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Two Buddhisms, Three Buddhisms, and Racism

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R e s e a r c h A r t i c l e

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Abstract

Over the past several decades, observers of American Buddhism have created numerous typologies to describe different categories of Buddhists in the United States. These taxonomies use different criteria to categorize groups: style of practice, degree of institutional stability, mode of transmission to the U.S., ethnicity, etc. Each reveals some features of American Buddhism and obscures others. None accounts adequately for hybrids or for long-term changes within categories. Most include a divide between convert Buddhists, characterized as predominantly Caucasian, and “heritage” or “ethnic” Buddhists, characterized as Asian immigrants and refugees, as well as their descendants. This article examines several typologies, and considers two dynamics: the effects of white racism on the development of American Buddhist communities; and the effects of unconscious white privilege in scholarly discourse about these communities. It critiques “ethnic” categories and proposes other ways to conceptualize the diverse forms of Buddhism outside Asia.

For several summers I have taught a class in Berkeley on Buddhism in the United States, which alternates between classroom sessions and visits to various Buddhist communities. It gives students a chance to experience for themselves the incredible diversity of Buddhist traditions. In just the three adjoining towns of Berkeley, Oakland, and Emeryville, the class has many options: Jōdo Shinshu, at least three varieties of American Zen, two kinds of Korean Zen, Japanese Sōtō-shū, Thai Theravāda, Vipassanā, Nyingma, Shambhala, Sōka Gakkai, and Ch’an. For the past three decades, scholars have been trying to make sense of this dizzying variety nationwide.

A number of scholars have tried to create some clarity by developing taxonomies and sorting Buddhist groups into them. This paper will mention a dozen examples. Typically, the taxonomies divide Buddhist groups and practitioners into two or three major categories. The criteria vary. Some focus on styles of religious practice; others on the religious identity of members or the mode by which a tradition was transmitted from Asia to the U.S. Several make a distinction between so-called “ethnic” Buddhists and “convert” Buddhists. The former refers to immigrants and refugees from Asian Buddhist cultures, and their descendants. The latter refers to those whose ancestry is not Asian and whose religious heritage is not Buddhist. The majority of converts have European ancestry.

This bifurcation seems to make sense on its face. One can indeed observe significant differences between groups catering primarily to Buddhist converts and those catering to people whose cultural heritage is Buddhist. Communities in each category tend to approach practice differently, and serve different purposes for their members. Yet this conceptual

division is also problematic in a number of ways. The category “ethnic Buddhism” is especially problematic.

Among the scholars who argue for a typology distinguishing between converts and “ethnic” or “heritage” Buddhists, Paul Numrich has been a staunch advocate and, I think, particularly thoughtful. His support for this approach is based on research he conducted in Thai and Sinhalese Theravāda communities in Chicago and Los Angeles during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the temples Numrich visited, he found “parallel congregations” operating side-by-side: one composed of immigrants and their descendants, who engaged in cultural and merit-making activities; and one composed of converts, who were mostly white, and who were interested primarily in meditation and Buddhist philosophy (Numrich, 1996).¹ These parallel congregations interacted relatively little, and “pursue[d] substantively different perspectives and practices of Buddhism” (Numrich, 2006: 207).² Other observers of Buddhism in the United States have proposed different taxonomies, several of which include three categories.

I will say more below about Numrich’s “two Buddhisms” and other writers’ “three Buddhisms.”³ In the process, I will take up some challenges that Numrich offered in 2006, ten years after his original ethnographic research was published. He urged “that advocates and critics alike acknowledge the value of the notion [of “two Buddhisms”], and that they direct their energies toward advancing the field in creative ways, both within and outside [this] paradigm” (ibid). I intend to offer some critiques of his model here, but I will begin by acknowledging its value. Numrich has argued for it because it accounts for the fact that Theravāda 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 (Numrich, 2000). These differing needs and race-based disparities of power and access are real and important, and Numrich is right to stress them.

He also suggested a number of ways that scholars might advance the field. Among these were “inter-generational dynamics, denominational and ecumenical issues, and the effects of racism and minority social status” (Numrich, 2006: 224). He encouraged insights from multiple fields, including Buddhist studies and American religious history, and the use of various theoretical frameworks, including postcolonialism and transnationalism. These are excellent challenges, and this is my response to them.

I have three goals. One is to offer some observations about how racism has affected American Buddhisms “on the ground.” More than that, however, I will reflect upon the ways that white observers have *described* how American Buddhisms are practiced on the ground. Specifically, I

¹ See especially chapter 4.

² This article was published earlier as Numrich, 2003.

³ Charles Prebish first coined the term “Two Buddhisms” in 1978, and employed it again in a 1993 essay. However, as explained in this article, Prebish used the term differently in 1978 than Numrich did—and differently than Prebish himself did in 1993. In 1978, Prebish distinguished between more and less serious students of Buddhism; in 1996 and subsequently, Numrich used the term to make an ethnic distinction; and in 1993, Prebish revised and expanded his categories, proposing that Buddhist groups be categorized as “ethnic,” “export,” or “new.”

will examine a number of taxonomies, which for several years have dominated discourse in this field. I will explain how I believe unconscious white privilege manifests in the discourse. My third goal is to propose alternative ways to think about the varieties of Buddhism in the United States, and perhaps elsewhere outside Asia. My proposal is based in part upon observations about inter-generational dynamics. My analysis is also informed by recent theoretical work on postcolonialism, transnationalism, and racial formation, and on research by scholars in several disciplines, including American religious history, the sociology of religion, and Buddhist studies.

Some Definitions: Race, Racism, and Privilege

Because the terms “racism” and “white privilege” can be so loaded, I will begin with some definitions. According to Michael Omi and Howard Winant, **Race** “is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi and Winant, 2004: 116). It is a social construct; it varies by time and place; and it draws upon arbitrary criteria for categorizing people. Differences in skin color, hair, and facial features may be invoked as criteria distinguishing “white” from “black” from “Asian,” for example, but this need not be the case. In the nineteenth century, many Anglo-Saxons did not regard my Irish ancestors as “white” when they emigrated to North America during the Potato Famine. Nor were Jews, Muslims, and Christians from Southern or Eastern Europe considered white. Ideas about whiteness have changed over time. Ideas about blackness and Asianness also have changed. Filipinos have sometimes been defined as Asian, and sometimes not. Not so long ago in the United States, if one had *any* ancestor with African heritage, one was legally categorized as black.

Racism “creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race” (Omi and Winant, 2004: 131). One key feature of racism is *essentialism*—a belief that all members of a racially defined group have fundamental and immutable characteristics. Again, the specific features that get essentialized may differ by time and place. One need not be white to have attitudes that could be called “racist”; anyone can decide that some racially defined group is essentially different from one’s own group, and feel prejudice toward that “other” group. Note, however, that the definition of racism cited here emphasizes what certain forms of racial essentialism *do*: they create and reinforce *dominance*—that is, systems of unequal access to power and resources. That is the manner in which I’m using the term “racism” here.

Privilege is a consequence of racism. Alison Bailey has defined it as a set of “unearned assets conferred systematically.... [I]f we want to determine whether a particular advantage qualifies as a privilege, we need to look at that advantage macroscopically in order to observe whether it plays a role in keeping complex systems of dominance in place” (Bailey, 2004: 305). One can enjoy unearned advantages based on one’s race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, physical abilities, and/or religion. Like racism, privilege varies by context. One reaps the benefits of membership in a dominant group *regardless* of whether one wants or intends to do so, and regardless of whether one is personally prejudiced toward non-dominant groups. Privilege is a characteristic of *systems* of dominance into which we are born, and which condition us all our lives. It is usually exercised unconsciously and unintentionally.

It is possible to have privilege in some ways—for example, as an educated, middle-class white person in the United States—and simultaneously to lack it in other ways: as a woman, as a gay or lesbian or transgendered person, as a person with a disability, as a non-Christian. I enjoy white privilege based on my culture's current understanding of whiteness. I can arrange to be around other white people most of the time. I can talk about racism without being regarded as self-serving or having a chip on my shoulder. I am more likely to get a favorable interest rate on a mortgage, and less likely to be stopped by police while driving or incarcerated if I commit a crime. I am not presumed to represent all white people, and I have rarely felt rejected or threatened because of my race. I have, on the other hand, been harassed, legally discriminated against, and rendered invisible because I am not heterosexual, and I have been physically threatened, taken less seriously, and paid less money than colleagues because I am female.

After compiling forty-six examples of privilege she enjoys as a white person, Peggy McIntosh observed,

some privileges make me feel at home in the world. Others allow me to escape penalties or dangers that others suffer. Through some, I escape fear, anxiety, insult, injury, or a sense of not being welcome, not being real. Some keep me from having to hide, to be in disguise, to feel sick or crazy, to negotiate each transaction from the position of being an outsider or, within my group, a person who is suspected of having too close links with the dominant culture. Most keep me from having to be angry (McIntosh, 2004: 323; see also McIntosh, 1990).

A key feature of privilege is that when we have it, we are largely oblivious to it: we take it for granted as normal, natural, or deserved because we earned it. We may deny or fail to notice that we have advantages, access to resources, and more positive attention simply because we belong to a dominant group, and that our advantages depend directly upon other people's disadvantages. *Privilege means not having to notice that you have it.*⁴ The advantages of privilege are cumulative. Better housing, better schooling, better mentoring, better access to professional networks, better job prospects, better pay, and more affirmation from mainstream society all lead to more confidence, more access to resources, and more likelihood of success.

Having defined these key terms, I want to make some of my own assumptions clear. First, I believe that ethnic identity, a social construct, is not necessarily bad. It is simply a sense of shared language, culture and/or national origin. It can help to locate and orient us in the world. I am proud of my own ethnic heritages. Pushed to extremes, however, ethnic pride can fuel xenophobia, nativism, and genocide.

Second, I believe that a long American history of white racism, and minority groups' concomitant distrust, have contributed to the development of racially segregated Buddhist

⁴ For a brief and excellent discussion of privilege, see (Johnson, 2006). Sometimes we confuse privilege with racism, and deny the realities of privilege because we do not hold racist beliefs. Or we may notice privilege, and believe we already know all we need to know about it. This makes us less teachable, less conscious of the ways we may perpetuate it, and less effective as allies. The process of learning to see it is ongoing.

communities in the United States. I am *not* suggesting, however, that any of the *authors* whose ideas I critique are racist. I repeat: *I am not calling anybody racist*. Most of the scholars I mention have dedicated their lives to sympathetically understanding Asian histories, cultures, and religions. Rather, I believe that some of the *assumptions* underlying *taxonomies of American Buddhism* reflect *unconscious white privilege*. That is why I distinguish between racism and privilege. I want to shine some light on ways that privilege can manifest unconsciously in one area of discourse. I do this reflexively as a white scholar specializing in this field.

Because privilege is a consequence of systems of domination, a necessary step in shifting such systems is for those who have privilege within them to notice how privilege works. That is my primary aim: to notice and describe it, in order to help work against systemic racism. I assume most of my colleagues share that goal. Having laid this groundwork, I will turn to examining several taxonomies.

Emma Layman: “Evangelical, Church, and Meditational Styles”

The first was developed by psychologist Emma McCloy Layman, who profiled about 20 American Buddhist communities in 1976. She saw them as falling into three broad categories, based on their styles of practice. Nichiren Shōshū-Sōka Gakkai was “evangelical”; the Buddhist Churches of America, Jōdo-shū, Nichiren-shū, and Buddha’s Universal Church were “church”-like; and convert-oriented Zen, Tibetan, Theravāda, and Ch’an organizations were “meditational.” The range of groups was ethnically diverse, but Layman focused on the American-born members of the meditation groups. They were typically white, middle-class, well-educated, single people between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five.⁵

Most of the groups Layman categorized as “church-like” catered to people of Japanese, Chinese, or Southeast Asian ancestry. Members’ age range was much broader. Children typically grew up in these communities, departed during their teens, and returned after marriage and childbirth. These groups tended to focus on sūtra study and/or cultivating virtue. In some cases their main halls were outfitted with pews. Their leaders performed marriages and funerals and provided pastoral counseling. Over the decades since Layman’s study, some of the meditation groups she studied have become more “church-like,” as well.

The “evangelical” group, Nichiren Shōshū of America-Sōka Gakkai International (NSA-SGI, currently just SGI), was then 35 percent Caucasian; the rest were a mix of Asian, Asian

⁵ Layman also studied Shingon and Shugendō organizations, but did not include the Sōtō Zen temples Zenshūji of Los Angeles, founded in 1921, or Sōkoji of San Francisco, founded in 1933. This is interesting, because she was fluent enough in Japanese to serve as a translator for the U.S. Navy. It is not clear why she overlooked them. Neither of these pioneering Zen temples has received much notice in historical accounts of Buddhism in North America, although Sōkoji is mentioned as the place Suzuki Shunryu first began teaching American hippies to meditate. Typically, the literature has credited people such as D.T. Suzuki, Alan Watts, and Beat-era converts with developing Zen in the United States. Duncan Ryuken Williams is currently researching and writing about first-generation Japanese-American Buddhists, which will help to fill this gap (see website “Duncan Ryuken Williams,” listed in the bibliography). A striking finding in Layman’s research is that in every group but the Buddhist Churches of America, she found more men than women. This is surprising, because women have consistently outnumbered men in most American religious communities (Braude, 1997). Further research would be necessary to determine whether this gender pattern persists to the present day, and if so, why.

American, African American and Latino/a members. This group continues to be the most ethnically diverse Buddhist group in the United States, by far. British scholar Sharon Smith has made some interesting observations about why. SGI has promoted an ideal of “global citizenship” in a way that de-centers whiteness, she says. In a variety of ways SGI also actively addresses the particular needs and concerns of ethnic minority members; and it promotes their active participation in the organization (Smith, 2003).

Charles Prebish and the Two Buddhisms

Around the same time Layman’s survey was published, Charles Prebish mused on “two Buddhisms” he saw in America. Many Asian-based new religious movements were popping up, and the distinction he drew between categories was based on the degree to which a group seemed institutionally stable.

One form of Buddhism places primary emphasis on sound, basic doctrines ... and on solid religious practice (which may reflect sectarian doctrinal peculiarities). These groups are slow to develop, conservative in nature, and remarkably *stable* in growth, activity and teaching. The other line of development includes those groups which seem to emerge shortly after radical social movements (such as the Beat generation and the drug culture)... Stressing less the basic doctrine and painstaking practice, they usually base their attraction on the promise of something new, frequently centered in the personal charisma of a flamboyant leader. In other words, they replace the old social order, now in decay or disfavor, with a new one, replete with the same sort of trappings, but transmuted into what is thought to be a more profoundly ‘relevant’ religious foundation. By nature flashy, opaquely exotic, and ‘hip,’ these movements gain much attention in the press, but are inherently unstable. Some ... do endure, but only after the pandemonium has passed and they have adopted a more solid working basis. It is usually only these flashy groups that generate significant public interest in the press (1978: 171-72).

Prebish hinted at an ethnic divide, as Layman had, and likewise focused on the convert Buddhists rather than on those with Buddhist heritage. He remarked that converts included “a veritable ‘mixed bag’ of serious, mature, understanding students and practitioners, and a group of no less serious, but seriously limited students who understand little, perceive less, but are wildly vocal” (1978: 155). His general observations seem apt, especially given the era, but it is not clear which organizations he saw as “stable” or “flashy.” San Francisco Zen Center, for example, attracted hippies and generated considerable press in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as it sought to raise funds for the first Zen monastery in North America and launched various business ventures. It could have been considered “flashy,” but like other high-profile groups, it became more stable over time and more concerned with “painstaking practice.”

Paul Numrich’s Two Buddhisms

Numrich’s “two Buddhisms,” described two decades later, are explicitly divided along ethnic lines. Numrich examined only immigrant-oriented Theravāda communities, however, so his

findings do not apply to multi-ethnic or multi-racial congregations, some of which have emerged since his study.⁶ Nor does the “two Buddhisms” model account for Asian immigrants or students who become interested in Buddhism *after* they arrive in the U.S., and therefore could be considered converts. Numrich has argued that such people do not count as converts, however.

For ethnic Asians in the West, it is really not a matter of ‘conversion’ to Buddhism even if one’s family or ethnic group was not Buddhist in Asia in recent times. It is rather a matter of reversion, or of revisioning their Buddhist heritage, even if that heritage has suffered hiatus for some time, or has to be created in response to the social pressures involved in minority group identity formation (2006: 223).

I disagree with him here. It seems to me comparable to assuming that a person whose ancestry is American or British, and who emigrates to Thailand, is tacitly Christian. Thus, if she decides in Thailand to practice Christianity, she is simply “reverting” to her “heritage faith.” But what if her ancestors were Jewish? Similarly, Malaysians or Indonesians who emigrate to the United States probably would be considered Asian, but their ancestral countries are predominantly Muslim, not Buddhist. A Korean-American’s family religion may very well be Presbyterian. 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.

A more important problem with the ethnic-convert divide is that it tends to break down over time, because of generational dynamics, exogamous marriage, and cultural exchanges with the dominant culture. Numrich found, for example, that some immigrants he met became more interested in meditation, and some converts took on more Theravāda ritual behaviors. Converts in one temple were enlisted to promote Buddhism as compatible with modern science among second-generation youth, and to help those youth affirm their Thai or Sinhalese cultural heritages (Numrich, 1996: 77).

Some communities outside the scope of Numrich’s study blur the lines even further. Sociologist Wendy Cadge, who studied Theravāda Buddhism around the U.S. a few years later, noted, “The divide between Asians and non-Asians is often described as one of the main characteristics of Buddhism in America. While this has often been the case, the current

⁶ Numrich’s “parallel congregations” concept might usefully apply to convert groups that began practicing meditation under the guidance of Japanese Zen missionaries sent to the U.S. to serve immigrant-oriented Zen temples, but who eventually split off to form separate communities, such as San Francisco Zen Center and Zen Center of Los Angeles. It could also apply, in a limited way, to more recent cases in which members of minority groups, such as people of color or LGBT practitioners, form communities or conduct special retreats within majority-culture institutions, as has occurred at San Francisco Zen Center and Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California. These specialized groups or events do not necessarily involve different forms of practice; they simply provide a supportive environment for meditators frustrated by insensitivities they encounter within the dominant group. See <http://www.spiritrock.org/display.asp?pageid=8&catid=2&scatid=31> for information about Spirit Rock’s diversity programs (accessed January 6, 2010). For San Francisco Zen Center programs, see <http://www.sfzc.org>. SFZC offers meditation instruction in Spanish, and retreats and scholarships for people of color. A website devoted specifically to practitioners of color is <http://www.rainbowdharma.com>.

picture is considerably more complex” (Cadge, 2001, n.p.; see also Cadge, 2005). While the “parallel congregations” that Numrich observed are “not uncommon,” she wrote,

At Thai temples in North Carolina and Washington State, Asians and non-Asians are beginning to attend meditation classes and weekend services together, and teachings are given in both Thai and English. Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery, a community of white monastics in Redwood Valley, California, is supported by lay Asian and non-Asian Buddhists alike, as is Metta Forest Monastery, a Thai temple near San Diego, led by American-born Thanissaro Bhikku. Asian and non-Asian monks live together at some U.S. Buddhist temples. At Ammayatarama Buddhist Monastery in Seattle, for example, two Thai monks and two American-born monks are in residence. And across the country some Asians do visit the meditation centers that are attended primarily by non-Asian Buddhists. In Massachusetts, the Vipassanā Meditation Center has begun to facilitate the visits of non-English speakers by offering retreats in Khmer, Hindi, and Chinese (2001, n.p.).

“American Buddhism” vs. “Buddhism in America”

A far more problematic “two Buddhisms” typology was proposed by Helen Tworikov in a 1991 editorial for the Buddhist magazine *Tricycle*. She observed:

There is no one way to be a Buddhist. Like other world religions, Buddhism has proved capable of providing something for everyone. The many sects that now exist in the United States reflect the compelling and flexible dimensions inherent in any body of ideas that has been tested by time and has crossed continents. There are a growing number of voices here concerned with the shape of American Buddhism, concerned with arbitrating which interpretations seem appropriate for this society and which may be better left behind in Asia. But whose America? Whose Buddhism? ... The spokespeople for Buddhism in America have been, almost exclusively, educated members of the white middle class... Asian American Buddhists ... so far ... have not figured prominently in the development of something called American Buddhism (1991: 4).

Although Tworikov’s editorial was actually lauding pluralism, the latter remark sparked an understandably irritated response from members of the Buddhist Churches of America, both Japanese and European American, who pointed out that the BCA had been developing an American Buddhism for more than a century. Tworikov seemed to be equating “American” with “white,” they said. Rev. Ryo Imamura, an eighteenth-generation Jōdo Shinshū priest, replied:

It was my American-born parents and their generation who courageously and diligently fostered the growth of American Buddhism despite having to practice discreetly in hidden ethnic temples and in concentration camps because of the same white bigotry. It was us [sic] Asian Buddhists who welcomed countless white Americans into our

temples, introduced them to the Dharma, and often assisted them to initiate their own Sanghas when they felt uncomfortable practicing with us (Ames, 1994).⁷

Tworkov did not de-escalate the debate when she insisted on her distinction between “American Buddhism,” represented by middle-class, mostly white converts, and “Buddhism in America,” which serves the needs of predominantly Asian communities. “White Buddhism evolved essentially independent of Asian communities,” she said (Ames, 1994). This unleashed a storm of ink, and stereotypes flew in both directions: white Buddhists were called arrogant, over-focused on enlightenment, self-absorbed. Asian Buddhists were called too devotional, too hierarchical, over-focused on social and cultural activities.

How Racism and Privilege Operate in This Debate

Regardless of whether anyone involved in this debate is or is not personally racist, this conflict certainly reveals the systemic racism affecting all American Buddhists. As noted earlier, racism “creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race.” Both Tworkov and her critics made essentializing statements about the members of racially defined groups: i.e., whites are one way and Asians are another. These statements both express and reinforce a long history of conflict in which people with European ancestry have dominated people with Asian ancestry. This dominance is a major reason that American Buddhist communities have been segregated.

Some examples: from 1878 to 1952, a series of court decisions and laws barred immigrant Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Asian Indians from becoming citizens of the United States. Immigration itself was barred in various ways from 1858 to 1965. Women citizens were stripped of their citizenship if they married Asian immigrant men. Non-citizens were barred from owning land. And of course, there were countless acts of terrorism and violence against Asian immigrants, from the ghettoization and lynching of Chinese during and after the California Gold Rush, to the World War II internment of Japanese and Japanese Americans, many of whom were citizens by birth (Takaki, 2008, especially chapters 8, 10, and 14).⁸ As Rev. Imamura noted, Asian immigrants and their descendents developed ethnically focused communities partly in *response* to the white racism promoted and enforced by law, propaganda, and violence.⁹

Kenneth Tanaka has described how internment caused the Buddhist Churches of America to cohere around ethnic and political concerns (Tanaka, 1999: 8).¹⁰ The BCA also adopted many of its so-called “Protestant” reforms—church buildings with pews; hymns; Sunday services

⁷ This exchange occurred in correspondence between Helen Tworkov and Rev. Ryo Imamura during 1992; it was later published in a BCA newsletter (Ames, 1994).

⁸ See also “Race, Racism, and the Law: The Racial Classification Cases,” <http://academic.udayton.edu/race/01race/White05.htm>, accessed December 29, 2009; and the Center for Educational Telecommunications’ “Ancestors in the Americas: Asian American History Timeline,” <http://www.cetel.org/timeline.html> (accessed December 29, 2009).

⁹ Numrich, citing R. Stephen Warner, made a similar point in (2006: 219).

¹⁰ Duncan Ryuken Williams also has done important research on the effects of internment on Japanese American Buddhism. See, for example, Williams, 2002: 191-200. He is currently working on a book about first-generation Japanese Buddhist immigrants to the U.S. and an edited volume on the internment. See <http://ieas.berkeley.edu/faculty/williams.html>. Accessed June 20, 2010.

and Sunday schools, etc.—to appear less “foreign” to xenophobes and thus to reduce racist persecution in the U.S. Although cultural and linguistic continuity is an important need *internal* to an immigrant group, we should not overlook *external* forces that create both a need for places of refuge, and ambivalence about practicing alongside Caucasian converts. Similar dynamics affect historically black Christian denominations in the United States.

Resistance to racial integration also has come from Caucasians. In a study of Asian-American Christian churches that tried to create multicultural congregations, for example, Russell Jeung observed that new African American and Latino members had a much easier time adapting to environments in which they were a minority, because they had long experience doing so. White congregants had a much harder time adapting to marginal status and tended to leave (Jeung, 2005). These are ways that racism has shaped religious communities on the ground.

Tworokov’s remarks about “American Buddhism” also reflected white privilege in at least three ways. First was the presumed authority to define what “American Buddhism” is for everyone. In 1994, Rick Fields noted in the pages of *Tricycle* that “a powerful aspect of racism [I would say white privilege] ... is the power to define.... [I]n 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.” (Fields, 1994: 54-56; 1998) In the same issue of the magazine, bell hooks¹¹ critiqued the sense of entitlement “that allows white comrades to feel so comfortable with their ‘control’ and ‘ownership’ of Buddhist thought and practice in the United States” (Fields, 1994: 42-45; see also Hori, 1994: 48-52). A sense of entitlement is often an aspect of privilege, and it is one of the reasons that white people (including me) sometimes react defensively when our privilege is pointed out to us.

Second was the assumption that “white Buddhism” is authentic American Buddhism, and that “Asian Buddhism” is an essentially foreign thing that happens to reside on American soil. Because the dominant culture does often equate “American” with “white,” some non-whites also internalize this assumption, which serves to reinforce white dominance. Numrich noted, for example, “many if not most of the Asians in our temples are American citizens, and yet they commonly refer to the non-Asian members of the temples as ‘Americans’” (Numrich, 2006: 219). Internalized racism can be more pernicious than overt hostility.

Third, as the white editor of a glossy popular magazine, Tworokov could command a larger audience than Rev. Imamura could in a BCA newsletter. In general, white Buddhists have gained disproportionate public attention from white scholars and journalists who have focused on people like ourselves in terms of race, class, and education. The advantages of privilege are cumulative, and cumulative advantage reinforces the system of privilege, by determining whose voices are heard most easily.

A more recent example was a 2008 Pew Forum study of religion in the continental United States. Of the 35,101 survey respondents, 405 (or 1.15 percent) identified themselves as

¹¹ bell hooks is the pen name of Gloria Jean Watkins, an American feminist scholar and social activist. She has made numerous public statements saying she prefers that this pen name not be capitalized, because the ideas expressed in her many books and articles are more important than the individual who produced them.

Buddhist. Forty-five percent of them lived in the western United States, 23 percent in the South, 17 percent in the Northeast, and 15 percent in the Midwest. Fifty-three percent of the Buddhists were white and 32 percent were non-Hispanic Asians.¹² However, the survey was conducted in English and Spanish, and therefore these results probably exclude Buddhists (and others) who speak Asian languages. Residents of Hawai'i, whose population is 39 percent Asian,¹³ were also excluded from the survey. Yet a demographic map indicated that 11-20 percent of Hawai'ians identify with Buddhism, compared to less than 2 percent in every other state.¹⁴ Thus the linguistic and geographic parameters of the study revealed affluent white Buddhists, and obscured Asian and Asian-American Buddhists.

Three Buddhisms: Two Examples

Several scholars have proposed taxonomies with three categories: one for Asians and Asian Americans whose heritage is Buddhist, one for converts, and one for a group that does not fit well into either category. In "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," Charles Prebish suggested a schema including: "(1) 'ethnic religions,' or those practiced by Asian immigrants and, to an extent, by their descendants; (2) 'export religions,' or those popular among well-educated, generally intellectual Americans; and (3) 'new religions,'" which often develop as revolutionary outgrowths of the first two categories (Prebish, 1993: 200-201). This typology uses both ethnicity and stability as defining characteristics.

In 1995 Jan Nattier argued for a similar taxonomy, based on the mode by which a given form of Buddhism is transmitted to the United States. "Elite Buddhism," Nattier said, is *imported* by people with money and leisure enough for books and meditation retreats. It is characterized by the middle-class income and college education of (most of) its adherents, rather than by their ethnicity, although a majority is Caucasian. Elite Buddhists, she noted, tend to emphasize meditation but generally eschew monasticism and devotional practices, de-emphasize ethical precepts except in the wake of scandals, and tend to look down their noses at Buddhists who are concerned with worldly benefits and social activities. Thus, while claiming to represent authentic Buddhism, elite Buddhism actually bears "the least resemblance to Buddhism as practiced in any Asian country"¹⁵ (Nattier, 1995: 42-49).

"Ethnic Buddhism" is brought to the United States as "cultural baggage" by Asian immigrants, and provides social support and cultural continuity, Nattier said. "Evangelical Buddhism," represented by the multi-ethnic Sōka Gakkai, draws members from a broad range of economic and educational backgrounds, though her observations "suggest a center of gravity in the lower-middle class."¹⁶ Nattier remarked that members of all three groups are "unwittingly

¹² Fifty-three percent of Buddhist survey respondents were also male; 70 percent were between the ages of 30 and 64. <http://religions.pewforum.org/portraits>, subcategory "Buddhists" (accessed March 20, 2008 and December 31, 2009).

¹³ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/15000.html> (Accessed December 31, 2009).

¹⁴ <http://religions.pewforum.org/portraits>, subcategory "Buddhists." Thanks to Michael Jerryson of U.C. Santa Barbara and Al Bloom, formerly of the Institute of Buddhist Studies, for pointing out these language issues in posts to the Buddhism forum of Humanities Net, on March 3, 2008.

¹⁵ There are, however, some meditation-oriented, middle-class lay movements in Asia, such as those launched by the Burmese teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin and his student S.N. Goenka.

¹⁶ Nattier notes that many SGI leaders are more educated and professional than the average member—though in some cases they become so *after* joining the organization. Children born to such

engaged in the practice of defining large groups of our fellow Buddhists out of existence,” by not recognizing them as “real” Buddhists (Nattier, 1997: 76).

While instructive, these categories apply less well to the Buddhist Churches of America; to groups that have multi-ethnic constituencies; or to groups that have a monastic core of converts, but serve constituencies of Asian immigrants and their descendants, such as the Sino-American Buddhist Association founded by the Ch’an Master Hsuan Hua, or some of the Theravāda communities described by Cadge.¹⁷ Nattier would place BCA temples among “ethnic” congregations, and it is true that the BCA remains overwhelmingly Japanese and Japanese American. After four or five generations in the United States, however, it is neither an immigrant community nor composed primarily of converts. Its members’ income and education levels are probably similar to those classified as “elite,” but I do not have that data.

To say that “elite” forms of Buddhism are *imported* is to assume that affluent (white) Americans are the primary agents, which obscures the agency of Asian missionaries who had their own agendas for bringing Buddhism to the United States. Shaku Sōen, for example, had religious, political, and economic motives for attending the World’s Parliament of Religions in 1893, touring the U.S., and sending his student D.T. Suzuki to work with writer and editor Paul Carus. These motives included opposition to unequal treaties with the United States and support for the Japanese government’s nationalist and imperialist agenda at the time (Ketelaar, 1990, 1991; Sharf, 1995c; Snodgrass, 2003; Victoria, 1997; Heisig and Maraldo, eds., 1995). Although neither Sōen nor Suzuki established temples in the West, both were extremely influential in shaping western perceptions of Zen. Senzaki Nyogen, Shaku Sokatsu, and Sokei-an, other early Zen missionaries to the U.S., likewise had their own agendas and traveled to America on their own initiative (Fields, 1992). A number of Tibetan teachers, including the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, have promoted Buddhism in the West, both for religious reasons and to raise awareness of the plight of Tibetans under Chinese control.

Suzuki Shunryu and Maezumi Taizan, founders of San Francisco Zen Center and Zen Center of Los Angeles, respectively, were not “imported” by white elites; they were sent as missionaries to Japanese communities, and later chose to devote their energies to converts. Nor are elite Westerners the only people who “import” Buddhist teachers. As Numrich noted, immigrant Theravāda communities also invite Asian-born monks to run temples they have established, and those teachers sometimes reach out to converts. So, as postcolonial theorists have pointed out, between dominant and non-dominant groups agency flows in both directions.

Other Three- and Four-Part Typologies

Richard Seager, in his textbook *Buddhism in America*, offered yet another three-fold typology of American Buddhists. “Converts” included both meditation-oriented Buddhists and the evangelical SGI, despite significant educational, ethnic, and economic differences in their constituencies. A second category was “immigrant and refugee” Buddhists. A third category,

upwardly mobile parents are then more likely to attend college (personal e-mail communication, May 4, 2005).

¹⁷ This organization operates the Gold Mountain Monastery, Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, and Dharma Realm University in California.

“old-line Buddhists” was represented by the BCA, most of whose members are neither recent immigrants nor converts. The latter category might also include some of the Chinese “church-style” Buddhists that Layman studied (Seager, 1999: 9-10).

Peter Gregory argued that SGI “is sufficiently different in terms of its origin, practice, organization, composition, and soteriology from Zen, Vipassanā, and Vajrayāna groups that it cannot be meaningfully subsumed under the same category with them, and it is too large to be written off as an anomaly” (Gregory, 2001: 246). SGI’s practice style and soteriology are, however, similar to those of its parent group, Nichiren Shōshū, and of other Nichiren groups that serve primarily, but not exclusively, Japanese immigrants and their descendants. Its organization differs because it is now entirely a lay group, which serves both “heritage” members and converts. Zen, Vipassanā, and Vajrayāna groups may also serve both groups. In any case, Gregory subscribed to Numrich’s “two Buddhisms,” but subdivided “converts” into elites and evangelicals, and “ethnic” Buddhists into immigrants and Asian Americans.

A different three-fold typology came from Martin Baumann, who studied the transplantation of Buddhist groups to Europe. Focusing on Theravāda, he identified “traditionalist” Buddhism with “devotion, ritual, and specific cosmological concepts” (e.g., merit-making and spirit cults); and “modernist” Buddhism with meditation, text-reading, and rationalism. “Post-modernist” Buddhism renders Buddhist concepts and practices in secular and psychological terms (Baumann, 2002). Although this analysis is intriguing, it is not clear how well these categories apply to Mahāyāna groups. Some Chinese temples, for example, study texts, offer meditation, *and* conduct devotional activities. SGI is modernist, but also devotional and ritually oriented. Many convert Zen groups are highly ritualized, meditation-oriented, and disinterested in textual study. Practice style may be the most problematic way to categorize groups, because one can find so many exceptions and hybrids.

All of these taxonomies shed light on certain dimensions of Buddhism in the United States, and obscure others. Their categories are based upon different criteria, so they are difficult to compare, and they do not always account for hybrids that cannot fit neatly into one category. As Max Weber observed long ago, this is true of all ideal types. Fixed categories can be useful even when they apply imperfectly, by bringing exceptions and hybrids into clearer view. A more significant limitation is that communities change over time. Each generation must wrestle with adapting to mainstream American culture, which is predominantly Protestant and individualistic, and with preserving traditions and values that may run counter to that culture (Mullins, 1988).

Problems with the Category “Ethnic Buddhists”

While ethnic identity as a social construct is clearly important to many people, any academic typology of American Buddhism that bases categories on ethnicity must be viewed with caution. First, such categories reify qualities that may be multiple and fluid, and that become more complex when describing successive generations and the children of mixed parentage. The longer an initially insular (and/or persecuted) ethnic group is present in a country, the greater the likelihood of exogamous marriage and mixed ethnic identities. It is also problematic to lump together diverse Asian ethnic and cultural groups as if they were

homogenous. They are not. To suggest that they are risks the possibility of racial essentializing.

When historians of religion in the U.S. discuss American Catholic history in the nineteenth century, we do talk about ethnic churches: parishes that served predominantly German or Irish or Italian or Polish immigrants, for example. There were debates about how much to preserve particular languages and cultural traditions, and how much to assimilate to the dominant Protestant, English-speaking culture. But taxonomies that include an “ethnic Buddhism” category apply the term “ethnic” *only* to people who are not white. To presume that whiteness is the norm against which “ethnic” is measured is another example of unconscious white privilege. This white-Asian dichotomy also obscures the presence of Buddhists who are neither, such as Latino/as, African Americans, Pacific Islanders, or people of mixed heritage.

More important, European American converts are *also* “ethnic Buddhists.” Ryo Imamura, Sharon Smith, and others have pointed out that European American Buddhists often approach Buddhism in very individualistic manner, which does not always meet the needs of people whose cultural heritage regards the individual as embedded in a web of social relations (Imamura, 1998; Smith, 2003). A resource guide called *Making the Invisible Visible: Healing Racism in Our Buddhist Communities* makes it clear that majority-white American Buddhist groups have cultural characteristics to which members of minority groups must adapt if they wish to participate.¹⁸ White people may not notice these characteristics—either because it is easy for us to associate mostly with people who are like us, which leaves our cultural assumptions unchallenged, or because we may be reluctant to face the full, painful implications of white privilege. As Addie Foye, a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist of Scottish and Japanese ancestry noted, “In white racist America, there is no way for a person of color to relate to any all-white situation without experiencing racism. This is an unavoidable fact that white people must wake up to” (Foye, Fall 1994).

Both scholars and practitioners of Buddhism in the United States must attend carefully to these issues, and we can do so without defining practitioners in simplistic, racialized terms. Even the terms “cultural” or “heritage” or “diaspora” Buddhists are less racializing than “ethnic” Buddhists, as that phrase is typically used.

Developmental Models: Baumann and Prebish

Any system for describing Buddhism in the United States also should be able to account for change over time. Martin Baumann, drawing on a theoretical framework developed by Michael Pye, described the process by which Buddhism has been transplanted to Europe (1994). The first stage is *contact*: a foreign religious tradition is transferred into a new culture by individuals, groups, buildings, texts, styles of activity, etc. Over time, ‘missionaries’ and first converts begin to appear in the public eye, important scriptures are translated, and missionary activities begin. Next is a stage of *confrontation and contact*: proponents of the transplanted tradition begin to confront the host culture by pointing out deficiencies and

¹⁸ <http://www.spiritrock.org/display.asp?pageid=318&catid=2&scatid=31> (accessed April 1, 2010).

arguing for solutions the tradition offers. The extent to which this is tolerated by the host society depends upon a variety of political, economic, legal, and social factors.

Eventually, *ambiguities* arise: to what extent should the tradition adapt to its new environment, in order to make itself more comprehensible, and how much should it resist accommodation? The host culture may also adopt elements of the transplanted tradition. Questions of orthodoxy will begin to arise. A period of *recouplement* will follow, in which a supposedly “pure” or original version of the tradition is reasserted. In addition, new forms and interpretations will emerge in a process of *innovative self-development*. In each of these stages, groups will use a variety of strategies: translating key ideas; simplifying or de-emphasizing elements unacceptable to the host culture; tolerating previously unacceptable customs in the host culture; reinterpreting teachings or practices; absorbing elements of the host culture into rituals or systems of meaning; and assimilating converts into foreign practices.

This model is a helpful way to think about the processes by which various forms of Buddhism have taken root, produced offshoots, and given rise to hybrids in the United States. It could also apply to the process by which Buddhism moved between other cultures: from India to China, for example, or from China to Japan.

Eva Neumaier-Dargyay offered some important caveats in an essay challenging horticultural metaphors: “Is Buddhism Like a Tomato?” (1995; see also Baumann, 1996). She noted that unlike tomato plants, neither cultures nor religious traditions are discrete objects with clearly identifiable boundaries.¹⁹ The forms of Buddhism that were transplanted to western countries already had been altered before they arrived, through complex interactions among Asian and Western actors, particularly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Heisig, 2002; Jaffe, 2004; Sharf, 1995a).²⁰

Charles Prebish likewise suggested a process-oriented way to look at American Buddhist groups as “established religion and emergent religion,” categories developed by Robert Ellwood. “Established” groups are marked by constancy, rejection of what is radical, and duration. Prebish observed, “It is not at all unusual for emergent religions to become established religions within a couple of generations” (Ellwood and Partin, 1988, 1973; Prebish, 1993: 201). He argued that such a typology can encompass all varieties of Buddhism in America, without valuing any one as more or less “legitimate” than the others.

For example, the BCA is an “established” religion, but it *emerged* as distinct from Japanese Jōdo Shinshū, particularly during the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Second-generation, American-born members consciously adapted themselves to American

¹⁹ Thomas Tweed’s theory of religions as “organic-cultural flows” emphasizes this permeability and fluidity. (Tweed, 2006)

²⁰ Some of the early Buddhist missionaries were also people marginal to the mainstream forms of Buddhism in their home countries, Neumaier-Dargyay noted. One example is the Harada-Yasutani lineage of Zen, or Sanbōkyōdan, which has been enormously influential in the United States and Europe, and in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, but is not prominent in Japan (Sharf, 1995b). Another example is Suzuki Shunryū, the founder of San Francisco Zen Center, a large and highly influential convert organization. In Japan, Suzuki was a minor figure (Chadwick, 1999). On the other hand, some missionaries, such as Shaku Sōen, were prominent Buddhist leaders.

Protestant norms, developing English-language services, Buddhist hymns, Sunday-school classes, youth groups, basketball leagues, Christian-style wedding ceremonies, and so forth.²¹

Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett was the first Western woman to train in the head temples of what she called the “Sōtō Zen Church” in Japan. When she developed her own “emergent” Zen community in the 1970s and 1980s, the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, she modeled it on both the Japanese Sōtō-shū and the Church of England. Today, the OBC is run by the first generation of her students and has a decidedly churchy ethos. (By “churchy” I mean its system of lay-oriented parish temples, its licensure of lay ministers, and the detailed regulations that govern its celibate clergy in the wake of Jiyu-Kennett’s death, not necessarily the OBC’s use of organ music and Gregorian chanting for sūtra recitations.) San Francisco Zen Center and Zen Center of Los Angeles likewise *emerged* from the established Japanese communities Sōkoji and Zenshūji. Now, after 40 years in the U.S, both SFZC and ZCLA are becoming more established. They, like other convert groups, are continuing the process of acculturation and looking for ways to make their practices accessible to working families with children, to prisoners, and to homeless and dying people.

Another Option: Established, Offshoot, Transplant and New Groups

A more nuanced way of thinking about the processes by which “established” and “emergent” groups develop might be to add some additional stages. I would define an *established* group as one that has endured for at least four generations, simply because that is about as long as any Buddhist group has been present in the United States to date. This is a somewhat arbitrary definition, and it will likely need to be revised as successive generations emerge. The BCA and some Chinese Buddhist groups would qualify as “established.” An *offshoot* group emerges from an established group, sometimes by schism, and sometimes by a more gentle process. The Theravāda temples that Paul Numrich studied gave rise to such offshoots. The San Francisco Zen Center and Zen Center of Los Angeles are offshoots of Japanese Sōtō-shū temples, and they have become increasingly well established over time.

A *transplant* is an established group that moves into a new environment. Sōka Gakkai; most Theravāda temples; Japanese Sōtō-shū temples; many Tibetan groups; Shingon, Jōdo, and most Nichiren groups; and the BCA in its early stage of missionary activity are all transplants. Sōtō Zen in thirteenth-century Japan was an offshoot of an established Chinese tradition, which Dōgen and his successors transplanted and adapted to their local contexts. Over time, “transplants” may become “established.” Of course, Neumaier-Dargyay’s critique of horticultural metaphors, which suggest more discrete boundaries than a religious or other cultural group possesses, applies here as well. The purpose of these terms is not to suggest another set of static or reified characteristics, but to emphasize the *processes* by which some groups move into new environments, e.g. through missionary efforts, and how those groups develop and change.

²¹ Richard Jaffe notes that some of these changes also had begun to take place in Japan in the late nineteenth century, particularly in the Nishi Honganji, the parent of the BCA (personal communication January 9, 2004). The BCA is now re-thinking some of these adaptations (Boyce, 2006).

A *new movement* is developed by someone who is not ordained by an established group, but who develops and promotes a form of religion that may draw upon elements of an established tradition. Sōka Gakkai is one example; others might include Vipassana groups led by people who never received monastic ordination. Richard Payne has suggested referring to these as “entrepreneurial groups,” and he cautions that we must be careful not to privilege older groups as somehow more “pure” or “authentic” than newer ones (Payne, 2010).

The categories I have proposed are neither mutually exclusive nor static. Sōka Gakkai, for example, was a new movement in the 1920s, then affiliated with an established group (Nichiren Shōshū), then transplanted itself to various locations, and later was excommunicated from its parent. The Vipassanā movement is an offshoot of established Thai and Burmese Theravāda groups, though it also has some elements of a new movement. I propose these categories tentatively, knowing they need testing and critique to determine their applicability and usefulness. Their main virtue is that they help to describe groups at particular stages of development; they presume impermanence and processes of change, which more static terms such as “immigrant” and “convert” do not.

Thomas Tweed rejects biological metaphors, because genetic metaphors were deployed in racist theories that buttressed European colonialism in Asia. When the nineteenth-century Orientalist F. Max Müller first identified three major language “families,” he attached the linguistic patterns he observed to notions of European racial, religious, and cultural superiority. Those who spoke “Indo-Aryan” (European) languages were more advanced than those who spoke Semitic or Turanian languages. Therefore, Europeans could and should help colonized peoples to progress out of their “primitive” and “backward” state, and become “civilized” like Europeans.²² Tweed’s caveat is very important; we should not lose sight of that history. Perhaps Tweed’s fluid metaphors would be more useful: streams, flows, tributaries, confluences, etc. (Tweed, 2006). While I appreciate his caution very much, I am still not convinced that horticultural metaphors *necessarily* produce or encourage notions of racial, cultural, or religious supremacy. We can apply them in more thoughtful and respectful ways than our predecessors did.

Cristina Rocha has provided a good example. In *Zen in Brazil*, she offers an insightful analysis of the terms “hybrid” and “creolization,” both of which she uses to describe processes of cultural mixing and indigenization as Zen develops in Brazil. The term “hybrid” refers simply to “the meeting of two or more cultures, practices, and beliefs” (Rocha, 2006: 19). Brazilian Zen is affected by globalization and indigenization, which make Brazil both an importer and exporter of Zen; by modernist and traditionalist interpretations of Zen; and by multiple religious cultures: e.g., Japanese Buddhist, Afro-Brazilian, Catholic, and Spiritist. Zen is also affected by depictions in the media, popular culture, and high culture. All of these produce hybrid forms. Rocha notes that notions of hybridity can be—and sometimes have been—contrasted with notions of “purity” (racial, cultural, religious), but such a contrast is not inevitable.

The trope of creolization, Rocha says, shows “*how the process of hybridity takes place* (ibid: 16). It is “not a product but a *process of interaction and change*” (ibid: 18). She acknowledges that

²² Comments made at the conference “Buddhism without Borders,” Berkeley, CA, March 20, 2010.

the word “creole” is embedded in a history of racism and colonialism, but it also “carries notions of creativity, agency, and innovation on the part of the colonized” (ibid). Creole cultures and languages reflect both relations of dominance and resistance to domination: they draw upon a dominant culture’s vocabulary, but express it in the “grammar” of an indigenous culture. Identity, whether religious, racial, cultural, or otherwise, “is ... an ongoing consequence of construction through negotiation” (ibid). This trope of creolization may be very useful for scholars analyzing Buddhist developments in North America and elsewhere around the globe.

The horticultural metaphors I have proposed—established, offshoot, transplant, new—likewise point to processes rather than products. They refer to living systems, which grow, adapt, move, cross-pollinate, and change. Ultimately, however, my aim here is not to propose some perfect set of categories that could replace all the others. My primary point is that we can examine the development of American Buddhist groups without defining them by simplistic or static categories based on race. I am not suggesting we should overlook race—quite the contrary. I am saying it is not helpful to typecast people or groups that way; to do so obscures much more than it reveals. I am also suggesting that we be self-reflexive about the power dynamics embedded in the categories we employ, and attentive to how living systems—including religious traditions—change.

Other Possibilities

We also have several other options for describing Buddhist groups. We could use Buddhist categories. Scholars certainly are not obliged to use insider terms, but we do categorize Christian groups broadly as Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox; Jewish groups as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist or Renewal; Muslim groups as Sunni, Shi’a, or Sufi. (In the United States we would add Nation of Islam and Moorish Science.) Likewise, Buddhist groups can be described as belonging to the broad “streams” of Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna, or unaffiliated/eclectic.

Tweed has pointed out that individual Buddhists might not identify strongly with one of these categories: they might, for example, see themselves first as Thai, then as Buddhist, but not necessarily as Theravāda.²³ Nevertheless, a Thai lay Buddhist probably would find “Theravāda” less reductionist or offensive than “ethnic Buddhist”; she probably could recognize her religious tradition as Theravāda within the broader context of global Buddhism. A Mahāyānist is also likely to recognize her tradition as distinct from Theravāda. To borrow Tweed’s aquatic metaphors, within these “streams” one can identify different “currents,” such as Zen, Pure Land, Shingon, Vipassana, etc.; these currents converge and diverge.

We might group communities according to their lineages, schools, sects, or “denominations.” The denominational categories can be broad, as suggested by Christine Walters: Zen, Pure Land, Tibetan, Theravāda, Nichiren (Walters, 2010). But many East Asian traditions practice both devotion to Amida and meditation; and American Vipassanā is very different from Southeast Asian Theravāda. I suggest instead using the term “denomination” in its usual legal and institutional sense: i.e., how groups identify themselves and their affiliations in their own

²³ Personal communication, Durham, North Carolina, December 3, 2003.

literature or in documents establishing them as non-profit religious corporations. For example: Buddhist Churches of America, Sōka Gakkai, White Plum Asanga, Shambhala International, etc. Some denominations can be nuanced further. Within Sōto Zen, for example, we can distinguish between temples under the direct authority of Sōto-shū Shumuchō (Administrative Headquarters) in Japan—which typically cater primarily to Japanese and Japanese Americans, but which also include non-Japanese members and clergy—and those that are independent of Shumuchō, which cater primarily to converts of various ethnicities.

Some groups, however, cross sectarian lines. Jeff Wilson has observed that unaffiliated and eclectic Buddhist groups are a growing segment of the American Buddhist world (Wilson, 2004).

Richard Payne has suggested that categories proposed by Catherine Albanese, a historian of religion in the United States, might be useful (Payne, 2010). Albanese identifies three streams of religiosity in the United States: evangelical, which focuses on the individual and promotes strong emotional experiences that are felt to be life-changing; liturgical, which centers on communal ceremonies; and metaphysical, which is diffuse, emphasizes the mind and its powers, and sees “salvation” in terms of healing (Albanese, 2007: 4-7). Payne would classify mass public events such as teachings by the Dalai Lama as “evangelical”; the BCA and other “church-like” groups as “liturgical”; and meditation-oriented groups as “metaphysical.” I am not so sure these categories are a good fit. In public teachings the Dalai Lama does not try to stir up powerful emotions; he is more likely to expound on the subtleties of Madhyāmika philosophy or offer a Kalachakra initiation. Soka Gakkai is similar to evangelical Protestantism in terms of proselytizing, but it is also liturgical and has metaphysical characteristics. Sōtō Zen is both meditation-oriented and liturgical. I do think, and have argued elsewhere, that the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn is a species of metaphysical religion (Hickey, 2008). I also think Payne’s suggestion deserves further exploration.

If we want to consider questions of religious identity, categories suggested by Thomas Tweed are useful. *Cradle Buddhists* are people born into Buddhist families, regardless of their race or national origin, so this group includes both immigrants and the children of converts. *Converts* include both immigrants and people born in the United States who were not raised Buddhist, but who later identify themselves with Buddhism and formally affiliate with it in some way. Some converts may also have multiple affiliations. *Sympathizers* are people who identify primarily with other religions, or with no religion, but are influenced by Buddhist thought and may engage in Buddhist practices (Tweed, 2002).

Conclusion

Any attempt to describe or categorize the myriad forms of Buddhism now present in the United States must use a layered approach, rather than static typologies. We might identify a particular organization or group of organizations as falling within the broad streams of Theravāda, Mahāyāna, or Vajrayāna Buddhism, or as unaffiliated and eclectic. We might note specific lineages or sub-schools. We might then explore how the group or groups formed, and

their stage(s) of development. Next we could consider members' religious identity and degree of affiliation, as well as a group's broader constituency of sympathizers. We can also look at a group's racial, gender, class, and generational dynamics; its religious practices; and the sociological needs it fulfills for its members. This layered approach provides a much richer picture than any taxonomy based on static characterizations.

Any scholarly attempt to describe groups should at least consider how members describe themselves. Our descriptions must be nuanced to account for exceptions, parallels, blends, and developmental processes. They also must pay attention to the history and ongoing effects of racism in the United States. As a white scholar, I have tried to use my own privilege to draw attention to those effects, in support of efforts to dismantle them. If we cannot do this, then as Jan Nattier cautioned, "there will always be 'two Buddhisms' in America: Us and Them, however we define each other" (Nattier, 1995: 49).

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