if one of the purposes of studying

46 Masuzawa, 79.
Buddhist communities in the United States is to examine, as Johnson phrases it, “similarity and
difference, fit and not-fit,” then we must achieve a detailed and nuanced picture of the realities of
Buddhist communities. Identifying the markers of various cultures – groups that have a sense of internal
coherence but that are not necessarily homogenous – makes the task of identifying Jodo Shinshu
Buddhist culture in the United States slightly easier. It also clears the way for cross-tradition comparison
to be a fruitful, rather than essentializing, endeavor, and has the advantage of respecting the self-
representation of the groups.

With such a broad definition of ‘culture,’ it is necessary to identify how ‘ethnic’ is distinct. I
noted earlier that ethnicity is a social construct, one that binds members of a group together over time
and space. Bruce McKay observes that ethnic identity is “constructed, defined, maintained and changed
by and for a group, a people whose members perceive and are perceived by others as having a sense of
commonality and unity which may allow them to claim, but which does not necessarily require, a
common history, language, homeland, ancestry and religion.” In broad strokes, the notions of ‘culture’
and ‘ethnic’ (or ‘ethnicity’) have many overlapping characteristics. Perhaps the key is in another
statement by McKay, that ethnic identity may “cut across other boundaries” such as states, nations,
classes, and communities. While ethnicity and culture are both fluid constructs, the construct of
culture can encompass multiple ethnic groups and multiple cultural influences. Ethnic groups, on the
other hand, may be influenced by various cultures over time while retaining the overall group identity.
Furthermore, specific cultures may be tied to a specific spatial location or temporal range (Meiji Era
Japan, World War II era United States) while ethnicity may not be tied to either space or time. In short,
using ‘ethnic’ to describe Buddhist communities is too blunt and homogenizing and must be replaced
with something more nuanced.

49 Ibid.
Speaking in broad terms, ‘culture’ and ‘ethnicity’ are both fluid constructs with similar characteristics that identify groups of people. ‘Cultures’ are defined by the geo-social contexts in which they originated, whereas the social construction of consciously agreed upon identity markers may be considered ‘ethnicity.’ Hence for the model of culturally-informed Buddhisms, Buddhist communities may be made up of members of any number of ethnic groups, without the ethnic and Buddhist identifiers being mutually exclusive. The ethnic Buddhism model, as we’ve seen, is not so accommodating; if you are a member of a non-Western ethnic group, and Buddhist, you are an ethnic Buddhist regardless of the tradition of Buddhism or individual ethnic identity. As the case studies in the next chapter illustrate, in order to understand and represent the identities claimed by Buddhist groups, we must be able to identify the various cultures which have left imprints on the communities.

In light of our distinction between ‘culture’ and ‘ethnicity,’ we may consider Tweed’s observation, provided as the second epigraph to this chapter, that there are “no culturally unmediated experiences.” The model of culturally-informed Buddhisms seeks to acknowledge and account for the cultural forces which come into contact with religious communities over time. Following in the theoretical footsteps of Chandler and Tweed, the culturally-informed Buddhisms model presents a way to make sense of the shifting identities of Buddhist practitioners and communities in the United States. Tweed’s theories of crossing and dwelling apply excellently for communities on the move or in flux, but not as well for communities who have already crossed and have established their dwellings in the United States. Culturally-informed is intended to reflect the various influences on a religious tradition as it moves through geographic spaces, through time, and through generations and constituencies. Each time

50 By “consciously agreed upon identity markers” I am referring to those traits, characteristics, features, etc. that at some point in the group’s history were codified as desirable (or undesirable). These identity markers may change over time as the groups wishes to change and may be influenced by the culture in which the group resides.

51 Tweed, Crossing and Dwelling, 138.
and space has had a hand in shaping the tradition, including its current geo-socio-political space. One of the main failures of previous models is the inability to account for change over time.

Also, specifying ‘BuddhismS’ instead of ‘Buddhism’ allows the conversation to move past the idea of American Buddhism or Buddhism in America. Trying to define a monolithic entity such as American Buddhism is an impossible task and risks oversimplifying and essentializing the rich diversity of Buddhist traditions in the United States. The culturally-informed Buddhisms model, by contrast, places this diversity and complexity at center stage of the analysis.

Finally, I would like to note a semantic difference in my approach: previous scholarship uses ‘American’ to refer, almost without fail, to Buddhist groups in the continental United States. Books, chapters, and journal articles that discuss Buddhist communities in Canada or Hawai‘i seem to be a separate genre from books, chapters, and journal articles about ‘Buddhism in America.’ Since one of the goals of this model is specificity and accuracy, I have shifted to using ‘in the United States’ or ‘of the United States’ as a way to identify the precise geo-socio-political space.52

In sum, the culturally-informed Buddhisms model has two aspects: a theoretical lens to help us re-orient the language used to classify/organize Buddhist communities in the United States and as a method to make sense of and organize data. The theoretical lens can be applied to either media analysis – such as the case studies of select websites of the Buddhist Churches of America undertaken for this thesis – or to ethnographic research. The culturally-informed Buddhisms model is complementary to models of ethnographic research, and can be integrated into participant observation, questionnaires, interviews, etc. For example, an ethnographic researcher could investigate not only the interviewee’s racial or ethnic origins, but how dominant that heritage is in shaping the interviewee’s day-to-day

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52 As a side note, although Hawai‘i is politically undeniably part of the United States, the Jodo Shinshu mission to Hawai‘i is its own entity – the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai‘i – and is not part of the Buddhist Churches of America, the organization active in the continental United States. Additionally, the Jodo Shinshu communities in Canada and Mexico are separate entities from either the Honpa Honwanji Mission of Hawai‘i and the Buddhist Churches of America. Each of these organizations is connected to the parent organization of the Nishi Hongwanji in Japan.
identity and how it influences (or not) the interviewee’s religious practice. In a similar way, analyzing documents with this lens leads to a more complete picture of the group’s identity and the influences which have caused that identity to alter over time. This sort of analysis aims to let the community speak for itself, with the researcher providing the necessary keys for an outsider to understand the historical socio-political pressures which have shaped the community as it exists in the researcher’s present-day context. Listening to how the community represents itself, and what historical cultural events have left their marks on the community, enables us to reorient classification schemes away from the essentializing notions of ethnic or convert and towards a classification that represents the community in its own language as well as language that is transparent to scholars (and others).

Understanding the complex strains of influence exerted upon the Buddhist Churches of American organization (and the communities of Jodo Shinshu practitioners) reveal a picture more complex than a labeling of ethnic or Japanese Buddhism would imply. Not being constrained by a labeling of ethnic provides the researcher the flexibility to describe cultural influences based not only in the region of origin, but also cultural influences that are more immediate in time and place. In the case of the Buddhist Churches of America, the researcher can consider activities at a Jodo Shinshu temple that are informed by strains within Buddhist, Japanese, and American cultural complexes and not feel constrained to represent only those that are Buddhist or Japanese. This may sound rather straightforward, and yet the existing literature on the Buddhist Churches of America has yet to make such a shift. The culturally-informed Buddhism model enables the researcher to place the BCA (or any Buddhist community) across times and spaces without compromising or essentializing the shifting identities of the group. The aspect of this model that addresses terminology is best demonstrated with concrete examples, and for that, we must turn to our case studies in the next chapter.
Chapter Three: Case Studies from the Buddhist Churches of America

The best way to demonstrate the utility of any theoretical tool is to apply it to examples. This chapter presents two such examples, case studies showing how the *culturally-informed Buddhisms* model can be applied and the results it yields. The case studies examine the website of the main Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) organization (http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org) and the website of a local BCA community, the Tri-State Denver Buddhist Temple (http://www.tsdbt.org). Each case study follows four general areas of inquiry: (1) the visual aspect of the site; (2) the audience(s) for the site based on content and rhetoric; (3) language; and (4) history. These four points go toward identifying how the community represents itself and the multiple cultural influences that have shaped the development of the community over time.

Since the model of *culturally-informed Buddhisms* does not seek to determine if the community is *ethnic* or *convert Buddhist*, the four points are guidelines for investigation rather than a check-list of elements. At the same time, as appearance of the community – in this case, the visual components of the websites – and the language spoken by the members are two key criteria in determining *ethnic* and *convert Buddhism* in prior models, I thought it would be interesting to investigate those aspects of the websites through the lens of *culturally-informed Buddhisms*. The second and fourth areas of inquiry, audiences and history, are connected, as the histories presented – histories of the Jodo Shinshu tradition, the BCA, and the Denver-based community – are tailored to specific audiences. As will become evident shortly, the two websites convey their respective senses of self in unique and fascinating ways, while maintaining an overall sense of continuity through the cultural thread of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism.
Case Study One – The Buddhist Churches of America

Visual dimension

The first area of inquiry into the BCA website is the visual dimension, the look and feel of the pages and website as a whole. This consists of two related pieces, the overall design of the website and the use of images and other visual cues. The most basic of these is the overall design of the site, which includes aspects such as color, font, and page layout - a template with variations in this case - and visual organization of materials. I would classify the template design as simple, clean (i.e. free of visual clutter),
easy to use, contemporary, and appealing. Based on the quantity of content and the entries with dates, this appears to be a new site within the past year, most likely a redesign of an older site. 

I will confess to having some preconceived expectations about the images and symbols I expected to see on the website. Because my experience of the tradition has mostly been through academic books, rather than a living experience, I thought the primary visual symbols used on the website would be either of a golden Amida Buddha, or the iconic weathered stone statue of Shinran Shonin (depicted second from the right in Figure 5 below). Instead, the website uses an imagery with which I was previously unfamiliar (Figure 2). To further confound my expectation, none of the "About Us" pages or "Learn" pages make mention of the symbol. It wasn't until I was looking to find a definition of something else that I stumbled across the name of the symbol - the Kujo Sagarifuki No Mon or Wisteria Crest - on the website of the Manitoba Buddhist Temple (http://manitobabuddhistchurch.org). The Manitoba Buddhist Temple page explains, "The Wisteria Crest is the official crest of the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha. Originally the crest of the Kujo family, great Hongwanji patrons, the drooping blossoms suggest humility and sincere reverence to Amida Buddha." The Wisteria Crest forms the foundation of the symbology used on the BCA organization website (see Figure 1 above). It is used in its entirety to the left of the letters "BCA" on the heading section of each page, and it also is used as a subtle background image in the heading section of each page. Based on the explanation provided by the Manitoba Buddhist Temple, the Wisteria Crest is a symbol specific to Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. In my opinion, the floral symbol itself does not invoke any particular cultural context;
even after reading the Manitoba Buddhist Temple’s explanation, and after registering the cultural strands of *Japan* and *Buddhism* at play in the use of the image by the BCA, it seems to suit its current context very well – as a symbol that has traveled through time and space to represent the current expression of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in North America.

**Audience**

There are multiple possible audiences for any website, and for the BCA site we can identify at least three. Some content on the site – such as messages from the Socho (Bishop) of the BCA, the President of the BCA, articles by BCA members, donation information, and event announcements – is most likely for members, although the content is available to anyone visiting the site. The educational information, found on the set of pages under the “Learn” heading, serves all three audiences: members of the BCA, interested non-members, and visitors to the site from the media. On the “Learn” pages, members can access historical information about the Jodo Shinshu tradition and thereby increase their understanding of the tradition they practice; non-members and the media can obtain an overview of the Jodo Shinshu tradition. As I am neither a complete newcomer to the tradition nor a member, nor a journalist, I find it challenging to say how useful the content on the "Learn" pages is to any group. However, my impression is that the pages under the "Learn" heading do assume the reader has some knowledge already, at least of general Buddhism.

For a newcomer to Jodo Shinshu, the “BCA Dharma School” page under the “Learn” heading has the largest quantity of basic information available. And yet, in order to access the information, the visitor must be willing to click the two links on the page – links that don’t give much clue as to the content of the PDF files – and then scroll through lengthy or sideways PDF files. If the visitor is that persistent, they will have found a wealth of information detailing many Jodo Shinshu beliefs and practices, holidays and festivals, and a short history of the tradition. If this information was intended for
members and non-members alike, the content in the PDFs would have been either put into webpages under the “Learn” heading or broken down into individual PDFs, with clearly labeled links off the “BCA Dharma School” page, or another page under the “Learn” section. While it is possible that the website is not fully finished, the information on the “Learn” pages is different (both less extensive and with a different focus) than that in the Dharma School PDF. For example, the “Shinran Shonin” page under “Learn” is credited to the “JODO SHINSHU HONGWANJI-HA 2002” and the PDF about Shinran was written by Rev. Kenryu Tsuji, the “National Director of the Bureau of Buddhist Education, Buddhist Churches of America, from 1959 to 1971.” What seems most likely is that the information on the Dharma School page is intended for website visitors who are already practitioners of the Jodo Shinshu tradition; rather than a basic biography of Shinran, which is what is provided on the “Shinran Shonin” page, the document by Rev. Tsuji is titled “The Religious Experience of Shinran Shonin as Revealed in the Tannisho.”

If we consider the “Learn” pages on the BCA website, the Dharma School PDFs, and the relatively recent establishment of the Center for Buddhist Education (CBE), we may theorize that the BCA clearly values and is focused upon education - the education of its members as well as that of the general public. Of the pages on the BCA site, the "Learn" section contains the most number of pages with unique content (the "Donations" section has more pages, but the material on several of the pages is reproduced elsewhere on the site) and provides the reader with online materials about the Jodo Shinshu tradition, as well as providing offline locations for Jodo Shinshu education including the Jodo Shinshu Center and the Institute for Buddhist Studies (both in Berkeley, California). Were this site not

56 The PDF file may be found at the following web address: http://dsresourcecenter.bcasites.net/file/view/The+Religious+Experience+of+Shinran+Shonin.pdf. It may also be accessed by going to the main BCA website, http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org, clicking on “BCA Dharma School” under the “Learn” heading, clicking on the “Downloadable Dharma School Resources” link, scrolling down on the new page that opens until you see the link for “The Religious Experience of Shinran Shonin.” Accessed April 5, 2012.
57 Ibid.
intended as anything but a resource for members, the content would be restricted by requiring a login and password (or some other form of security to create a boundary between members and non-members), or only the most basic and general information about Jodo Shinshu would be present on a page or two. The open, welcoming atmosphere I experienced at the Octavia Street temple is present also on this website.

Furthermore, many of the events sponsored by the BCA, the Jodo Shinshu Center, and the CBE are for both members of the BCA and the general public. As we discussed in the previous chapter, one attribute assigned to ethnic institutions is the community’s emphasis on cultural preservation and/or transmission. 58 One limitation of the term ethnic Buddhism comes to light when we look for evidence of this in events sponsored by the BCA – at an ethnic institution, one would expect to find events focused on Japanese history and culture. What I found instead are Jodo Shinshu focused events - talks that are open to the public at the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley and national meetings of various groups within the organization (the Buddhist Women's Association, the Federation of Dharma School Teachers). Such events are the sort of activities that can be found occurring at any number of religious organizations in the United States and are unrelated to the ethnicity of the membership. The conclusion I draw from the evidence available on the website is that the national BCA organization is not actively involved in promoting anything but Jodo Shinshu related events. The Jodo Shinshu tradition is inextricably intertwined with pieces of Japanese history and culture, and therefore some crossover must be expected. But there is a clear difference between promoting Jodo Shinshu Buddhism and acting as a center for Japanese culture, and the BCA occupies itself with the former.

58 For comments of this nature, or discussions about this point, see the following: Tanaka, “Epilogue: The Colors and Contours of American Buddhism,” 298-288; Fields, “Confessions of a White Buddhist,” 56; Nattier, “Buddhism Comes to Main Street,” 78.
Language

Our third area of investigation relates to language, by which I do not mean rhetoric or word-choice. The entire BCA website is in the English language; there is no section devoted to Japanese language pages nor does there appear to be a parallel Japanese language site. Furthermore, the pages are only in English and there is no repetition of the information in Japanese situated farther down on the page. There are a couple of pages where the copyright belongs to the parent organization in Japan - the "Shinran Shonin" page under the "Learn" heading, for example - which have been translated into English and neither a Japanese language version nor a link to a Japanese language page on the parent organization site is offered. I believe this to be informative for a couple of reasons. First, it indicates that the primary and target audience is English speaking. In the two instances where a brief phrase in Japanese is quoted, it is in Romanized Japanese and a translation is immediately provided. Japanese characters do not appear on any of the site pages. Given my previous observation that much of the site is intended for members of the BCA, we can further observe that for a significant portion of the membership, English is the primary language. To put it slightly differently, providing the site only in English indicates that a vast majority - if not all - of members can make use of the information, as can the general public. This is not meant as a sweeping generalization about the language preference of the entire BCA membership, however, and leads to my second point: the organization made a choice to have the website appear solely in English. At least in terms of language, the organization chose to make the website open and accessible to as many people as possible, which further dispels the idea of an insular or isolated community of ethnic Buddhists.

Choice of language is just one of the ways – one of the most important – the BCA website emphasizes its current situation geographically and culturally in the United States. In a message by the

59 The only place Japanese characters appear at all is on a PDF of an event flyer discussed below. This statement also does not apply to the Wheel of Dharma publication available for download on the site.
Socho (Bishop), Koshin Ogui, on the Commemoration of the 750th Memorial of Shinran, he writes, "The 'big picture' that I envision, and the dream that I have is, to make Jodo Shinshu Buddhism a major religious tradition here in America."\textsuperscript{60} While I would not offer this statement by itself as conclusive evidence of my observation, the statement still represents the wishes of a person in a position to help achieve that dream. The Socho would like to see Jodo Shinshu Buddhism be more widely known throughout the United States; it is not unreasonable to conclude that portraying the BCA as a welcoming, English-speaking institution is a necessary step towards achieving this goal.

History

The most glaring omission in the "About Us" or "Learn" sections is the lack of historical narrative about the BCA as an organization. There is a concise history of the Jodo Shinshu tradition in Japan, from the time of Shinran through to the 20th Century, but

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{BCA_History}
\caption{"BCA History" page, http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/about-us/bca-history}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{60} Features -> Bishop's Page [http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/bishops-page]; the same message also appears on the "Features -> BCA News" page [http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/category/bca-news].
there is no comparable summary of important people, places, and events once the tradition arrived in the United States. One would expect the page titled "BCA History" under the "About Us" heading to contain such a summary. Instead, the viewer is presented with a very short paragraph mentioning the arrival of the first two ministers from Japan to San Francisco in the early 20th Century, and then an overview of the basic structure of the BCA as an organization. (Figure 3) We can speculate that perhaps the organization has chosen to de-emphasize aspects of the BCA’s history which includes potentially sensitive issues (such as widespread anti-Japanese sentiment in the early part of the 20th Century and internment camps during World War II) in favor of a more neutral summary of the organization. However, it is curious that the page is titled “BCA History” but that is not what the page contains. There is nothing on the website to resolve this disparity, and it is therefore a perfect example of the limitations of performing a textual analysis - the text doesn't always have all the answers.

Additional Observations

In addition to the webpages which make up the BCA website, there are several documents linked off of pages on the site. Two of these documents – both advertisements for events – provide insight into the larger BCA community. These documents are neither webpages nor hard copy pages that have been scanned, and therefore occupy a gray, in-between space in terms of analysis. The documents have been placed on the website either for archival purposes or to make them available to members who may not have ready access to a physical temple space but will be interested in attending the events. As with the rest of the website, it is the visual and rhetorical dimensions of the advertisements that make them relevant to our discussion here. The first document is a single page advertisement for the ‘Winter Pacific Seminar – 21st Century’ titled ‘A Life of Shinjin’; the second file is a

61 The concise history is found on the “Shin History” page under the “Learn” heading: http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/about-us/shin-history.
multipage announcement for the 2012 Federation Dharma School Teachers’ Conference. The flyer for the Winter Pacific Seminar appears designed for printing and display on an announcement board or to be handed out in physical form. The Dharma School Teachers’ Conference announcement most closely resembles a Power Point presentation (based on the background colors and designs, the landscape layout, and the number of “pages”).

As I mentioned in passing above, the Winter Pacific Seminar flyer (Figure 4) is one of the few places on the BCA website that contains Japanese characters – and the argument could be made that it is only peripherally part of the website, as it is a link off a page, not a page itself. The Japanese characters are prominently placed in the middle section of the flyer and the characters are not placed in proximity to an English translation, at least not in such a way so as to make it obvious to a reader unfamiliar with Japanese what the translation is. A color image of a snow covered Japanese Cherry tree shares the center of the page with the Japanese text. The flyer advertises Rev. Dr. David Matsumoto as the keynote speaker, four panelists, a haiku workshop, ‘Buddhist Etiquette,’ ‘Chanting,’ and additional Dharma sessions, one in English and one in Japanese (held at the same time and place, led by different ministers).

As it relates to our overall questions of ethnic Buddhism and culturally-informed Buddhisms, this flyer provides plenty of food for thought. Following the culturally-informed Buddhisms model, we can

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see the meeting of at least three socio-cultural strands: the United States as evidenced by the predominance of English and the physical meeting spaces for the events; Japan as evoked through the use of Japanese language characters, the imagery of a Japanese Cherry tree, and reference to haiku; and Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, indicated in the context of talks and speakers for the event. The latter is unsurprisingly the dominant textual strand, but the imagery of the tree and the Japanese language characters argues strongly for Japanese language and culture being equally, if not more, dominant than the first strand of the United States. If we were to put this idea into a modification of Chandler’s model, we would see *Jodo Shinshu* Buddhist Japanese American.

Let us compare the Winter Pacific Seminar flyer with the advertisement for the Dharma School Teachers’ Conference (Figure 5). Aside from the immediate contrast between a designed-for-print flyer and an announcement with the feel of a digital presentation, differences which are important to keep in mind, the imagery and textual elements combine to form a very different impression than the Winter Pacific Seminar flyer. The series of four images spaced evenly under the heading text are eye-catching: the first is a popular image depicting Darwinian evolution from primate to *homo sapiens*; the next three images are separated and depict a golden statue of a seated Buddha (possibly Amida), a photograph of the iconic statue of Shinran as the wandering monk, and a photograph of the current Socho of the BCA, Koshin Ogui. The arrangement of the images suggests the viewer is supposed to interpret the progression from the Buddha figure to Shinran to Socho Ogui as an evolution, and I
doubt it is coincidental that the images get slightly taller and larger from left to right, as a parallel to the
gradual increase in height depicted in the image of primate-to-human evolution. It is also possible to see
a progression from India (the place of origin for Buddhism) to Japan to the United States, although that
could be coincidental. Even without the last interpretation, this is a powerful and well-crafted visual
statement. The tagline for the conference reads, “Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in America. . . be a part of the
evolution.” Furthermore, the ‘u’ in Jodo Shinshu, the ‘s’ in Buddhism and ‘a’ in part are in red, white,
and blue font colors, respectively, and are capitalized and larger. These elements taken together are
placing the Federation Dharma School Teachers’ group, and by extension the BCA, solidly in the United
States and the 21st Century.

The design contrast to the Winter Pacific Seminar flyer discussed above is remarkable. The most
likely explanation for the contrast is the intended audience for each event; the Winter Pacific Seminar is
sponsored by the Institute for Buddhist Studies and the Center for Buddhist Education, is a public event,
and was “hosted by the BCA Southern District Ministers Association.” The Dharma School Teachers’
Conference is, as the name implies, an internal event for any BCA member who is also involved in
teaching Dharma School. While both audiences are involved in educational aspects of the BCA on the
local and national levels, and it is possible there is some overlap, the two intended audiences and the
purpose of each event most likely accounts for the differences in advertising approach. However, the
contrasts do not help us come to any definite conclusion about the BCA membership as a whole. Luckily
the culturally-informed Buddhisms model allows us a wide enough scope to see multiple cultural strands
within the group and multiple strategies of self-representation. What these event advertisements tell us
is that the BCA membership is diverse; English is the predominant spoken and written language, the BCA

63 The PDF, quoted above, is available as a link on the following pages:
http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/category/events and http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/2012-
64 The PDF from which this statement is drawn is available by link on the following pages:
http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/category/past-events and http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/pacific-
predominantly locates itself in the geo-cultural space of the United States, and on certain occasions or for certain audiences, the Japanese heritage of the tradition is invoked through visual cues (such as the Wisteria Crest and the Cherry tree) and language.

Summary

Taken as a whole, the website for the BCA organization reveals a number of important points. Through choice of language, a contemporary visual design, and content, the website is useful to many audiences, especially interested non-members. The event posters are carefully tailored for their respective audiences. The advertisement for an external event (with the potential for a mixed audience of members and non-members) contains the most prominent references to Japanese culture whereas the advertisement for the Dharma School Teachers’ event emphasizes the cultural context of the United States. Certain pages, such as the “BCA History” page leaves us with more questions than answers. For instance, if the website is expecting non-members of the BCA as visitors, why not present a concise yet complete history of the organization, or provide a link to another website that contains the information? Is the organization’s development viewed as unimportant by those in the organization responsible for the site’s content? Other than this one piece though, the information on the site provides a reasonably complete overview of the BCA organization – its goals and mission, affiliate local temples, and basic information about the Jodo Shinshu tradition. Our next case study, of the Tri-State Denver Buddhist Temple (TSDBT), moves us from the national context of the BCA organization to a local community.
Case Study Two – The Tri-State Denver Buddhist Temple

The second case study examines the website for the Tri-State Denver Buddhist Temple (TSDBT), using the same four areas of inquiry as the first case study as starting points for analysis – visual design of the site, audience, language, and history. Two of the areas, audience and language, are similar between the BCA and TSDBT websites. Additionally, instead of the event advertisements found on the BCA website, the TSDBT site has several unique pages and content worthy of special mention in regards to *culturally-informed Buddhisms*, such as the “New to Buddhism” pages, the “Religious Services” page, and the “Affiliates” page.

![Tri-State Denver Buddhist Temple website](http://www.tsdbt.org/web/)
Visual dimension

As with the BCA website, the design of the TSDBT website is simple and relatively static. In many ways, the TSDBT page is of a simpler design than the BCA page: there are fewer images, the only difference between pages is the content (i.e. visually, nothing on the page changes except the text in the center frame), and the site does not contain much color. There is a banner of five images that is the header for the page template, and those are the only images a visitor to the site sees. Taken as a group, the image banner emphasizes community, family, and the celebration of special events. Under the image banner header there are two rows of links and almost all of the pages of content on the website are listed in those two rows. Because of the visual simplicity of the site, I expected the content of the site to be much the same - sparse, basic, and static. As I navigated the site, I discovered that’s anything but the case - there are several links to the relatively new YouTube channel where the weekly Dharma talks are posted, a page detailing the events and holidays celebrated by the Temple community throughout the calendar year, an Announcements page that is updated weekly, and the Affiliates page listing the various Denver-based organizations hosted by the Temple. After browsing the entire site, I have the impression of an active, vibrant community of Jodo Shinshu Buddhists.

Audience and Language

One of the aspects of the site to catch my attention is the quantity of information available to those who may be new to either Buddhism or Jodo Shinshu. As with the BCA website, English appears to be the dominant language for the current member base and of the intended audience for the non-member pages, and there does not appear to be a companion Japanese-language version of the site. I do not consider the thumbnail images of book covers, provided by LibraryThing on the Bookstore page, to be images related to the Temple. Furthermore, the thumbnails are so small that it is difficult or impossible to read the book title or author.
found information on the TSDBT site that I looked for – and did not find – on the main BCA site. Visitors to the TSDBT site are presented with general information about Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, a very well written and concise page explaining the holidays the Temple celebrates, a "Temple Etiquette" page which describes what a visitor should do from the moment s/he enters the Temple building to the time the visitor leaves the Hondo, a general order of events in a typical service, what the Dharma School is, and a brief history of the Denver area Jodo Shinshu community.\textsuperscript{66}

The information about Jodo Shinshu belief and practice is spread across several pages. While these pages are engrossing on a number of levels, I will focus my observations around the ideas of \textit{ethnic Buddhism} and \textit{culturally-informed Buddhisms}. If a scholar doing research to support the continued used of the binary model of \textit{ethnic and convert Buddhism} was to analyze this website, they might write triumphantly that there is no better example of ethnic Japanese Buddhism than what is displayed on the website of the Tri-State/Denver Buddhist Temple. Our fictional scholar would go on to cite the founding of the temple by Japanese immigrants in the first decades of the 20th Century and the influx of Japanese people to the Denver area during World War II; the celebration of Japanese festivals and the steady stream of Japanese-based activities held at the temple would be offered as conclusive evidence. All of these are important observations.

However, I believe it is here, at the Tri-State/Denver Buddhist Temple, where a keen observation by Chandler is worth repeating:

\begin{quote}
The third generation, fully assimilated into the American way of life and therefore much more secure than their parents, recognized that, while the language and many of the customs of their grandparents could not be perpetuated on these shores, not only could the religion of one's forebears be maintained, but an important element of American identity was precisely the preservation of one's religious legacy.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

While the Denver Temple offers a Japanese language service periodically, and Japanese language classes are available, these are rather recent developments – introduced or revived sometime in the last 12-18

\textsuperscript{66} The Hondo is the "main hall" of a temple building, where the "principal buddha or bodhisattva is enshrined." – Hisao Inagaki, \textit{A Dictionary of Japanese Buddhist Terms}, 5\textsuperscript{th} Edition, Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1992, 108.\textsuperscript{67} Chandler, 23.
months. Furthermore, the periodic Japanese language service is in addition to, and not in place of, the
main English-language Family and Adult services. The Announcements page that mentions the addition
of the Japanese-language service gives only the most basic information - that a Japanese language
service will be held on a certain date and time, in addition to the regularly scheduled Family and Adult
services - and not what prompted the offering. This suggests that for whatever reason, there is enough
interest to learn and skill to administer these events. We can speculate that perhaps the previous
ministerial staff was unable to accommodate multiple services at the Denver location on the same day.

Were the Denver Buddhist Temple a stalwart bastion of Japanese Buddhism and culture (as the
ethnic Buddhism classification would insist), one would expect the Japanese language service to be the
norm and an English language service offered periodically. If we recall Prebish’s early work, American
Buddhism, he observes that Japanese language services are standard and English language services few
and far between. This reversal of languages is just one of the changes the BCA, and the TSDBT, has
undergone since Prebish made those observations thirty years ago. At some unknown point in the
Denver Temple’s history, the standard language for services, publications, and events was established as
English. Now, in the second decade of the 21st Century, Japanese language services are offered as
interest demands. Rather than simply taking this as proof positive of the ethnic nature of TSDBT, I
believe it is necessary to ponder what factors brought about the addition of a Japanese language
service. It is also necessary to consider the Temple as a whole and balance the Japanese language
service with the Temple Band, Art Club, and weekly bake sales in order to decide how best to classify
and refer to the community. A study of the website alone may not reveal all of the influences leading to
the decision to offer the service, nor do we know with certainty by whom the decision ultimately was
made.

68 Although I do not believe there to actually be a correlation, it is interesting to note the timing of a new minister
being assigned to the Denver Temple by the main BCA organization and the start of Japanese language services
and classes.
69 Prebish, American Buddhism, 68-9.
History

A good place to start is with the "New to Buddhism" page. This page is divided into three sections: "Jodo Shinshu Buddhism," "Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in the Rocky Mountains," and "Denver Buddhist Temple." The first section is a summary statement of Jodo Shinshu thought, followed by an overview of the main "schools" of Buddhism (Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana) and where the BCA fits into the larger Buddhist world. The section introduces several key concepts and figures - Amida Buddha, Shinran Shonin, the Nembutsu, and the concept of "other power." Explanations are a bit inconsistent - "shinjin" is neither translated nor explained - and organization of the information is a bit confusing, but overall, it prepares the reader to grasp the rest of the information on the page and site. The intended audience for this page is an interested non-member who may or may not be conversant with Buddhism in general, Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, and/or the BCA.

As a scholar, I find the opening statements in the "Jodo Shinshu Buddhism" section intriguing:

Jodo Shinshu Buddhism is unique among Buddhist paths. It emphasizes everyday Buddhism for ordinary people, rather than monastic Buddhism for spiritually strong (singularity-minded) people. Its "practice", uttering the Nembutsu, is Amida Buddha embracing us, rather than us relying on our efforts to attain enlightenment. After another sentence about "Nembutsu followers," the paragraph goes on to remark, "yet, even in its unique approach, Jodo Shinshu does not differ at all from other Buddhist paths. It awakens us to true reality." There are a few key points to mention relating to self-identity and conceptions of the Buddhist world. In these statements, the group identifies as “Nembutsu followers” when speaking about the people who are part of the group. They share a common practice – and note the quotation marks around the word ‘practice’ – of reciting the Nembutsu and trusting in the saving power of Amida Buddha. There is a subtle distinction being made here between the name of the tradition – Jodo Shinshu or Jodo Shinshu Buddhism – and the group of people, “Nembutsu followers.” I may be reading too much

70 http://www.tsdbt.org/web/node/8
71 Ibid.
into this because of my position as an academic and outsider to the group, but I perceive a certain tension in these statements between internal and external. The group (as a group) does not refer to itself first and foremost as Buddhist, Jodo Shinshu practitioners, or Japanese Buddhists. Also note that they are not followers of Shinran, the founder of Jodo Shinshu. Indeed, he is not mentioned until later in the section when Jodo Shinshu is being located in the larger world of Buddhism. These statements also contain a recognition that the phrase “Nembutsu followers” is going to be virtually unrecognizable to the larger community (Buddhist and non-Buddhist) and therefore use of the more common labels such as “Buddhist” or “practitioner of Jodo Shinshu” are necessary. Going on to place Jodo Shinshu in the larger Buddhist world and geographic space – as the Nishi Hongwanji in Japan and the BCA in the continental United States – seems almost like a concession or less important. The spiritual dimension of Nembutsu practice takes precedence over any classification and identification.

Also worth note are the intriguing comments regarding other Buddhist traditions. Through the lens of culturally-informed Buddhisms, we may interpret these remarks as reflecting two facets of the tradition: first, Japanese Buddhism in the era of Shinran (12th and 13th C Japan) was physically removed from the average person, located in compounds on Mt. Hiei. As Socho Ogui describes, Shinran “retreated from his life of ‘mountain Buddhism’ for the select few, and brought ‘ground level Buddhism’ down to the ordinary people of the villages and towns. He opened up the path to Buddhism for ordinary men, women, and children.”72 One of the consistent and defining features of the Jodo Shinshu tradition has been the appeal to the common person rather than the intellectual elite. (It is worth reminding ourselves that the companion label to ethnic Buddhism in the United States is convert. Convert tends to be used as a codeword for Euro-American, educated, and financially comfortable people who can afford the time and expense of frequent or lengthy meditation retreats and associated materials.) I interpret the statements on the TSDBT website as a reaction to the more popular forms of Buddhism in the

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United States that seek to merge the monastic and lay practices of traditions, such as Zen, for a Western audience. It is not necessary to emulate monastic practice, this paragraph implies, in order to reach the fundamental truth of Buddhism.

Nembutsu followers are the privileged ones; they can live normal lives working and having families while trusting in Amida’s grace to bring them to the Pure Land - quite a powerful and provocative sentiment for the Buddhist world. Emphasis on the average, ordinary person may also have the side benefit of appealing to an American/Western audience and serves to answer the question, “What does Jodo Shinshu and the BCA have to offer that Zen or Tibetan does not?” At the risk of belaboring my point, I would note that absent in this initial, and arguable most important, statement of thought is an ethnic, cultural, social, economic class, political, or geographic identifier. Hints to the historical socio-political context are present to a knowing reader, as I mentioned above. To an unknowing reader (the primary audience for this page), “Nembutsu” could be any language and does not immediately place the tradition in any particular socio-cultural or geographic context.

The second section on the “New to Buddhism” page is a brief overview of “Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in the Rocky Mountains.” The opening statements of this section are as instructive as the opening statements of the preceding section on the same page. The section begins:

Japanese immigrants settled in and around Denver in the early 1900s. Many were Jodo Shinshu Buddhists with strong ties to their religious heritage. Married couples especially wanted a strong Sangha for their families. 73

This is a perfect example of statements that can be interpreted in a number of ways depending on the scholar’s perspective. Our fictional scholar of ethnic Buddhism from earlier might interpret this as further evidence of an ethnically Japanese Buddhist community from the time of its founding almost 100 years ago. I see a subtle distinction being made between Jodo Shinshu Buddhists and non-Buddhists, geo-cultural space of origin aside. Some “Japanese immigrants” were Jodo Shinshu Buddhists and some

were not. The focus is on the community of Nembutsu followers, not the entire group of Japanese immigrants. The next part of the section highlights the time between 1919 and World War II, mentioning ministers and the geographic region served by the Denver-based community. It is in the third paragraph of this section that we are allowed a glimpse into the group’s perspective on World War II. The following quote is the paragraph in its entirety:

During World War II, Japanese-American citizens were forced into relocation camps. Simultaneously, many Japanese-Americans from California were evacuated to Colorado where they lived as “regular” citizens as opposed to “prisoners” of the relocation camps; most of these people settled in Denver. To serve them, the Denver Buddhist Church structure was enlarged. Reverend Shodo Tsunoda joined Reverend Tamai in 1944. Jodo Shinshu Buddhists throughout the tri-state area, especially in rural areas, generously gave money so a new facility could be built.74

First, let us note the dual identifier of “Japanese-American” used by the author(s) of the passage, as well as the additional descriptor of “citizens.” Second, note the language of “forced,” and the quotations around regular and prisoners. Third, the phrase “To serve them, the Denver Buddhist Church structure was enlarged” deserves note. From these statements we can come to the following conclusions: the second wave of Americans of Japanese ancestry to arrive in the Denver area were unwilling migrants, bowing to the geo-political pressures of the time which removed them from California and deposited them in the Colorado region. The Denver Buddhist/Jodo Shinshu community rose to the occasion to make the new arrivals welcome, incurring great expense to do so, adapting to the self-same socio-political events as the migrants.

The impact of the Second World War on Japanese-Americans is a subject of other studies, and the ramifications of which seem to be overlooked in some earlier works on Buddhism in America. This brief passage reminds us that not all ethnic communities are so by choice, and that in this instance, the Denver Jodo Shinshu and Colorado Japanese-American communities were forcibly enlarged by external cultural and political forces. It is not much of a stretch to imagine that the migrants were dropped in Colorado with little support from the government – and into a social climate fearful of rendering aid to a

group of people under suspicion by the government. In addition to enlarging the temple building, the narrative implies that Temple services to the community increased, and/or the Temple became the center of life for the migrants.

The final paragraph of the “Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in the Rocky Mountains” section traces the names the Temple has gone by since 1947, and the geographical space covered by the organization. This paragraph contains two further examples of adaptation by the community. The paragraph does not mention the changes made by the BCA to structure and content of weekly services made during World War II. However, it does mention, “the two assigned ministers could not possibly be in attendance at every service on every Sunday despite the fact that they constantly traveled from one temple to another. So lay members of each Sangha led the Sunday services when a Sensei could not be present.” On the surface, this highlights the dedication of the ministers and the strength of the community to overcome the frequent absence of a minister. Additionally, these statements add to my earlier sense that the rapid influx of members in the war years created logistical hardships for which the existing infrastructure was unprepared. Name changes of the Denver community, and the larger Tri-State organization, are instructive regarding public opinion about or perception of the group. During periods of strong anti-Asian sentiment, the organization maintained the “Church” designation. It was not until 1981 that the larger organization and the Denver community “changed their names to designate ‘Temple’ instead of ‘Church’.” While it is speculation on my part that the temple and organizational naming conventions are related to external factors as much or more than internal preference, the name changes may indicate a continuous restructuring or reassessment of how the community represented its identity to the non-Jodo Shinshu public. Furthermore, it is significant that the current name – Denver Buddhist Temple – is ambiguous as to tradition and geographic space of origin.

75 Earlier in the same paragraph, the author writes, “The...Tri-State Buddhist Church served sanghas in Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, Montana, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and western Texas.” Both quotations may be found at: http://www.tsdbt.org/web/node/8. Accessed 28 March 2012.
The last section of the page, “Denver Buddhist Temple” is short, and offers a summary of the Jodo Shinshu/BCA community in Denver. As one of the recurring themes of this study is identity, this section offers the following self-representation:

Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) temples are unique in the fact that they sponsor Sunday services and guide their respective organizations as an entity in the learning of Buddha Dharma. Because of this practice, we are able to form a cohesive Buddhist community comprised of a diverse group of people (age-wise, gender-wise, ethnicity-wise, etc.) in the heart of downtown Denver, Colorado. The Denver Buddhist Temple focuses on sharing the teachings (Dharma) of the Buddha and serving the community (Sangha) with educational and cultural opportunities. While we are not an evangelical religion, we do encourage you to ask questions and learn about Buddhism.

Because of the avenue I have chosen to pursue in this study, I am inclined to perceive the remarks about diversity among the community and various activities held through the Temple to be reactionary to criticism over time, criticism leveled at the BCA as a whole for being an ethnic and insular community. This community perceives itself to be diverse in several ways and as scholars we must balance the self-perception of the community with external observations. A comprehensive ethnographic study is the only way to determine if (1) the mentioned diversity exists, and (2) if it does, if it is unique to the Denver community, or if the membership of the overall BCA is represented by this statement.

Additional Observations

I would like to conclude my discussion of the TSDBT website with a few additional examples of why I see this site as an excellent case study on the topic of ethnic or culturally-informed Buddhisms. There are two pages that provide additional insight into the TSDBT community, the “Special Services” page (linked from the “New to Buddhism” page) and the “Affiliates” page (found in the next-to-last spot on the right of the secondary navigation row). The “Special Services” page contains brief descriptions of the twelve holidays celebrated by the TSDBT throughout the calendar year. Each description gives the Japanese name (in Romanized Japanese), a literal English translation, the common name for the event, if

the event occurs on a specific date, the date is given, and a description of the holiday. The descriptions vary in content and it is in the descriptions where we find more pieces to our puzzle. It is important to note that the “Special Services” page is written for an audience unfamiliar with Jodo Shinshu and possibly Buddhism in general. The descriptions are concise, well written, and generally convey the essence of the event. I would like to highlight three holiday descriptions: Shunki Higan-E (Spring Other Shore Gathering) or Spring Ohigan, Hanamatsuri (Flower Festival) and Kanbutsu-E (Bathe Buddha Gathering), and Autumn Higan/Ohigan.77

The description of Shunki Higan-E or Spring Ohigan has a three paragraph structure: the first paragraph explains the origin of the word “higan” as coming from the Sanskrit word “paramita” and gives a brief explanation of “paramita.” The second paragraph explains how the holiday is celebrated in Japan, and the different name used for the holiday in Japan (San Butsu E or Gathering to Praise the Buddha). The third paragraph explains the intent/purpose for the celebration of Ohigan. In these three short paragraphs (each one no longer than three sentences), the reader is presented with some very useful information. The piece most interesting for the purposes of this case study is the first sentence of the second paragraph: “Ohigan is a Japanese tradition.”78 With that short phrase, we see distinctions being made, a particular cultural strand is invoked, and at the same time, the information is incomplete. The reader is given background information to understand the name of the holiday and context for how events are carried out during that time by Jodo Shinshu practitioners in Japan, but there is no comparable information on how the holiday is celebrated by Jodo Shinshu communities outside of Japan. The third paragraph makes passing reference to the “Ohigan service,” but lacks description of any concrete actions performed at the service, or if the service is an event carried out by practitioners in

77 For the full text of the “Special Services” page, consult: http://www.tsdbt.org/web/node/27 or go to the “New to Buddhism” page, scroll to the bottom, and click on the “Special Services” link. Accessed 28 March 2012.
Japan as well as the United States. When there are other, more complete descriptions on this page, it seems odd for this one to be incomplete, and we must wonder why.

The answer may be located in the description for the companion holiday of Autumn Higan. The Autumn Higan paragraphs allow us to see that the Higan festivals – or more accurately, the practices that became known as Higan – predate Jodo Shinshu and may have pre-dated the introduction of Buddhism to Japan. This description, combined with the Spring Higan description, is emphasizing the Buddhist philosophy for the holiday. If a scholar was looking for markers of ethnicity, that could be one such marker. At the same time, even if these holidays have their origins in pre-Buddhist Japan, they have clearly become Buddhist holidays within the Jodo Shinshu tradition. And by extension, have become two among twelve holidays to be celebrated by the BCA in the United States.

The explanations of Hanamatsuri (Flower Festival) and Kanbutsu-E (Bathe Buddha Gathering), which occur on the same day, provide an interesting contrast to Spring and Autumn Higan. The root of the holiday is the birthday of the person who would become the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama (not to be confused with Amida Buddha). The description provides a short summary of the account of the Buddha’s birth and a comment by the author that the “legendary story is not taken literally but used to describe the significance of an extraordinary person.” The rest of that paragraph and the next one explain the figurative interpretation of the story and how the story continues to have relevance for Buddhists in the modern world. The final paragraph explains the second part of the holiday and two of the rituals performed on that day. In contrast to Spring and Autumn Higan, this is presented as a Buddhist holiday being celebrated by Jodo Shinshu Buddhists (rather than a Japanese custom adopted or combined with existing Buddhist thought). And unlike the Spring and Autumn Higan descriptions, there is no indication that Hanamatsuri is a “distinctly Japanese” holiday.

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79 I am basing this observation on the first two sentences of the description, which states, “Ohigan occurs with the autumnal equinox and is one of the few religious holidays which has no direct link to Shakyamuni Buddha. It is distinctly a Japanese holiday.” - http://www.tsdbt.org/web/node/27. Accessed 28 March 2012.

The descriptions of Hanamatsuri and Kanbutsu-E are also useful, perhaps counterintuitively, for what isn’t said. Most descriptions on the page are more in the style of Hanamatsuri than Spring and Autumn Higan: an explanation of the name, context of the event in Buddhist philosophy and/or cosmology, and how the holiday is approached by contemporary Jodo Shinshu Buddhists. Explicit references to how the holiday is celebrated in Japan are the exception on this page. Therefore, how do we consider this page in terms of evidence for an ethnic Buddhist designation? Do we consider percentages (such as, one third of the holidays mention the Japanese custom or origins of the holiday) and decide that the marker for ethnic is a majority of descriptions are focused on the celebration in Japan? Or is it less quantifiable than that? Is it perhaps the impression with which a novice visitor to the site would take away? (And since most scholars interested in this question are unlikely to be a “novice” visitors, answering the question would require focused ethnographic research.) As a non-practitioner scholar, my impression of the “Special Services” page is informed by my previous knowledge of Jodo Shinshu, Buddhism, and the study of Buddhism in the United States, as well as having a research interest in this site. With that positioning in mind, I see the “Special Services” page in the following ways: (1) An excellent resource for several audiences – members (as reference), non-members visitors to the site, students learning about Jodo Shinshu, the media, and academics/scholars. 81 (2) An elegant example of how cultural elements can be combined to form something new for a fresh audience and/or a change in geographic or cultural spaces. By that I mean that the information on this page hints at Buddhism’s adaption to pre-existing customs (Spring Higan) and Jodo Shinshu’s adaptation to a new linguistic space - the writing of this page, in English, can be seen as cultural mediation and adapting to the needs of a new audience.

81 Students would obviously need to be reminded to treat the webpage as a primary source without a named author and evaluate it accordingly.
Finally, let us consider the “Affiliates” page. This page is accessed through a link on the secondary navigation row. The placement of the link, next-to-last on the right, is curious. Except for the placement of the “Affiliates” link, the navigation row is arranged in alphabetical order from left to right. Placing the “Affiliates” link out of order indicates a desire to have it be less prominent or that the page (the information on the page) is less important than the other links in that navigation row (Announcements, Calendar, Newsletter). As the name suggests, the “Affiliates” page lists groups who use the Temple as a gathering space. There are twelve groups listed; of those twelve, only the Buddhist Women’s Association is directly related to Jodo Shinshu. The other eleven activities – Aikido, Craft Class, Denver Bonsai Club, Denver Taiko and Denver Junior Taiko, Japanese Language School, Judo, Kayo Club, Minyo Club, Ohara School of Ikebana, and Volleyball – are secular activities, most of which have their origins in Japan. It is worth mentioning also that the “Announcement” pages reveal activities for members of the Temple that are not listed on this page, such as the Temple Band, an Art Club, and a dance club for children. In other words, with the exception of the BWA, the organizations and activities mentioned on this page are separate from Temple community activities. Temple members may choose to participate in these activities, but the organizations are Denver-based and open to the public. My interpretation of the page is that the Temple has historically been associated with Japanese cultural events and as a result is seen as the logical meeting place for these organizations. Let me be clear – I do not believe this use of the Temple building may be used as support for the concept of ethnic Buddhism. To the contrary it helps to highlight the complexities of the question. Meeting places are often at a premium, particularly in densely populated areas, and churches/temples often rent out meeting space to other local organizations. Is it significant that the majority of the “Affiliates” are engaged in an activity which has its origin in Japan and Japanese culture? Certainly. However, rather than view them as integral components of the Jodo Shinshu Temple, they should be viewed as Japanese cultural events.

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that take place in the greater Denver region and meet at the Temple. The placement of the “Affiliates” link, and the primarily non-Jodo Shinshu activities listed on the page, support an interpretation of these events as distinct and separate from Jodo Shinshu/Temple functions.

Summary

This second case study is just a brief glimpse into the Tri-State/Denver Buddhist Temple community. From the website, we are given a very strong sense of community – the image banner used on all the pages shows adults and children sharing and celebrating a common, Jodo Shinshu Buddhist vision and the Announcements pages reveal weekly community gatherings after the Sunday service, and a wide range of activities tailored to the interests and needs of the community. However, the website is constructed in such a way that this sense of community is open to new additions, either visitors or new members. Visitors are greeted during the Sunday service each week, the Temple allows local groups to use Temple buildings as meeting spaces, the quality and quantity of educational information on the website, and the recent creation of a You Tube channel for weekly Dharma Talks all speak to the welcoming nature of the group. In a paragraph quoted above, the website emphasizes that one of the defining features of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism is its emphasis on the group of people gathered around the Nembutsu, and that one of their goals is to “form a cohesive Buddhist community.” Our culturally-informed Buddhisms analysis reveals a group brought together and maintained not by ethnic, geo-social, or even cultural ties, but by the common cause of the Nembustu follower.

Chapter Four: Concluding Thoughts

When Charles Prebish was studying Buddhist communities during the 1970s, his distinction between Buddhist groups oriented around serving a specific community – generally Asian immigrants – and groups founded to serve the specific interests of non-Asian Americans was grounded in his experiences and observations. Although he chose not to make use of Tetsuden Kashima’s work on the Buddhist Churches of America, Prebish could have found support in Kashima’s work for his first type of Buddhist group (we may recall that the first type of Buddhist community was focused on the maintenance of tradition, based in a specific ethnic group, and slow to change). Paul Numrich’s work in the 1990s on Buddhist communities in Chicago demonstrates that some temple buildings house dual – “parallel” – congregations, one of recent immigrants and one of non-immigrants interested almost exclusively in meditation. However, there is a noticeable difference between the Buddhist groups about which Prebish wrote (and on which he based his two-fold typology) and the Buddhist communities in the United States over thirty years later. Typologies and categories that may have once adequately described Buddhist communities no longer fit when the conversation over classification was revived in the 1990s and definitely do not suffice in the present day.

The purpose of this thesis was not to call into question the validity of Prebish’s original work. Rather, the review of scholarship in Chapter 2 was intended to demonstrate how scholars have struggled repeatedly over the years to create or modify the structure and language of classification models to adapt to the Buddhist landscape in the United States. In the Introduction, I listed several goals for the culturally-informed Buddhisms model, many of which were crafted with the intention of rectifying the limitations of previous theories and models. As I believe the theoretical discussion and case studies have demonstrated, the culturally-informed Buddhisms model reframes the classification discussion in terms that are specific to the geographic and cultural contexts of a Buddhist community.
The case studies presented in Chapter 3 highlight a culturally and ethnically diverse community that has adapted repeatedly to physical relocation, political pressure, and shifting cultural landscapes. Furthermore, the lens of *culturally-informed Buddhisms* allows us to make sense of, and speak coherently about, the various strands of influence that have shaped the Buddhist Churches of America organization over time. While I argue strongly against the classification of the Buddhist Churches of America as an *ethnic Buddhist* institution, threads of Japanese culture are still present and visible, as the poster for the Winter Pacific Seminar and the re-activation of Japanese language services demonstrate.

In the December 2011 Issue of the Tri-State/Denver Buddhist Temple Newsletter, the Temple Administrator Donna Inouye reflected on her son’s recent wedding. Ms. Inouye relates that her first trip to Japan was in July of 2010 – an unpleasant time of year to visit, it seems, if one is used to aridity of Denver – and her second trip was in November of 2011 for her son’s wedding. Chris Inouye is an excellent example of Herberg & Chandler’s comments about later generations taking an interest in their ethnic and cultural heritages – born and raised in the United States, yet traveling to Japan as a young adult, thus introducing not only himself, but his immediate family, to present-day Japan. As Buddhists born in the United States, Ms. Inouye and her son are neither *ethnic Buddhists* nor *convert Buddhists*. The nuances that the *ethnic/convert* models are unable to account for – such as the American Inouyes forging a new link to Japan, and not through the auspices of the Temple – are nuances the *culturally-informed Buddhisms* model is well-equipped to bring to light. What may appear on the surface to be an Asian community of Buddhists is in reality a much more complex and diverse group than scholars have previously been able to express when using rigid models of classification. Therefore, even if members of the communities are ethnically or racially Japanese – and even that varies widely – the notion of *ethnic Buddhism* is incomplete because the self-representation of the communities shows multiple cultural strands at work.
I have argued that labeling Buddhist communities as *ethnic* is inadequate and limiting. In the case of the BCA or the TSDBT, Chandler’s constellation of identity model would leave us trying to arrange three or four constellations (American, Japanese, Buddhist, Jodo Shinshu) in an order that makes sense and applies to the majority of the group, which seems impossible. The closest we could come is *American Jodo Shinshu Japanese Buddhism*. And if I were forced to choose between that and *ethnic Buddhism*, I would choose the specificity of the Chandler-inspired naming.

Ultimately, though, we can locate the answer by listening to what the community has already told us on their websites. With the contents of both case studies in mind, I offer the following two options for consideration as a new naming convention, based on the *culturally-informed Buddhisms* model: *Jodo Shinshu Buddhists of the United States* or *Nembutsu followers of the United States*. The first, *Jodo Shinshu Buddhists of the United States*, has the advantage of locating the group by current geographic space (United States), which can also function as a socio-political identifier; by specific tradition, Jodo Shinshu; and by general religious affiliation, Buddhist. The latter identifier is only necessary until such a time as Jodo Shinshu achieves greater name recognition among the general public. Does this naming convention meet our goals laid out in the first chapter? It adequately locates the tradition in its current spaces while maintaining continuity with its origins as a religious tradition. It does not rely on a naming convention that could lead to confusion over ethnic or linguistic requirements for membership, as *Japanese American Buddhism* might. And it allows us to distinguish between the various schools and subsets of Japanese Buddhism (i.e. distinguish between Zen, Nichiren, Pure Land, etc.). On a broader scale, scholars can exchange the *Jodo Shinshu* identifier for any number of other identifiers for their own work: Rinzai Zen, Soto Zen, Vipassana, or Vajrayana, to name a few. Another advantage to this naming convention is that is does not preclude or interfere with other identifiers that an individual might choose to invoke. For example, were I to refer to myself as Irish American (as my cultural heritage) and joined the TSDBT community, I could identify as Irish American Jodo Shinshu.
Buddhist of the United States without my cultural heritage becoming confused with my religious affiliation.

My second suggestion, *Nembutsu followers of the United States*, has the advantage of being primarily informed by the community itself, but on further consideration, I believe it to be more problematic than useful. In an attempt for specificity, it errs on the side of being so specific so as to be opaque to anyone but practitioners. Therefore, while it is important for scholars to respect a group’s identity, for use in educational materials it is probably best to employ a more transparent naming scheme.

The lens of *culturally-informed Buddhisms* provides us with the means to shift our scholarly terminology for classification away from ethnically-based language to language that is meaningful and identifiable to members of the tradition in question, transparent to non-members, and flexible enough to adapt as the community moves through spatial and temporal landscapes. Previous models of classification would have the BCA be the standard for *ethnic* Buddhist institutions, even though the community is no longer made up of Japanese immigrants. Referring to the overall community as *Jodo Shinshu Buddhists of the United States* locates the community in its current social, political, and geographic contexts and achieves a new level of specificity. Finally, it makes a distinction between the organization known as the Buddhist Churches of America and the community of practitioners.

This thesis has necessarily been limited in length and scope, and there are several areas for further investigation. Were this current project to be continued, it would expand in the following ways: It was not in the scope of this project to engage in a more extended discussion of the notion of ‘culture,’ nor was an exploration of the term ‘tradition’ possible. Both would be the necessary next additions to Chapter 2. Additional case studies, added to Chapter 3, would be the second area for expansion. This thesis examined websites only from the Buddhist Churches of America organization – communities previously encompassed by the label of *ethnic Buddhism*. It would be equally informative to use the
**culturally-informed Buddhisms** lens on websites for communities heretofore labeled *convert Buddhist*. These new case studies would highlight the socio-cultural situation of the group’s founding – such as San Francisco in the early 20th Century or Boulder, Colorado in the 1960s – as well as the socio-cultural origins of the Buddhisms on which the groups draw for their practice. Any study of *convert* communities requires an attention to generational shifts, where there are now second and third generation Buddhists, which will provide interesting comparison data to the formerly *ethnic* communities. These comparisons would highlight the general innovations and evolution of Buddhist communities in the United States, perhaps highlighting underlying similarities between the modes of self-representation.

Beyond this specific project, further research with the **culturally-informed Buddhisms** model could pursue a number of different areas of inquiry. The first avenue could be to perform a similar case study on the websites of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai‘i. This would allow for the observations presented here to be supported with a broader data set and demonstrate the applicability of the model for communities outside the continental United States. A similar investigation would consider websites of Jodo Shinshu communities in Canada and Mexico. As I mentioned in the second chapter, I believe the **culturally-informed Buddhisms** model to be complementary to ethnographic research methods, and incorporating the model into ethnographic research on Jodo Shinshu communities in the continental United States or the Hawaiian Islands would be another area of research to pursue. Ethnographic research is the best way to determine if the conclusions reached in this thesis, utilizing the lens of **culturally-informed Buddhisms**, accurately reflect the lived reality of the communities. Ethnographic research will also reveal cultural influences that may be obscured in text-based media.

One final example of **culturally-informed Buddhisms** is perhaps the best way to end this discussion and look forward to future studies. The title for an earlier version of this project (presented at the 2012 Rocky Mountain-Great Plains Regional AAR Conference), ‘Dharma for Keiki,’ was drawn from a website representing four Jodo Shinshu communities on Hawai‘i Island, Dharma OHANA. Unfortunately,
the site is no longer available, nor does it appear to have been replaced with four individual websites for the temple communities. When I examined this website, I came across a section titled ‘Dharma for Keiki’ which was explained as: “‘Dharma’ refers to the Buddhist teachings and ‘Keiki’ is a Hawaiian word which refers to children.” This one short phrase encompasses multiple cultural, linguistic, temporal, and geographic spaces, and by its presence on a website situates itself in another set of cultures and spaces. In order to not only grasp the full significance of the phrase, but to then convey that significance, a researcher must fully account for the cultural – which in this case includes linguistic, ethnic, geographic, and political – influences that have shaped the community over time. There is little doubt in my mind that the communities represented by the Dharma OHANA page would have been classified as ethnic Buddhism by earlier generations of scholars. If we look at these communities not merely as ethnic Buddhism, but as Jodo Shinshu Buddhists of the Hawaiian Islands, we allow ourselves the freedom to see and accurately represent the richness and diversity of Buddhism in the United States.
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