
CHINESE BUDDHISM IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

The connection between a religion and a culture is significant. A religion can have an impact on a surrounding culture while a culture can also transform a religion into a style to suit local needs. Buddhism is no exception. Its flexibility to fit in different cultures is the key that allowed this religion to progress from an Indian religion to a worldwide religion. Today, Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the world. According to *Buddhist Studies: Buddha Dharma Education Association & BuddhaNet*, there are about 350 million people who claimed they are Buddhists. Chinese immigrants introduced Buddhism to the United States. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Buddhism was simply a Chinese religion within the immigrant community that enabled immigrants to stay in touch with their native culture and traditions. It eventually grew in California during the first half of the twentieth century. The construction of Buddhist temples and the arrival of monk, enabled Chinese immigrants to hold onto their original culture and to find a way to fit into the new culture in America. Overall, Chinese Buddhism's flexibility and willingness to adopt different cultures are major factors contributing to its survival in the diverse cultures of the world.

China: The Cradle of Mahayana Buddhism

If India is the birthplace for Mahayana Buddhism, then China could be seen as the cradle that nurtured this school into a worldwide practice. In China, Buddhists helped this school to be reborn into a significant religion that was adopted and practiced by Buddhists throughout the world, including Western countries.¹ Today, Mahayana Buddhism is the most popular Buddhist sect around the world.

According to Buddhist tradition, Buddhism was introduced to China from India around the first century C. E. During that time, traders came to China from India through the Silk Road, and many of them were Buddhists. Also, Buddhist monks came to China to spread Buddhism on new soil outside of India.² In fact, the famous Silk Road not only symbolized a connection between Chinese cultures with the rest of the world but it was also a path for foreign traditions and religions to come to China. As a result, Buddhism has adopted Chinese culture and been recognized as Chinese Buddhism.³

When Buddhism came to China, it faced Chinese traditional beliefs and culture. At first, Buddhism combined with Taoism and later Confucianism.⁴ For most Chinese, there was not a clean-cut division between Buddhist teachings and traditional teachings; it was “the wild goose that received different names when it flies to different regions.”⁵ The way the Chinese accepted Buddhism into their ancient literate civilization mirrored Buddhism spread to other countries; Asian Buddhism has even been transformed into American Buddhism after assimilation into American culture. Certainly, its willingness to compromise with every new culture is one of the reasons Buddhism spread and has thrived throughout the world.

In China, Buddhism prospered from dynasty to dynasty, and it reached a high point in the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907 C.E.)⁶ Thousands of Buddhist temples were established in the capital Ch’ang-an, and throughout the kingdom. Buddhist practitioners and great masters were attracted to Ch’ang-an, including Buddhist Master Hsuan-tsang, the most remarkable scholar and translator. He contributed in translating

Buddhist Sanskrit canons into Chinese. Buddhist literature and studies were at its golden age.⁷ Among Hsuan-tsang's Buddhist translations, *The Heart of Prajna Paramita Sutra*, has become the most influential text in Chinese Buddhism.⁸

Two main Buddhist schools emerged in China: the Ch'ing-t'u School ("the Pure Land School" and the Ch'an School ("the Meditation School"). Master Hui-yuan (334 – 416 C. E.) was the first Buddhist monk in Chinese history to build up the foundation for the Pure Land School in China; he began to teach Chinese Buddhists to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha as a way to practice the doctrines of Buddhism.⁹ Later, during the fifth century, under the propagation of the first patriarch of the Pure Land School, Tian-luan (476 - 542 C. E.), helped to popularize it in China. The main concept of Pure Land Buddhism was based on reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha with a sincere mind with the intention of being reborn into the Pure Land ("the Western Paradise" or "the Buddha's Land"). In Pure Land theology, one can live forever and never to be reborn into the "muddy world" (this world) again unless by one's own wish to come back.¹⁰

Besides the Pure Land School, the Ch'an School was also popular in China. The well-known Buddhist monk Bodhidharma was responsible for bringing Ch'an to China around the fifth century C.E. The Ch'an School, or the so-called Meditation School (originated from Sanskrit *dhyana*), teaches that meditation can lead a person to cultivate his or her mind and enable a person to face life challenges and to have a satisfying life.¹¹ The Ch'an School has attracted Buddhist monks, artists, and intellectuals to its practice.

Ch'an is widely accepted around the world because meditation is practiced in silence and is not hindered by any language barriers in comparison with other Buddhist schools that emphasize chanting in foreign languages, a real challenge and difficulty for most English speakers. There is a famous stanza to express the core principle of the Ch'an School:

A special transmission outside the scriptures;
Without depending on words and letters;
Pointing directly to the human mind;
Seeing the innate nature, one becomes a Buddha.¹²

Most Americans who have embraced Ch'an practice are either the followers of Lin-chi Ch'an or Ts'ao-tung Ch'an. Both Lin-chi and Ts'ao-tung schools were founded in the ninth century C.E. The Lin-chi School was established by the Ch'an Master Lin-chi, and its main concept is focused on using *kuans* (mysterious riddles), which are direct questions and answers with a Ch'an teacher that could lead to a possible awakening for a practitioner. Another Ch'an School is Ts'ao-tung (Soto in Japanese), and the founders were the Ch'an Masters Ts'ao-shan and Tung-shan. Ts'ao-tung Ch'an believes in a gradual awakening through meditation and was accepted by the Chinese in the north, and Lin-chi Ch'an emphasizes a sudden awakening and was popular in the southern region of China.¹³ However, during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), these two schools merged into one Ch'an School.¹⁴ Today, particularly in America, a Ch'an teacher would normally guide students to figure out the answers of *kung-ans* by combining practice with sitting meditation.

Chinese Buddhism Spreads to America

Because most Chinese immigrants are Buddhists, Americans have always labeled Buddhism as one of the ethnic religions that was practiced only by the Chinese. Even though more and more Americans became Buddhists, there was, and is, still segregation between Chinese Buddhism and an Americanized Buddhism in the United States.¹⁵

In the nineteenth century, China struggled with domestic and foreign pressures due to its isolation and fell into decline as a world power under Qing rule. This caused the Chinese to turn to the world beyond their borders.¹⁶ Chinese was one of the largest groups to appear on mainland United States when James Marshall discovered gold at John Sutter's sawmill, north of San Francisco in 1848.¹⁷ A few years later, in 1852, there were more than twenty thousand Chinese who had joined the gold rush

to California.¹⁸ By 1860, Chinese made up 10 percent of the population in California.¹⁹ China sent an estimated 300,000 immigrants to America before the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.²⁰ It was the first federal law to restrict foreigners to enter the United States.²¹

The Chinese immigrants found themselves in a disadvantaged situation in the United States. Their inadequate skills, poor education, and inability to communicate resulted in isolation from the American community. Struggling between maintaining their old culture and trying to fit into the new environment presented a significant challenge for the immigrants. Isolation and loneliness forced Chinese immigrants seek spiritual guidance, and their traditional religions became important elements in recreating a social connection within their community.²²

As the Buddhist population increased within the west coast Chinese community, establishing a Buddhist temple became an urgent need. When wealthy Chinese businessmen came together to form the Five (later Six) Companies, they also shouldered the responsibility of establishing Chinese Buddhist temples so their countrymen could have places to practice their faith and form a social circle within their community. As a result, the Sze Yap Company built the first Chinese temple in Chinatown, San Francisco in 1852. T'ien-hou (or Tien-Hau) Temple in San Francisco has become the first and the oldest Buddhist temple in America.²³

To remain Buddhist in a foreign country was a hard battle for those early Chinese immigrants. In the California Supreme Court case of *John Eldridge vs. See Yup Company* of 1859, Chinese immigrants sought legal assistance in order to maintain their religious freedom. When See Yup Company purchased a parcel of property at a sheriff's sale, the land was intended for a Chinese Buddhist temple. A lawsuit was filed by the city of San Francisco against the future use of the property.²⁴ As a result, the California Supreme Court decided that there was no legal or moral ground for the justice system to determine what type of religious worship to be preserved or prohibited by law.²⁵ This was a great victory for all Chinese Buddhists in the United States and a turning point for the development of Buddhism in the future.

The early Chinese temples in Asian immigrant community in California reflected a mixture of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. These Chinese temples were credited for bringing Buddha statues to America and for maintaining the tradition of Buddhist ceremonies on special occasions, in particular the Chinese New Year's celebration.²⁶ During the Chinese New Year holiday on February 10, 1869, the celebration of the Chinese community caught the attention of the press. One of the special reports from the *San Francisco Alta* described how the Chinese celebrated their New Year's Day with religious worship and plays in the theatres. It related how they decorated the temple with candles, flowers, and thousands of oil lamps. The temple mentioned in this newspaper article was the Josh Temple with a statue that looked similar to Othello, the character in one of Shakespeare's plays.²⁷

The second temple was established by the Ning Yeong Company a year later for a total cost of sixteen thousand dollars. Not long after, more Chinese temples were built around San Francisco's Chinatown. In 1875, two decades after the first temple was built, there were eight temples in Chinatown alone. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were more than four hundred temples throughout the west coast of the United States, particularly, in the state of California.²⁸ These Chinese temples represented "the early seeds of Buddhism" that encouraged most Chinese immigrants to practice their faith.²⁹ However, for the majority of Americans, these temples were seen as "Chinatown temples" and had little to do with the development of Buddhism in the United States. In fact, Buddhism did not attract Americans' attention until the 1890s.³⁰

In the United States, the development of Chinese Buddhism outside of the immigrant community began at the end of the nineteenth century. Buddhist monks from the Pure Land School were among the early Chinese immigrants to America. In Chinatown, these monks performed Buddhist ceremonies or gave blessings for weddings or funerals. During that period, Ch'an monks would have preferred practicing in isolated mountain monasteries rather than to have come to America.³¹ Therefore, Zen practice was not as popular as the Pure Land School during that time.

In the twentieth century, the increasing population of Chinese immigrants in San Francisco resulted in the founding of the Chinatown there. Small shops were opened to provide oriental supplies for Chinese immigrants. Gradually, Chinatown has become a center within the Chinese immigrant community to seek both economic opportunity and a cultural connection with their own people. During the 1960s, several Chinese groups such as *Leway* (“Legitimate Way,”) were formed in Chinatown that grew rapidly from seventeen members in 1967, to have more than 400 members in the early of 1968. Confrontations between police and those Chinese groups resulted in the 1969 Chinese New Year Riots. Chinatown in San Francisco became an unsecure place with bad reputation that led to economic and cultural depression within the Chinese immigrant community during the 1970s to the 1980s. Religion, in particular Buddhism, has become extremely important for uniting Chinese immigrants into a community.³²

New Awakening for Buddhist Identities

Chinese Buddhists in America increased tremendously after the revision of the Immigration Act of 1965, which allowed immigrants to have an easier access to come and stay in America than in the previous century. In the second half of the twentieth century, according to *the Statistical Abstract of the United States* of Washington, D.C. of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1994, the estimated number of Chinese immigrants reached 420,000 in 1985 and 921,000 in 1990.³³ The increase of Asian immigrants resulted in the establishments of Buddhist centers and organizations throughout the nation. According to Dr. Stuart Chandler, there were a total of about 150 Chinese-related Buddhist centers in the United States in the 1990s. Chinese Buddhist immigrants established most of these centers.

During the second half of the twentieth century, in order to avoid being labeled as merely an immigrant religion, Chinese Buddhist temples such as the Hsi Lai Temple of Fo Guang Shan (FGS) in California and the Chuang Yen Monastery in New York State have begun to offer

Buddhist classes for English-speakers. Throughout the United States, FGS's various branches began to offer programs and services in English in order to gain recognition from more Americans.

According to Professor Charles Prebish, there were two types of Buddhists, "cradle Buddhists" and "convert Buddhists," in Chinese Buddhism in the United States. "Cradle Buddhists" were those Chinese-American Buddhists who followed their parents' footsteps to become Buddhists at a very young age while "convert Buddhists" were those Americans who converted to Buddhism.³⁴ Dr. Thomas Tweed interpreted, "cradle Buddhists" as adherents who simply followed their family tradition and many stopped practicing altogether. However, "convert Buddhists" took a more serious approach to Buddhism as they specifically chose the religion. Tweed mentioned that there was another type of Buddhists called "sympathizers" (or "Night-stand Buddhists"), to identify those who have a casual attitude towards Buddhism; named because they kept Buddhist texts on the night-stand to help them to go to sleep.³⁵

A New Age of "Beat Zen" in the United States

During the twentieth century, Buddhism made an unexpected transformation on American soil. Experiencing bitter warfare, in particular WW I and WW II, and the appearance of the Beat movement of the 1950s and the 1960s made Americans raise their eyebrows and take a second look at this Asian-originated religion. Buddhism began to go beyond Asian immigrant communities and began making an opening with Anglo-Americans. Technology's boom by the end of the twentieth century also provided easier access for Americans to study Buddhism.

The Beat Zen generation - the so-called "counter culture" - created a powerful wave that used Zen practice and literature to create an alternative to the conformity of the 1950s and the 1960s. This new generation of Beat Zen consisted of famous poets, writers, artists, and composers who applied their meditation experiences to their art in order to express a free spirit.³⁶ They believed that the ultimate goal of Zen practice was to help them transcend to the highest stage where they could live with happiness

forevermore. The Beats did indeed play a key role in promoting Buddhist practices, in particular Buddhist meditation, poetry, and literature that impacted and shaped the future of American Buddhism.

The Beat movement can roughly be dated from the end of World War II to the 1960s. Its members lived under the shadow of the postwar society that experienced the frustration of the Korean War and the Cold War, with economic uncertainty and consumer pressure. That opened a door for Americans to search for a new spiritual path. Buddhism was at the right place at the right time. Buddhist doctrines became an answer and a refuge for Americans to deal with their problems in daily life.

When Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* was published in 1958, the Beat movement was at its peak. Kerouac's emphasis on practicing Zen and his free lifestyle appealed to many Americans.³⁷ Searching one's inner nature and being free from life's burden were the principal ideal for the Beats.³⁸ There were several dominating figures for the Beat generation, including Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder.

Jack Kerouac was born in Massachusetts, 1922, then, went to New York when he was in his early twenties. In New York, he met and began a friendship with Ginsberg and Snyder who later became the most prominent figure of the Beat generation. Kerouac was the most productive writer during the Beat generation. He began his most successful literary work, *On the Road* in 1949. Other Buddhist-oriented books were published later including *The Dharma Bums*,³⁹ and *Some of the Dharma*.⁴⁰ Henry Thoreau's *Walden* had a significant impact on Kerouac's life, writing, and Zen practice. In the 1950s, he had begun to live a lifestyle as a Buddhist ascetic in a silent retreat. He went to the Desolation Peak in Jack Mountain, Washington, to practice sitting meditation, reciting sutras, and observing his consciousness.⁴¹ He was an admirer of Milarepa, a great master in Tibetan Buddhism. Kerouac tried to follow Milarepa's path by practicing as an ascetic. In the end, Kerouac decided to come back to society because he realized that extremely painful practice and getting away from reality were not the Buddha's teaching.⁴² For him, the true meaning of the word "Beat" was to "try to love all life, being utterly

sincere and kind and cultivating ‘joy of heart.’”⁴³ Kerouac died in 1969 due to a life of drinking and drug addiction.

Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) was born in New Jersey and went to Columbia University in the 1940s. In 1954, Ginsberg moved to San Francisco where he met Kenneth Rexroth, a leading figure in the San Francisco Renaissance. He also befriended with Kerouac and Snyder.⁴⁴ Together, they promoted Zen practice and the free spirit of the Beats. During the 1960s and the 1970s, Ginsberg studied under several Zen masters, including Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a well-known Tibetan Buddhist teacher.⁴⁵ Besides his Zen practice, Ginsberg also proactively participated in political and social activities such as protesting the Vietnam War and demanding the rights for free speech and homosexuality. He believed that the principal teaching of Mahayana Buddhism, which he studied from Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, was to protect the weak and to save them from unjust social issues. In the 1970s, Ginsberg also co-founded and directed the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at the Naropa Institute in Colorado, a Buddhist university founded by Tibetan Buddhist teachers. In his later years, Ginsberg was a Distinguished Professor at Brooklyn College.⁴⁶

Gary Snyder was born in San Francisco in 1930. Fond of Eastern culture and religion, he went to Japan and studied under the Japanese Zen Master, Oda Sesso Roshi in Kyoto during the 1950s. Compared to other Beat figures, Snyder had more interest in following the traditional Buddhist practice.⁴⁷ Snyder’s fluency in Chinese enabled him to share his knowledge with friends by reading from the original Chinese Buddhist texts and poems, including the well-known Chinese Zen poems *The Cold Mountain*.⁴⁸ In one of his essays, *Buddhist Anarchism* (1961), Snyder pointed out, “wisdom without compassion feels no pain” and “the mercy of the West has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void. We need both.”⁴⁹ Snyder has published sixteen books of poetry and prose, including *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1997) and *The Practice of the Wild* (1990). He is an Emeritus professor of English at the University of California, Davis.⁵⁰

The Beats practiced Zen and studied Buddhist doctrine; however, they still followed their original religion and did not convert to Buddhism. The spokesman of the Beats, Kerouac, was a practicing Catholic throughout his life, even though he openly declared his Buddhist identity and practice Buddhism. Ginsberg's Jewish faith was reflected in his writings.⁵¹ As Snyder points out, "in a way the Beat Generation [was] a gathering together of all the available models and myths of freedom in America that had existed before, namely: Whitman, John Muir, Thoreau, and the American bum. We put them together and opened them out again."⁵² According to the Vietnamese Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh, the fundamental teaching of the Buddha is to encourage Buddhists around the world to care actively and passionately for social, economic, and political justice.⁵³ Overall, the Beats led Americans to a place that they had never imagined before and opened a door for future generations to see the significance of Zen practice in American Buddhism.

Chinese Buddhism Assimilating to American Culture

Chinese Buddhism has begun an inner transformation in order to fit into American culture and society. After the Korean and the Vietnam Wars, studying Asian culture and religion became more popular in the United States. As a result, more and more leaders from Chinese Buddhist organizations came to realize that Chinese Buddhism should become a religion that suits Americans' needs and not remain only a religion for Asian immigrants. They began to create programs and activities for English-speakers and provided charities for local communities. Among them, California's Ten Thousand Buddhas Temple and Hsi Lai Temple were the most proactive Chinese Buddhist organizations to try to be a part of American Buddhism.

The Ten Thousand Buddhas Temple was founded by a Chinese Zen Master, Hsuan Hua. Born in China in 1908, Master Hsuan Hua came to America in 1959 and began his Buddhist mission in the San Francisco Buddhist Lecture Hall a year later. Master Hsuan Hua was the first Chinese monk to promote the idea of ordaining American students. He

believed this approach was the best way to help Buddhism's future in the United States. In 1970, he ordained the first five American monks and began the Buddhist Order on the west coast. In the same year, the Master and the Sino-American Buddhist Association purchased an old mattress factory in the Mission District of San Francisco. Together, they founded the Gold Mountain Monastery. With more and more followers from immigrants and American communities, they purchased a 237-acre parcel of land in Ukiah, California, in 1976, which became the site for the Ten Thousand Buddhas Temple.⁵⁴

Master Hsuan Hua's great contribution was to unite the two most dominating Buddhist Schools, Chan (Zen) and Pure Land, to create Chinese Buddhism which would be a powerful force in American Buddhism.⁵⁵ He taught his students, both Asians and Americans, to recite the name of Amitabha (the Lord Buddha of the Pure Land Buddhism) while practicing meditation. Besides giving Chinese Buddhist lectures, the Ten Thousand Buddhas Temple also provided Sanskrit and European language studies. In 1970, Master Hsuan Hua founded the Buddhist Text Translation Society. Since then, the Society has published a significant number of translated Buddhist books in several languages to circulate throughout the world.⁵⁶ Today, there are still more American Buddhist monks and nuns in the Ten Thousand Buddhas Temple than in other Chinese Buddhist temples in the United States.

The Hsi Lai Temple is another significant Chinese temple on the west coast. Located in California, Hsi Lai Temple was founded by a Chinese Master Hsing Yun. He founded Fo Guang Shan ("Buddha's Light Mountain") in Taiwan in 1967, which now has more than 100 branch temples, 180 associated centers, and several colleges throughout the world including the University of the West in California. Master Hsing Yun has been a respected exponent of Humanistic Buddhism worldwide and Fo Guang Shan became a significant international Buddhist organization.⁵⁷ Education for monks and nuns is also the priority for Master Hsing Yun. Under his encouragement and financial support, many of his disciples have studied and obtained doctoral degrees from top universities around

the world, including Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Stanford. As a result, those highly educated Buddhist monks and nuns have been the major force for Master Hsing Yun to fulfill his dream of spreading Buddhism in America.

Master Hsing Yun first came to the United State in 1976. He believes that Chinese Buddhism should adopt local culture and to create an Americanized Buddhism for Americans. Right after Master Hsing Yun's visit to California, Fo Guang Shan purchased a major parcel of property in Hacienda Heights, California, in 1978 where the Hsi Lai Temple was built. The founding of Hsi Lai Temple was a bittersweet experience for Fo Guang Shan. It took them about ten years to overcome a series of protests from the local American communities. The temple was eventually completed and opened in 1988.⁵⁸ Resistance from American communities has been one of the challenges for Chinese Buddhist organizations. Even today, Chinese Buddhist temples in the United States have been forced to overcome tax issues and protests over land purchases from townspeople in a nation where the freedom of religion is stated in the Constitution.

In order to improve relationships with the surrounding communities, Hsi Lai Temple has adopted American cultures and traditions, such as offering food baskets to the needy during Thanksgiving and holding a special banquet in the Chinese New Year for the local neighborhood.⁵⁹ In 1992, Fo Guang Shan founded the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA), which has become the major power in fulfilling Master Hsing Yun's dream to bring Buddhism into Americans' lives. With a tremendous contribution from Chinese communities throughout the United States and direct financial support from Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan, Hsi Lai Temple has become the largest Chinese temple in the United States. When former Vice-President Al Gore visited Hsi Lai Temple in 1996, he recognized "the placing of palms together is very much in the American spirit, ... to bring together, one, two, three, four, so many, is simply wonderful. It is an act of cooperation, union, mutual respect, and harmony."⁶⁰

Conclusion

The first decade of the twenty-first century was an age for Chinese Buddhism to be reborn from an ethnic religion for Chinese immigrants to become a religion suited to Americans' need. Religion became a personal choice rather than just a family tradition. According to Todd Johnson, a professor at Rice University, "religion in America is 3,000 miles wide, but it's only 3 inches deep" because Americans are willing to approach new ideas and faiths.⁶¹ If he is right, then, Americans' easiness and free spirit may be a match with Buddhism's flexibility. When asked about how they felt about other religions and practices besides their own faith, about 86 percent of Buddhists believed that other practices can lead to an eternal life; this statistic was only second to Hindus 89 percent in the survey. Buddhists had the highest percentage (90) of followers who believed that there is more than one way to interpret their religious teachings.⁶²

Buddhism has become one of the fastest growing religions in the United States in the twenty-first century. In 2001, an interview survey also conducted by Barry Kosmin, called "American Religious Identity Survey," (ARIS) showed that there were about 0.5 percent of adult Americans who claimed they were Buddhists; this figure is a slight increase compared with his previous survey in 1990, which was 0.4 percent. There were an informal number of 1.5 million Buddhists in the United States.⁶³ A recent data survey indicated there are about 20 percent of American converts among the estimated range of 1.5 million to six million Buddhists in 2009.⁶⁴ During an interview with *The New York Times* in 2000, Richard Hughes Seager, a professor of religious studies at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, pointed out that there were about two million Buddhist practitioners in the United States, and as many as one-third of them were American converts.⁶⁵

There are more than 2,200 Buddhist organizations and centers in the United States, and most of them have lay practitioners in charge. The increasing Buddhist population is due to convenient internet access and Buddhist scholars and practitioners who have committed themselves to a full-time Buddhist practice that have shaped this Asian-originated practice

into an Americanized religion.⁶⁶ There were few “cradle Buddhists” and “night-stand Buddhists”; instead, many people willingly chose Buddhism as their lifetime religion.

Chinese Zen Buddhism is still the most developed practice in American Buddhism. In 2002, Professor Davidson of the previous Monk Experiments Project, presented a paper “Vision of Compassion” which revealed that meditation did indeed transform one’s negative emotions into positive emotions and even caused changes in brain activities and the immune system.⁶⁷ In September 2003, a symposium was held at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to discuss the health benefits of Buddhist meditation. The attendees included the Dalai Lama, and a group of well-known neuroscientists and behavioral scientists.⁶⁸ The research on the power of meditation and is still ongoing in the United States; one should objectively regard the findings of this scientific research. However, the practice of meditation in bringing calmness and peace in daily life has intrigued a significant number of Americans, both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Approaching a study of the Buddhist practice of meditation with scientific methods is one of the major reasons why more Americans are studying Buddhism today.

Applying meditation in the workplace is another new approach in American Buddhism in the twenty-first century. Since 2007, one of the greatest online searching engines, Google, has launched a series of meditation courses for its employees. One of Google’s employees, Chade-Meng Tan, was the program’s organizer. Tan started the program called Search Inside Yourself (SIF), which aims to make the world a better place through high-tech science and to establish a work environment that is enjoyable and stress free.⁶⁹ The application of meditation in daily life – to put Zen in motion – has become a productive avenue for Americans to study meditation.

A religion serves as not only a spiritual guide but also has a great impact on a country’s culture, tradition, and history. After Chinese Buddhism had been brought to the United States during the nineteenth century, became a cornerstone for Chinese Buddhist immigrants. It allowed

them to maintain their origins while assimilating into American culture.

The various cultures and traditions of the East and the West have tested the capability and flexibility of the doctrines of Buddhism. Traditional Asian Buddhists still emphasize the need to follow Buddha's original principles and rules as the key to establish and to protect Buddhist practice. In the United States, Buddhism has evolved into a popular practice for Americans. Western teachers have taken liberally from different Buddhist traditions including gender equality, simple rituals, and focusing on daily life. In other words, American Buddhists have utilized and perceived Buddhism as a living culture with practical methods that can be applied to solve actual problems in many fields of human life, including psychology, philosophy, morality, science, and art.

To adopt local culture in order to transform itself into a model to fit in with a new environment enabled Buddhism to become the fourth greatest religion in the world. Today, regarding Buddhism as solely being something solely for Asian immigrants is long gone. Instead, continually evolving Buddhist practices that contain American culture serve the needs of Americans. Buddhist centers have been founded by American-convert Buddhists. Lectures are given in English. Buddhist literature blossoms in the academic community. And, more and more Americans have sought to develop their Buddhist identities. Studying Buddhism is a part of learning Asian culture and traditions.

Finding a compromise and lessen the differences within Buddhist communities in the United States is the key to making Buddhism a part of American culture and traditions. During an interview in 1996, a journalist asked the Dalai Lama, whether it was a possibility for a Buddhist to be elected as a president of the United States. The Dalai Lama answered that he would rather see Westerners follow their traditions because Buddhism's priority is not gaining power and popularity.⁷⁰ The Dalai Lama's response reflected a free spirit and open-minded attitude about Buddhist practice.

Today, the most significant contribution of Buddhism is its transformation from an ancient ethnic religion into an approachable and practical religion that creates a pathway for people to find a way to live a better

life. Therefore, studying Buddhism could be an opportunity for people in the United States to enrich both their spiritual and cultural knowledge.

ENDNOTES

¹ Daisaku Ikeda, *Buddhism, the First Millennium*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Kodansha International Ltd., 1977), 72.

² Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History, and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; reprint, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 140.

³ Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 21-41.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 45-54.

⁵ Louise H. Hunter, *Buddhism in Hawaii: Its Impact on a Yankee Community* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1971), 11, citing Hajime Nakamura, *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Tokyo, 1960), 288, 292-93; Shao Chang Lee, *Popular Buddhism in China* (Shanghai: Commercial Press LTD, 1939), 11, citing Hajime Nakamura, *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Tokyo, 1960), 288, 292-93; Shao Chang Lee, *Popular Buddhism in China* (Shanghai: Commercial Press LTD, 1939), 8.

⁶ Kenneth Baker. "1,000 Years in the Latter Days: Asian Museum Exhibition Looks at Chinese Buddhist Art." *The San Francisco Chronicle*, January 21, 1995. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/1995/01/21/DD48194.DTL>. All rights reserved.

⁷ Wright, 67-76.

⁸ Buddhist Text Translation Society, trans., *The Heart of Prajna Paramita Sutra with Verses Without a Stand and Prose Commentary*, by Tripitake Master Hua (San Francisco: The Sino-American Buddhist Association, Inc., 1975; reprint, San Francisco: The Sino-American Buddhist Association, Inc., 1982), 13.

⁹ Wright, 46-49.

¹⁰ Harvey, 152.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹² Harvey, 154.

¹³ Lin-chi is still the most popular Ch'an School in Chinese Buddhism.

¹⁴ Harvey, 157.

¹⁵ James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of An Ancient Tradition* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7.

¹⁶ Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: a Narrative History* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2003), 12.

¹⁷ James L. Roark et al., *The American Promise: A History of the United States*, 4th ed., 1 vols. (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009), 422.

¹⁸ Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: a Narrative History* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2003),

¹⁹ 1.

²⁰ Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1981; reprint, Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1986), 70-71.

²¹ Yung, 1.

²² *Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)*, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=old&doc=47#>, excerpting from *Teaching With Documents: Using Primary Sources From the National Archives* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1989), 82-85. This was the first historical federal law to target a specific ethnic group of immigrants to enter the United States. The Act created a ten-year embargo on Chinese labors to enter the United States in order to create work opportunities for Americans. The law also restricted other Chinese who had already presented in the United States and limited them to obtain US citizenship. The Act was expired in 1892, extended to 1902, and repealed in 1943.

²³ Yung, 2-3.

²⁴ Garfinkel.

²⁵ David T. Bagley, *Reports of Cases Determined in the Supreme Court of the State of California*, vol. 17. (Sacramento: Bancroft-Whitney Company, 1861), 44-57. All rights reserved.

²⁶ Fields, 75.

²⁷ Ibid., 74-75.

²⁸ "The Chinese New-Year: How the Occasion was Celebrated in San Francisco – The Josh Temple – The Theatres," *The New York Times*, March 14, 1869. The article was first appeared on *the San Francisco Alta* on February 11, 1869. *the San Francisco Alta* was a local newspaper, which served San Francisco area. It was stopped published in 1891. See, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016463/> for the further information regarding *the San Francisco Alta*.

²⁹ Fields, 73.

³⁰ Garfinkel.

³¹ Charles S. Prebish, *American Buddhism* (MA: North Scituate, Duxbury Press, 1979), 5.

³² Fields, 75.

³³ Susie Lan Cassel, ed., *The Chinese in America: A History from Gold Mountain to the New Millennium* (CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 337-344. <http://books.google>.

com/books?id=_zSiPKzf0LYC&pg=PA345&dq=Bridging+the+Pacific:+San+Francisco+Chinatown+and+its+People&hl=en&ei=OMatTYK_ItT3gAfZyvy-JDA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CEQQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=Bridging%20the%20Pacific%3A%20San%20Francisco%20Chinatown%20and%20its%20People&f=false. All rights reserved.

³⁴ Chandler, "Chinese Buddhism in America: Identity and Practice," *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, eds. Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 17.

³⁵ Prebish, Charles S. *Buddhism: The American Experience*. Journal of Buddhist Ethics Online Books, 2004, 22. <http://www.jbeonlinebooks.org/eBooks/bae/documents/prebish-BAE-preview.pdf>. All rights reserved.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁷ Prebish, "We've Come a Long Way," *Buddhadharma: The Practitioner's Quarterly*, Winter 2009, 27.

³⁸ Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (New York: The Viking Press, 1958; reprint, New York: The Viking Press, 1971; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1976; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 171-179.

³⁹ Carole Tonkinson, ed., *Big Sky Mind: Buddhism and the Beat Generation* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), viii-ix.

⁴⁰ Kerouac, 19-45. The book's exploration of the freedom of sexual relationships between male and female practitioners is shocking to most Asian Buddhist readers. In traditional Buddhist culture of Asia, there are many extreme disciplines and rules for both Buddhist monks (nuns) and laypeople which prohibits sexual misconduct while practicing Buddhism. According to the practice of Buddhism, a sexual relationship is not allowed other than one's own legal partner by marriage. Also, traditional Asian Buddhists would not encourage practitioners to escape from reality by going to the mountains or to isolated areas (as described in *The Dharma Bums*) in order to obtain enlightenment. Instead, in Asian Buddhism, the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism is followed by practicing the great vows of Bodhisattva to dedicate oneself proactively to society. The highest wisdom and compassion can only be achieved by helping people in need, which will lead to the ultimate enlightenment according to the teachings of Buddha. Therefore, the "Beat Zen" culture can be interpreted as one of the Western products in American Buddhism that would not be recognized as firmly grounded in Buddha's teaching in Asian Buddhism.

⁴¹ "Poets.org: From the Academy of American Poets", <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/1270>. All rights reserved.

⁴² Kerouac, 169-87.

⁴³ Tonkinson, 26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁴⁵ Tonkinson, 90-91.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 89.

⁴⁷ *Poets.org*.

⁴⁸ Tonkinson, 16.

⁴⁹ “Cold Mountain” was originally taken from the name of a Chinese Buddhist monk. According to Chinese Buddhism, Han Shan was one of famous Zen masters in Chinese Buddhist history. Han Shan was a poet of the T’ang Dynasty (618 - 906). After the An Lu-shan Rebellion in 760, he retreated to the cold mountains of far eastern China and dwelled as a Buddhist sage for the rest of his life.

⁵⁰ Tonkinson, 177-78.

⁵¹ *Poets.org*.

⁵² Tonkinson, 14.

⁵³ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁴ Matthew Weiner. “Buddhists Who Stand Up.” *The New York Times*, April 1, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/01/opinion/01iht-edweiner.1.11587836.html>. All rights reserved.

⁵⁵ Fields, 339-41.

⁵⁶ In the history of Chinese Buddhism, both Chan and Pure Land schools did not really get along because of their variety in practice. Chan practitioners always criticized that Pure Land School was for the lower class and illiterate people, while Pure Land practitioners argued with Chan practitioners for their over-confident pride and unreasonable criticism. Today, both schools in the United States have a great connection and relationship. Most of Chinese Buddhist centers and temples introduce both methods and doctrines to followers.

⁵⁷ Fields, 342-43.

⁵⁸ Richard L. Kimball, “Humanistic Buddhism as Conceived and Interpreted by Grand Master Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan,” *Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism*, vol. 1 (2000): 1, <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-JHB/jhb94214.htm> (accessed April 18, 2016). According to Professor Kimball, Humanistic Buddhism focuses on promoting “the equality of every human, the interconnectedness of all sentient beings, the sanctity of life and created principles related to developing positive living.”

⁵⁹ Stuart Chandler, “Placing Palms Together: Religious and Cultural Dimensions of the Hsi Lai Temple Political Donations Controversy,” *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, eds. Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen (United Kingdom: Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), 37-38.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁶¹ Ibid., 36.

⁶² Kuruvila.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Prebish, *Buddhism: The American Experience*, 28.

⁶⁵ Prebish, “We’ve Come a Long Way,”

⁶⁶ Niebuhr.

⁶⁷ Prebish, “We’ve Come a Long Way.”

⁶⁸ Hall.

⁶⁹ Hall.

⁷⁰ Barry Boyce, “Google Searches,” *Shambhala Sun*, September 2009, 34-38.

⁷¹ Claudia Dreifus. “Peace Prevails.” *The New York Times*, September 29, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/29/magazine/peace-prevails.html>. All rights reserved.

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