BUDDHISM EAST AND WEST: CHINESE BUDDHISM IN BEIJING AND HOUSTON

A Thesis

by

MELINDA WILSON

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2008

Major Subject: History

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ABSTRACT

Buddhism East and West: Chinese Buddhism in Beijing and Houston. (December 2008)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Carlos Blanton

Although Buddhism was introduced in the United States over a century ago, only recently has it become part of the mainstream. In addition to the exponential increase in Buddhist practitioners in the United States, scholar Thomas Tweed argues that Buddhist images and references, devoid of religious context, have seeped into American society. The increasing popularity and prevalence of Buddhism in America is attributable to many factors including changes to the immigration laws in the 1960s and the episodic popularity of all things Eastern. This fascination with the East is epitomized by the current Dalai Lama, who has a pop-culture presence as well as political sway, as evidenced by his meeting with John McCain on July 25, 2008.

Just as the pre-1965 immigration laws stifled Buddhism in the United States by limiting the number of Asian immigrants, Mao's communist doctrines prevented the practice of Buddhism in China. As a result, in recent years Buddhism has emerged in the United States and remerged in China. By examining the state of Buddhism in Beijing and Chinese Buddhism in Houston this thesis shows that despite the comparable newness of the religion in both places, it is developing in very different ways, showing the impact region has on religion.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to Bill Murray, who first introduced me to “The Big Hitter.”

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the sky, there is no distinction of east and west; people create distinctions out of their own minds and then believe them to be true.
~ Buddha

In the summer of 2004, Victoria's Secret launched a new swimwear style called the "Baby Buddha Bikini." It featured strategically located images of the Buddha on the crotch and bikini top. A caption in the company's catalog next to the swimsuit mentioned "reaching nirvana." Within days of its introduction, the swimsuit was removed from the online and print catalogs as result of global protests from Buddhists.[1] A year earlier Nike introduced the Karma golf ball line with the slogan, "If your Mojo isn't working, Nike has some Karma for you."[2] A search for "Buddha" on the online auction site eBay on July 25, 2008, turned up over 6,400 hits, including pencil toppers, t-shirts, mugs, and even a Buddha travel alarm clock. Although Buddhism was introduced in the United States over a century ago, only recently has it moved past its initial stages and become part of the mainstream, both religiously and culturally. In addition to the exponential increase in Buddhist practitioners in the United States, Thomas Tweed, a foremost scholar of Buddhism in America, argues that Buddhist images and references,

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This thesis follows the style of the *Journal of American History.*

[1] New America Media, "Protests by Vietnamese Stymie Sales of Victoria's Secret Buddha Bikinis," http://news.ncmonline.com/news/view_article.html?article_id=e326ebc1e3b3f3cff1460d7658a71c93. Accessed July 17, 2008.
[2] Nike Karma Golf Balls, http://www.golfblogger.com/index.php/golf/comments/nike_karma_golf_balls/. Accessed July 22, 2008.

devoid of religious context, have seeped into American society.[3] The increasing popularity and prevalence of Buddhism in America is attributable to many factors including changes to the immigration laws in the 1960s as well as the episodic popularity of all things Eastern. This fascination with the East is epitomized by the current Dalai Lama, who has both a pop-culture presence as well as political sway, as evidenced by his recent meeting with John McCain on July 25, 2008.[4]

Just as the pre-1965 immigration laws served to stifle Buddhism in the United States by severely limiting the number of Asian immigrants, Mao's Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and its communist doctrines prevented the practice of Buddhism in China. As a result, in recent years Buddhism has emerged in the United States and reemerged in China. By examining the current state of Buddhism in Beijing and Chinese Buddhism in Houston this thesis will show that despite the comparable newness of the religion in both places, it is developing in very different ways, showing the impact region has on religion.[5]

Chapter II will trace will trade the history of Buddhism in China from its earliest beginnings to 2008, concluding with a series of interviews with residents of Beijing about their religious beliefs and Buddhism. Chapter III examines the history of Buddhism in the United States, focusing on Chinese Buddhism, and concludes with the

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[3] Thomas Tweed, "The Buddhification of the American Landscape: Buddhism, Art, and Transcultural Collage in Postwar America," 2007. Unpublished paper in author's possession.
[4] Bruce Einhorn, "McCain, Obama, and the Dalai Lama," *Businessweek,* July 25, 2008. http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/blog/eyeonasia/archives/2008/07/mccain_obama_an.html. Accessed July 26, 2008.
[5] Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States, and Beijing is China's second largest province. Beijing has an urban population of about eight and a half million, while Houston's metro area is home to approximately five and half million residents. Both are comparable centers for Buddhism in their respective countries.

results of interviews conducted at the highly influential Jade Buddha Temple in Houston Texas. Before examining the divergent strains of Buddhism in these two countries, however, comments are necessary about the world origins and teachings of Buddhism.

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A Brief History of Buddhism

Buddhism dates back over 2,500 years, and is the world's oldest universal religion. Due to Buddhism's origination in high Indian culture there are a large number of records, but they are complicated by over one hundred generations of transmission and translation. As Buddhism spread from India to China and the rest of Asia, it adapted its philosophies and rituals to different cultures, eventually resulting in Buddhism's multiethnic presence in the United States.[6]

Siddhartha Gautama, the original Buddha, was born in the fifth or sixth century BCE during a time of spiritual and social unrest. The Iron Age created a new wealthy class in India that sought to change the rigidity of the caste system. The Brahman priesthood was confronted by activists promoting new ideas that challenged their hereditary based traditions. This situation provided a unique environment for Siddhartha Guatama's upbringing. According to tradition he was born into a wealthy family and was heir to the throne as head of the Shakya clan. Despite the luxury and ease of his

[6] The conventional history of Buddhism and its principles are documented in numerous works. For more information see: Donald Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Houston Smith and Philip Novak, *Buddhism: A Concise Introduction* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003); Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); or Charles S. Prebish and Damien Keown, *Introducing Buddhism* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

personal life, Siddhartha was troubled by all the pain and suffering he saw in the world and became preoccupied with their source and how to end them. At the age of twenty-nine he relinquished his inheritance and retired to the forest to find the meaning of life.[7]

For eight years Siddhartha pondered this question. He first studied under two meditation masters, but found no answer. Then he turned to ascetic practices and spent six years practicing various forms of self-mortification. Still finding no solution he gave up and decided to meditate in a quiet spot under a bodhi tree. As he sat in silence he experienced what became known as the "enlightenment." The "Buddha," which means "enlightened" or "awakened" one, gained many converts during his remaining forty-five years. He spoke to all types of people in various settings. It is said he spread the *dharma*, or truth, mainly by speaking with parables, popular sayings, and anecdotes, giving no commandments to his followers. The Buddha repeatedly insisted he was not a god and was considered a compassionate and kind man. He quickly gained a large following, known as the *sangha*. The sangha became so large that formal rules and education were required for membership. These were the first Buddhist monks. They lived mainly by begging and wandered from town to town spreading the Buddha's word. During India's rainy season most monks studied together in retreats, beginning the tradition of Buddhist monasteries.[8]

Buddhism's tradition of adaptability originated with the Buddha himself. Tradition holds that the Buddha continually adjusted his teachings to suit the needs and

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[7] Charles S. Prebish, *Buddhism: A Modern Perspective* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 10-15.
[8] Ibid.

level of the people to which he was speaking. Unlike most religions, he encouraged listeners not to accept his ideas on faith, but to test them in their own lives to discover if they were true or not. [9] The most fundamental of his teachings are contained in the *Four Noble Truths*. These tenets both describe the human condition and offer a remedy for suffering. Regardless of the wide-ranging variety of sects and practices in Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths have remained the core of all Buddhist faith.

1. The First Noble Truth is that all life is dominated by suffering, or *dukkha*. From birth onward, life is full of suffering, sorrow, pain, grief, and disappointment. Buddhists consider this focus on suffering as neither good nor bad. They view it as a realistic analysis of the principal problem with human life.

2. The Second Noble Truth says that craving, or *tanha*, is the cause of suffering. The Buddha believed that humans, at their most basic level, always want what they do not have, and that people fearfully cling to possessions.

3. The Third Noble Truth is that suffering ends when cravings are left behind. Western theologians often focus on the negative aspect of the first two Noble Truths, while Buddhists highlight the Third Truth's liberating knowledge that suffering can cease.

4. The Fourth Noble Truth is the Eightfold Path, a list of instructions for how to engage in action, or *karma*, that leads to an enlightenment known as *nirvana*, and the

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[9] James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 28.

end of suffering. The Eightfold Path contains the essence of Buddhist living and forms the cornerstone for Buddhist traditions and teachings.[10]

The first two steps of the Eightfold Path are right view and right resolve. These concern wisdom and the knowledge that actions have consequences that create good or bad karma. Buddhists seek to live a life free from actions that create bad karma and stand in the way of enlightenment.

The next three steps, right speech, right action, and right livelihood, concern ethics. Language has great power and can be employed to create good or bad karma. Likewise, actions such as killing, stealing, or envy should be avoided. Right livelihood means earning a living in an honest and fair manner.

The last three steps, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, relate most directly to religious Buddhist practice. Right effort involves developing a positive mental state. Right mindfulness is the process of becoming attentive to the body and mind in daily living. Right concentration leads to the proper inward focus and state of mind that ultimately results in nirvana.[11]

Although Buddhism does not include specific creeds or canons, most Buddhist traditions uphold the repetition of the Threefold Refuge. The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are known as the "Three Jewels" of Buddhism.

> I take my refuge in the Buddha.
> I take my refuge in the Dharma.
> I take my refuge in the Sangha.[12]

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[10] Smith and Novak, *Buddhism*, 31-37.
[11] Ibid, 38-49.
[12] Ibid, 114.

The Buddha's teachings were never recorded during his lifetime, leaving no precise set of canons. Before he died, the Buddha left instructions that no one should succeed him and said that monks should use the dharma to develop their own guidelines. Shortly after his passing, a council of five hundred followers met to review the Buddha's doctrines. There the members memorized his teachings by chanting, a practice that become common in most Buddhist traditions.[13] For the next several centuries Buddhism was transmitted throughout India primarily by wandering monks and matured into a rich and complex religion. Predictably, this early sangha experienced division in both principle and influence. At the high point, there were eighteen different schools of Buddhist thought. A lay community also evolved among Buddhists, and many oral traditions were converted into written canon. The most important of these, the Pali Canon, was assembled by the first century BCE.[14] Over the centuries Buddhist dharma splintered into numerous schools of thought and customs that primarily fell under three traditions, or *yanas*. They are the Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana.[15] Interestingly, Christianity is also comprised of three main divisions – Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy.

The principle yanas practiced by Chinese in both mainland China and the United States today also fall under three categories. Mahayana, "the great vehicle," is the largest of the three. Mahayana is very inclusive, and acts as an umbrella for a variety of

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[13] Coleman, *New Buddhism,* 32.
[14] Emma McCoy Layman, *Buddhism in America* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, Inc., 1976), 19.
[15] Richard Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 29.

schools.[16] The second is Ch'an Buddhism, which translates as Zen. Most Americans recognize it as the Japanese meditation practice made popular in the United States during the 1950's Beat Zen movement. Before traveling to Japan, Ch'an gained great status in China, especially during the T'ang Dynasty.[17] Some see the third yana practiced by the Chinese, Lamaism, as an extension of Mahayana, but the type observed in mainland China today is distinct and developed primarily in Tibet. Tibet is a thorny subject for modern China, but having controlled Tibet for the majority of time since the 13th century most Beijing residents view Lamaism as a genuinely Chinese entity.[18] In Beijing, the Lama Temple is the one most frequented by Chinese Buddhists, but in the United States, it is not a style favored by American Chinese practitioners.

Buddhism's malleable nature is demonstrated throughout its long history by the diverse ways it has developed and been utilized by practitioners. Although the core tenants of the faith remain the same, the methods and motivations for practicing Buddhism vary widely. Region strongly influences religion and Buddhism, especially. This is illustrated by the divergent ways Buddhism has developed in Beijing and Houston. The following chapter will examine Buddhism's history in China from its origins to 2008, and Chapter III looks at the United States in a similar manner.

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[16] Ibid, 24. While most Buddhist doctrine preached that only select individuals could achieve the state of Buddha, Mahayana founders felt that all sentient beings have the potential to awaken the Buddha mind. This unlocked the faith to all classes instead of catering to only the wealthy elite. Mahayana schools also fostered a sense of belonging by supporting the participation of lay practitioners and teachers in temple activities instead of the strict monastic codes kept by other traditions.

[17] Ch'an focuses on meditation rather than the study of scriptures, rituals, and devotional practices with the belief that meditation will lead to a sudden enlightenment. Ch'an is still practiced within China, but the form found in the United States comes primarily from the Japanese tradition.

[18] This conclusion is based on interviews conducted in Beijing by the author in May, 2008.

CHAPTER II

CHINESE BUDDHISM IN MAINLAND CHINA

People in China are more concerned with improving their daily life than their afterlife.
~ Tony Lee, Beijing

Early Chinese Buddhism

Buddhism arrived in China via the Silk Road during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) at an ideal time to fill a religious void in the country. Previously, Confucianism had dominated Chinese philosophy. From the beginning translators and practitioners blended numerous aspects of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, creating a foundation for Chinese Buddhist thought. Buddhist rituals such as candlelight, incense-burning, and chanting, for example, are results of this synthesis.[19]

From the third to seventh centuries, Buddhism went through periods of alternating growth and discrimination, producing doctrinal variations. Early Buddhism was most prominent during the T'ang Dynasty (619-907 CE), when it had great appeal for China's entire population. This popularity came to an abrupt halt during a period of severe persecution from 842-845. The T'ang emperor of that time was a devout Daoist, and he declared Buddhism a "foreign superstition" and "parasitic burden on the state."[20] His ensuing anti-Buddhism decrees resulted in the destruction of 45,000 monasteries and temples and the displacement of over a quarter million monks and nuns. Scriptures were burned and monastery lands redistributed. Following the death of the Emperor the

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[19] Cho-Yun Hsu, "Chinese Encounters with Other Civilizations," *International Sociology* 16 (September 2001): 445.
[20] "Chinese Buddhism," in *Overview of World Religions Encyclopedia*, http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia. Accessed May 27, 2008.

persecutions ended, but Buddhism in China had been dealt a blow from which it never fully recovered. Although the ensuing Sung Dynasty (960-1279) looked favorably on Buddhism, the religion no longer had a significant influence on China.[21]

The Mongol Yuan Dynasty of 1271-1368 brought further complications by introducing Tibetan Buddhism into Chinese culture. Tibetan Buddhism, also known as Lamaism, draws deeply from the mysticism of Tantra and from the ancient shamanism and animism of Bon, an older Tibetan religion. It is a grandiose tradition that includes flamboyant rituals such as loud drumming and the sounding of great horns. The *lamas*, or teachers, wear richly colored garments during ceremonies.[22] The Yuan's support of the Tibetan tradition eventually led to it being named the state religion. Many scholars agree that in addition to being more familiar with and closer ethnically to the Lama faith because of Mongolia's geographic proximity to Tibet, it was also easier for the Mongols to gain control of China by supporting an outside religious leadership. Additionally, some scholars maintain that the Mongols were more impressed by the strong religious hierarchy and extravagant ceremonies found in Tibetan Buddhism than the quiet conduct and subtle philosophies of Chinese practitioners.[23]

When the Chinese regained power over their country during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1643), the restoration of native beliefs, such as Buddhism and Daoism, was of primary importance. Hongwu, the first Ming emperor had been a Buddhist monk during

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[21] Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 389-408.
[22] Ch'en, *Buddhism in China,* 416.
[23] Jan Yun-hua, "Chinese Buddhism in Ta-tu," *Yuan Thought: Chinese Thought and Religion Under the Mongols*, eds. Hok-lam Chan and William Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 398.

his youth. He sought to eliminate the Mongol-favored Tibetan form of Buddhism completely from China and hoped to restore the popularity of traditional Chinese Buddhist schools.[24] Following Hongwu's reign, most Ming leaders tolerated Buddhism, and in later years even encouraged the faith. A trend toward "harmony" for China grew in popularity, and this contributed to a desire to unite China's three leading religions, neo-Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. [25] Although neo-Confuncians still controlled China's elite, they acknowledged the importance of Buddhism and Daoism to China and incorporated many of their ideas into neo-Confucianism. The reverse was also true: Buddhism and Daoism integrated elements of the other religions into their systems. Despite the open-mindedness of the Ming, Buddhism still suffered an overall decline during their reign. Of the many schools that had developed in China, only the Pure Land Schools, the most popular sect of Mahayana, and one branch of the Ch'an tradition remained active, while the majority of Buddhist styles were lost in the time of "harmony."[26]

When the Qing gained power in China (1644-1911), they adopted the same style government used by the Ming. Their dynasty marked only the second time foreigners ruled all of China. Like the Mongols, the Manchurian born Qing preferred the Tibetan Lama Buddhist tradition, but were tolerant of Chinese styles. Lamaism resembled the Manchu's Shaman religion, and helped gain allegiances with the Mongols and

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[24] Timothy Brook, "At the Margin of Public Authority: The Ming State and Buddhism," *Culture and State in Chinese History*, eds. Theodore Huters, R. Bin Wong, and Pauline Yu (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 166.
[25] Chun-fang Yu, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 2.
[26] Ch'en, *Buddhism in China,* 437. As these schools are currently among the most popular in both China and the United States, it is valuable to note their rise in status.

Tibetans.[27] Despite their support for Buddhism, the Qing's attention was largely focused on the many uprisings, both internal and external, that plagued their time in power. The Qing faced numerous conflicts, from the T'ai P'ing Rebellion to the Opium Wars that weakened the country and left it ripe for revolution.

Buddhism in China, 1900-1949

As a result of the 1911 revolution the Qing Dynasty was overthrown, inaugurating the censorship of religion that would later become even more pervasive under Mao. The intellectual leaders who emerged after the Revolution of 1911 felt science was the all-powerful solution for society.[28] The populace agreed, seeing science as a tool to free China from its oppressive feudal past. They viewed China's older faiths, including Buddhism and Confucianism as a tie to that subjugation.[29] The Revolution of 1911 launched a decade of unrest, culminating with the May Fourth Movement of 1919. The Movement was supposedly a student protest against China's treatment under the Treaty of Versailles, but actually was more of a class struggle within China protesting feudalism. It was the first time the population felt they actually had the ability to bring about change. The students' protests gave a tangible voice to the people's desire to shed the feudal past and create a new, and ultimately, faithless nation. These attitudes were furthered during the 1920's by the introduction of Marxist thought in China. According to Marx, religion was a tool used by the upper classes to control people, ultimately

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[27] Ibid, 450.
[28] James B. Grieder, *Hu Shis and the Chinese Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 316.
[29] Ibid, 176-179.

hindering the progress of a country.[30] The government's frequent use and support of Buddhism throughout China's history gave validity to this idea and made the religion an attractive target for reformers. Marxists also criticized the non-productiveness of monks and temple workers. Chinese writers often quoted Vladimir Lenin, the founder of Russian communism, as saying, "Religious leaders are parasites, for they receive from the exploiters some of the fruits of the masses' labor, in some instances share in the instruments of production and political privilege, and thus actually join in the exploitation of those they ostensibly serve."[31] The idea that religious leaders oppressed the people, both economically and politically, "under the cloak of religion," appeared often in Chinese Communist writing.[32]

For over twenty years, beginning in the 1920's, China suffered a politically and religiously tumultuous era, resulting in the destruction of scores of Buddhist images, special taxes levied on temples, and the appropriation of temples and monasteries for use as public schools, military barracks and police stations. Despite these hardships, Buddhism survived and even moved forward in some ways. Much credit for the religion's perseverance goes to the Chinese Buddhist Society, which claimed 4,620,000 members by 1947. Besides successfully reclaiming many Buddhist temples and properties seized by the government, the Society established several educational institutions that schooled thousands of people in Buddhist doctrine and led to an

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[30] Richard C. Bush, Jr., *Religion in Communist China* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1970), 28.
[31] Liu Chun-wang and Yu Hsiang, "Religion and Class Struggle in the Transition," *Kuang-ming Jih-pao* March 21, 1964. Quoted in Beatrice Leung, "China's Religious Freedom Policy: The Art of Managing Religious Activity," 7. http://www.asef.org/go/subsite/ccd/documents/beatrice1.pdf Accessed July 10, 2008.
(*Kuang-ming Jih-pao* was a Chinese newspaper published during the Cultural Revolution.)
[32] Bush, *Religion*, 25.

increased number of lay practitioners and leaders. The increase in membership was remarkable given the adversity of the times.[33] Unfortunately, the benefits of this revival came too late for most Buddhist schools of thought and numerous traditions faded away. Of the ones that survived, the Mahayana Pure Land School was by far the most successful. During the 1930's it is estimated that approximately two-thirds of Chinese Buddhists were supporters of the Pure Land School.[34]

Buddhism Under Communism

The religious policies established in 1954 by Mao Tse-tung's Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) still influence religious practices in China today. The Communist occupation of mainland China in 1949 marks the beginning of Buddhism's darkest era. China was ruled by an atheistic government openly hostile toward religion. However, the newly formed government realized the importance of the Buddhist tradition and other faiths to China and feared repercussions from the people if religion was completely wiped out. Consequently, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) claimed to protect Buddhism and other faiths, but allowed the government to control and use them for political purposes. This duality was achieved primarily through Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, the Religious Freedom Policy, a document that has remained the foundation of China's religious strategy since its inception:

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[33] Ch'en, *Buddhism*, 456.
[34] Ibid, 460.

> Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.[35]

Article 36 decrees that religious *belief* is acceptable, but the practice and promotion of religions are not. This and other intentional vagaries allow officials to interpret the policy as they see fit, often leading to religious repression and persecution. For example, the text states that "normal" religious activities are permitted, but fails to define the term "normal." Nor are any guidelines are given for disciplining violations of the policy, giving further freedom for arbitrary government intervention.

Under the policy, China's five recognized religions, Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestant Christianity, may only be legally practiced within the walls of CCP approved churches which are meticulously governed by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA). This agency oversees supervising bodies (known as "patriotic associations") for each religion, including the Chinese Buddhist Association.[36]

Two other important aspects of the policy are that followers of recognized faiths are required to register with the government, and that Communist Party members may not participate in any type of religious activity. Mao firmly believed that "communists

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[35] In the original PRC constitution religion was addressed in Article 88. The current constitution was adopted December 4, 1982, by Deng Xiaoping. Article 88 was revised to Article 36. The text changed very little. For the complete PRC Constitution see: http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html. Accessed June 29, 2008.

[36] Leung, "China's Religious Freedom Policy," 7.

are atheists and must unremittingly propagate atheism."[37] Thus, anyone with government-politico aspirations cannot belong to any church. Fearing the possibility of a government crackdown, many businesses and academic institutions are hesitant to hire religious persons.

Another notable consequence of this stipulation is that China's religions are run by atheists. SARA and the patriotic associations are led by Party members, and all legislation is Party created. Actual religious believers have had no input on religious policy in China for over fifty years, and although the government claims tolerance, it is clearly their goal to eradicate religion from the country.[38]

The implementation of Mao's Freedom of Religion Policy resulted in frequent persecutions of Buddhism during the early years of Chinese Communism. A great many monasteries and Buddhist canons were burned, images melted down for their metal, and some monks were beaten and several killed. The situation was described by one Buddhist monk as "a state of terror."[39]

These maltreatments were carried out largely through an organized strategy to control Buddhism implemented in 1950. The plan exhibits Mao's attitude towards religion. On August 4, the government classified Buddhist monks and nuns as religious workers, and therefore parasites on society. Temple abbots were categorized as landlords, and thus subject to punishment for living off the sweat of others.[40]

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Donald MacInnis, *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 418.
[39] Holmes Welch, *Buddhism under Mao* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 1.
[40] Ibid, 85.

The second phase in 1951 was more dramatic. The Land Reform Movement confiscated properties held by Buddhist monasteries as well as temples and ancestral halls. By denying Buddhist clergy their source of income, thousands were forced to leave their monasteries. Others stayed, but were "reeducated" to learn productive pursuits, such as weaving or gardening.[41] Exactly how many monks and nuns fled their monasteries during this time is unknown, but the numbers were great. Communist newspapers portrayed their abandonment of the monasteries as an awakening to the truthfulness of the communist message.[42]

The last part of Mao's plan to control Buddhism is still in effect. Throughout the religion's history, the Sanghas and monasteries have operated chiefly independent of each other and with very little communication. This was unacceptable to PRC leaders who wanted a hierarchical structure they could control. In response, the government formed the Chinese Buddhist Association in 1953. Under this body Buddhism became, much like everything else in Communist Chinese society, a tool for the implementation of Mao's ideas. According to the Constitution, the Association's purpose was "to unite all followers of Buddhism under the leadership of the People's Government to demonstrate their love for the Fatherland and to preserve world peace."[43] Besides being a mechanism of control within China, during Mao's reign the Chinese Buddhist Association became a method to influence neighboring Buddhist countries such as Vietnam, Burma and Japan. For example, Buddhist monks were often sent with

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[41] Ch'en, *Buddhism*, 462.
[42] Bush, *Religion*, 300.
[43] Ch'en, *Buddhism*, 464.

delegations to visit these countries as a demonstration of how Communism could be compatible with Buddhism. The People's Republic successfully employed Buddhism as a tool for domestic and foreign purposes for much of the 1950's, but regardless of the government's appearance of support for the religion, its actions made true religious practice almost nonexistent. One foreign observer described it as "religion at its worst."[44]

All religions in China were persecuted and virtually extinguished during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960's, but Buddhism's temples and relics made it a much more visible target for youth set out to destroy the "four olds."[45] The suppression of religion that had been building for over fifty years erupted in a violent climax that wiped out nearly all traces of Chinese Buddhism and its history. The few temples that remained were gutted and converted for the "people's" use. The enormity of the transformation the Cultural Revolution wrought is hard to reckon, both because the change was so great and because most records were destroyed. Over the ensuing decade even as Mao's hold on China slipped away, it appeared that Buddhism in China had little chance of survival. Even as Mao himself slipped away, eventually dying in 1976, the policies and attitudes towards religion he had established remained in full force. As a result, for a decade after his death it appeared that Buddhism would also soon die out.

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[44] Colin Mackerras and Neale Hunter, *China Observed* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), 81-91.
[45] Bush, *Religion*, 342.

Tibet Under Communism

Buddhism's story in Communist China would not be complete without attempting to explain the turbulent Tibetan-Chinese relationship as it relates to Buddhism. After more than fifty years, the CCP recognizes all branches of Tibetan Buddhism as legitimate, but still fails to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Dalai Lama, the religion's highest spiritual leader. When Chinese Communist forces invaded Tibet in 1951, Mao said that the region would follow China's Religious Freedom Policy.[46] Tibet and its Lamas suffered the same Land Reform measures and other ruthless actions experienced by the Chinese. The symbolic leader of Tibet, the Dalai Lama, led resistance to the takeover, but his efforts resulted in his exile in 1959 and further abuses of the Tibetan people. In 1963, the Chinese Buddhist Association created a third Tibetan branch of the organization, and a Communist appointed Panchen Erdeni became China's puppet spokesman of Tibetan Buddhism. By the mid 1960's, however, there were few reports of Tibetan Buddhist activities as the Cultural Revolution drew closer. The Cultural Revolution led to the same decimation of religion in Tibet as experienced in mainland China. Of the 6,254 Buddhist temples in Tibet in 1951, only twelve remained by the end of the century.[47]

The hard-line policies of Mao have relaxed significantly in the decades since his death, but the subject of Tibetan Buddhism remains a source of tension. Between 2000 and 2006, representatives of the Dalai Lama and PRC held six rounds of talks seeking

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[46] Ibid, 308.
[47] Edward A. Gargan, "Tibet's Buddhist Monks Endure to Rebuild A Part of the Past," *New York Times*, June 14, 1987, E3.

peaceful relations, but after a stalemate negotiations broke off in 2006. The Chinese government still sees the fusion of Tibetan national identity and Buddhism as a threat, and the Dalai Lama's outspoken advocacy of Tibetan independence draws much criticism. For instance, Qi Xiaofei, vice-director of the state administration for religious affairs said, "The Dalai Lama is not only a religious figure, but is also a long-time stubborn secessionist who has tried to split his Chinese motherland and break the unity among different ethnic groups."[48] The Chinese press paints the Dalai Lama as a criminal whose actions hurt, not help his people. A *China Daily* article in April, 2008, blamed recent violence in Tibet on him: "His inflammatory words led to the violent crimes in Lhasa on March 14 by his followers, who beat up and even murdered innocent people… The Dalai Lama is guilty of all these crimes and more."[49] Tibetan exiles have said they believe China's government has decided to wait for the vastly popular Dalai Lama, age 72, to die, in hopes that his cause will die with him.[50] Additionally, some have posited that China is waiting for Chinese migrants to outnumber Tibetan natives in the region before taking additional action.[51]

Religion and Reform in China

Since Mao's death in 1976, China has made slow, but steady progress towards liberalizing reform. From Deng Xiaoping's "Open Door Policy" to Hu Jintao's

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[48] BBC News, Published April 13, 2006. http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/4905140.stm. Accesssed June 20, 2008.
[49] *China Daily*, April 23, 2008, 8. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-04/23/content_6636817.htm. Accessed June 20, 2008.
[50] Sahi Oster, "Tibet and China: A History of Conflict," *Wall Street Journal*, March 17, 2008, A3.
[51] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Religion in China on the Eve of the 2008 Beijing Olympics*, http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=301. Accessed June 19, 2008.

"Harmonious Society," China has opened itself considerably to new ideas, both domestically, and in international relations and trade policies. During the last twenty-five years the government has issued a profusion of state papers concerning religion. Communist atheism still dominates the language, but most statements slightly decrease the restrictions created under Mao's Religious Freedom Policy. Deng Xiaoping introduced the first religious liberties in the 1980's, albeit with political motivation. Deng believed that relaxing religious control would bring together non-conformists and show China breaking with the past. More importantly, he hoped religious reform would attract foreign aid.[52] Deng's policies attempted to reconcile intellectuals, as well as religious and minority leaders, with the new, reform government but still re-enforce Party control over religion and prevent its proliferation. This dialectic approach is clearly evident in the PRC's Document No. 19, issued in 1982 which states: "The basic policy of the Party towards religion is that of respect for and protection of the freedom of religious belief. This is a long-term policy, one which must be carried out until that future time when religion will totally disappear."[53]

In addition, Document No. 19 contained numerous guidelines for religious practice in China including strict limits for religious fundraising and the continued prohibition of proselytizing. Much like Mao's original policy, Document No. 19 was written in vague language that allowed Party cadres to monitor and supervise religious matters and discipline policy violations. Another section encouraged the training of new religious personnel and advocated the restoration of religious properties, but it failed to

[52] Leung, "China's Religious," 14.
[53] MacInnis, *Religion in China Today*, 19-26.

give instructions for how to put these goals into operation.[54] Document No. 19 illustrates the PRC's standpoint on religion in the reform era: tolerance but with firm control. The text was shrewdly written without input from religious believers to clearly serve the Party's interests, rather than address the needs of religious advocates.

Even with the constraints of Document No. 19, China's modest liberalization resulted in an explosion of religious activity. Calculating how many Chinese participated in religious endeavors presents a challenge due to the large number of believers who fail to register with the government, and the great difference between China and the West in defining who qualifies as religious. Regardless of these issues, even the official figures for believers increased. The number of registered Catholic churches rose from 300 in 1983 to 3,900 in 1992 and to 5,000 in 1997. The number of Protestant followers went from an estimated 5-6 million in 1993 to 10 million in 1997, and ultimately to 14 million in 2000. The number of registered churches and meeting points climbed over 70% from 1980-2000 topping out in 2001 at 16,000 churches and 32,000 meeting points.[55] Buddhism also experienced a revival and enjoyed even more government support than other religions. Even though Buddhists outnumber all other religions in China, due to their loose organization, de-emphasis on strict practice, political non-involvement, and long history in China, traditional Buddhism has never been viewed as a threat by the CCP. As a result, the Party helped restore and rebuild many Buddhist temples and monasteries. It is difficult to quantify the increase in Buddhist practitioners due to the scarcity of records and lack of membership

[54] Leung, "China's Religious," 20.
[55] Ibid, 22.

requirements. The religion was completely suppressed from 1966-1979, but as of 1986 there were about 1,000 Buddhists nationwide enrolled in monasteries studying to become monks and nuns. The PRC did not release numbers for registered believers during that time, leaving the number of temple visitors as the only available statistics for Buddhism. No one can say how many of these people were actual Buddhist worshippers or simply visitors.[56] Most statistics claim there are around 90 million Chinese who practice at least some Buddhist traditions such as offering incense at home alters and temples.[57]

The proliferation of religious activity in the 1980's greatly alarmed China's leaders. Writing in 1993 for the *New York Times*, Nicholas Kristof mused, "Marx may have regarded religion as an opiate of the people, but Beijing regards it as an amphetamine."[58] The Religious Freedom Policy was not meeting its ultimate objective of eliminating religion, rather the opposite was happening. Several international and domestic events occurred that disturbed the CCP and led to the tightening of their control over religion. The downfall of communism in Europe greatly concerned the CCP, especially as Deng thought that increased religious activity in Communist Europe had contributed significantly to its collapse and feared the same for China.[59] Furthermore, domestic issues made the Communist Party fearful that China was following the European path. On April 15, 1989, students around the country began

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[56] MacInnis, *Religion in China Today*, 125.
[57] H. H. Lai, "Religious Policies in Post-Totalitarian China: Maintaining Political Monopoly over a Reviving Society," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 11 (Spring 2006): 62.
[58] Nicholas D. Kristof, "Christianity is Booming in China Despite Rifts," *New York Times*, February 7, 1993.
[59] Leung, "China's Religious," 22.

protesting the poor treatment of Hu Yaobang, a former Secretary General under Deng Xiaoping who was forced to resign after advocating liberal reforms. The students used the occasion of his sudden death on April 15 to call for economic liberalization and democratic reforms. The protests grew, and following a three week hunger strike the government declared martial law on May 20. The student protestors and Chinese Army clashed in Beijing on June 3-4, an event known as the Tiananmen Square Incident. The government claimed that 241 people died and 7,000 were wounded while the Red Cross claimed the number of dead reached 5,000 and the wounded 30,000. This convinced the government that the newly implemented liberal policies, especially those regarding religion, were leading to ruin.[60]

Later that year, the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize, confirming the incredible heights of his popularity. In addition to his two best selling books, he was named one of the hundred most influential people of the twentieth century by *Time* magazine. The Dalai Lama was increasingly used as a tool for Westerners to critique China's poor record on human rights and civil liberties. In 1995 the Dalai Lama announced that he had discovered the Panchen Lama (the position right under the Dalai Lama), much to the consternation of the Chinese Government which had claimed the right to identify the next Panchen Lama. Taken together, these issues increased the Communist Party's fears of religion and their desire to constrict religious practice.[61]

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[60] Peter Li, Steven Mark, and Marjorie H. Li, eds., *Culture and Politics in China: An Anatomy of Tiananmen Square* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 173-196.
[61] "Tibet Buddhists Call Boy, 6, Reincarnation of No. 2 Monk," *New York Times*, May 15, 1995; Slavoj Zizek, "How China Got Religion," *New York Times*, October 11, 2007.

Pope John Paul II was just as active in protesting China's treatment of his religion and its followers as was the Dalai Lama. In the PRC's Constitution Catholicism was allowed but was stripped of its international elements and made a tool of the state. This meant that the Pope was not allowed to appoint any church officials and had no authority in China. Scores of priests and nuns refused to disavow their loyalty to the Pope, and as a result were tortured and imprisoned for as many as twenty-five years. One of the main reasons the Chinese government persecuted the Catholic Church was their differing stances on birth control and abortion. Whereas China operated under the One Child Policy and required couples to use birth control after having a single child, the Catholic Church prohibited the use of contraception.[62] The Vatican sent both funding and personnel to China to facilitate underground churches. These churches gained many adherents during the 1980's and 1990's who had multiple children in the countryside where government control was weaker. Because of his role in supporting these usurpations of Chinese law, one Chinese official accused Pope John Paul II of "rude interference in the sovereign affairs of the Chinese church."[63]

The Chinese government's annoyance at the interference of Western agitators was not limited to the Pope. The closer ties with the West had sparked a fervent movement among foreign Christian missionaries to spread their message to mainland

[62] Kristof, "Christianity is Booming."
[63] Merle Goldman, "Religion in Post-Mao China," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 483 (January 1986): 154.

China. Much like their response to the Vatican, Chinese officials views this as "foreign infiltration" that clashed with the objectives of Document No. 19.[64]

The growth of domestic cults such as the Falun Gong also upset the government. Founded by Li Hongzhi in 1992, Falun Gong claimed to be a combination of Buddhism, Daoism, and ancient Chinese medicinal techniques. It originally consisted of meditation and breathing exercises and garnered little government notice. Within a few years the group had grown dramatically, with estimates of the number of members varying widely from two to sixty million.[65] The main cause of Falun Gong is human rights. The government was and remains mystified at the sect's ability to mobilize massive numbers of people at protests with seemingly no prior organization. The dramatic number of Falun Gong's members who have been killed or imprisoned is a sign of the government's fear of them. However, Buddhists disavow any association with Falun Gong, contending that they "distorted Buddhism to use it as a spiritual tool to control innocent people."[66] Ironically, the government backlash following these developments meant that religion was more tightly controlled after Deng Xiaoping's attempted liberal reforms that it had been before.

The CCP's tightening measures began immediately after Tiananmen Square and were led by Jiang Zemin, the General Secretary of the Communist Party from 1989-2002 and the President of the PRC from 1993-2003. In 1990 he initiated a three pronged approach to tightening up religion: stricter implementation of the Religious Freedom

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[64] Ye Xiaowen, "The Contemporary Religious Questions of the Motherland," in *Selected Reports of the Party Central School* 101, pages 9-23, quoted in Leung, "China's Religious," 22.
[65] Daniel A. Metraux and James W. Yoxall, *The Problems Facing China Today: Politics, Economics, Health, and Religion* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 265-268.
[66] Mark Landler, "China Steps Up Its Drive to Halt Dissident Sect," *New York Times*, July 23, 1999.

Policy, strengthening SARA and the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), and introducing new legislation aimed at increasing control over religious groups.[67] Zemin introduced two themes for the regulation of religion, "ruled by law" and "accommodationism."[68] This is illustrated by Jemin's description of the strategy in 1992:

> This type of accommodation does not request religious adherents to abandon religious faith and belief in Deism, but we request them to be politically patriotic and to support Communism and the leadership of the Communist Party. At the same time we must rid the country of religious systems and doctrines which do not accommodate socialism. We must try to mobilize the positive elements within religious doctrine, religious law and morality to serve socialism.[69]

The CCP convened a week long meeting attended by 236 party leaders in December 1990 to educate them on the new religious management strategy, a clear indication of the importance of the new legislation. All religious cadres as well as Buddhist monks, Catholic priests and nuns, Protestant pastors, etc., were required to study the new regulations during two sessions held in Beijing from November 1990 to April 1991.

Within a year, religious activities in China were drastically curtailed. Many underground Christian leaders were imprisoned, and all foreign religious emissaries were prohibited from entering the country.[70] In 1993, the CCP began laying the groundwork for even more policing of religion. Contending that religion's public nature

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[67] Xiaowen, "Reflections on the Religious Work," 4-9.
[68] Leung, "China's Religious," 26.
[69] Jiang Zemin, "Highly Regarded Works on Nationalities and Religion," in *Documentation Centre of Party Central and Policy Section of the Religious Affairs Bureau* (Beijing: Zhongjiao Wenhua Press, 1995), 249-255, quoted in Leung, "China's Religious," 28.
[70] Jean-Paul Wiest, "Catholics in China: The Bumpy Road to Reconciliation," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27 (January 2003): 5.

placed it under the purview of the Department of Public Affairs, the government said any religious personnel, activity, or location were subject to public administration. Two new sets of legislation pertaining to religion were released in 1994: Document 144 *Regulations on the Supervision of the Religious Activities of Foreigners in China*, and Document 145 *Regulations Regarding the Management of Places of Religious Activity*.[71] These two documents became the foundation for religious regulation until 2001.

Document No. 145 created a management system whereby local authorities could govern religion, relieving the state of that burden. All religious institutions had to be approved, register annually, and provide frequent reports about the state of their finances, personnel, and activities. Additionally, they had to prove themselves free of foreign influences. Local authorities had the power to levy punishment for any violations.[72]

Document No. 144 curbed foreign contact with religious outsiders. All non-Chinese nationals had to obtain permission before attending any church related activity. Almost all foreigners on faith related trips were denied entry into the country. The goal of this legislation was to decrease the connections between China's domestic religions and their international counterparts, thereby limiting their outside funding and creating a more conducive environment for CCP administration.[73]

In 2001 events culminated that forced China to loosen their grip on religion. First, the globalization of the late 20th century combined with the incredible information

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[71] "China: State Control of Religion," Human Rights Watch, October, 1997. http://www.hrw.org/reports/1997/china1/. Accessed July 1, 2008.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

explosion made it virtually impossible for China to maintain the strict level of control previously exercised. The new market-oriented economy had surged into second place in the world, and young Chinese people were adopting Western styles and consumption patterns.[74] Deng Xiaoping's "Open Door Policy" had finally come to fruition.

On July 13, 2001, the International Olympic Committee awarded Beijing the 2008 Summer Olympics, the culmination of a controversial two-year campaign to bring the games to China. Groups such as Amnesty International and Tibet Watch actively worked to prevent the awarding of the games to China, but ultimately failed.[75] China viewed the Olympics as an opportunity to be among the major players on the world stage. With a theme of "One world one dream," and emblems designed to signify hospitality and a commitment to the world, China illustrated a desire to change its popular image as a nation hostile to foreigners and civil liberties, including religion.[76] The Beijing police distributed pamphlets, too, instructing Chinese nationals on the proper treatment of foreign guests, forbidding them to hang up on callers, prohibiting the use of foul language, and demanding they be sympathetic and helpful to tourists.[77] China is greatly aware of the increased scrutiny the Olympics will bring, and the relaxation of censorship that will have to ensue. However, this does not mean they have totally liberalized religion and other civil practices in the country: tourists in Beijing are

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[74] 2001 CIA World Factbook. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html#Econ. Accessed July 2, 2008.
[75] "Positions Within the IOC Concerning the Questions of Human Rights," *ChinaOrbit.com*, http://www.chinaorbit.com/2008-olympics-china/2008-olympics-human-rights.html. Accessed July 2, 2008.
[76] BEIJING 2008 – The Official Website of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, http://en.beijing2008.cn/spirit/beijing2008/. Accessed July 3, 2008.
[77] Veronica Carrington, "The Summer Olympics Are Drawing Near: Thoughts Are Turning to the 2008 Olympics," *The EastCarolinian*, June 25, 2008.

only allowed to bring one bible for personal use and bibles have been banned completely from the Olympic Village.[78]

In December of 2001, China was accepted as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the culmination of a record setting fifteen-year application process. In order to gain membership China had to repeal 2,300 laws that were incompatible with WTO requirements. Most of the repealed laws dealt with standardizing the regulation and conduct of business practices to be more transparent. Additionally, trade barriers and quotas were removed.[79] These reforms gave the Chinese people more freedom in the marketplace than they had ever experienced before. This acted as a catalyst, and encouraged people to agitate for other freedoms, including religious liberties. The presence of outside observers, both due to the Olympics and WTO membership, meant that the government crackdowns to limit civil liberties, like religion, seen in the past were no longer possible.

The CCP's most recent attempt to articulate a position on religion, known as the new Regulations on Religious Affairs, or Document No. 426, came in December 2004. Although the government claims the regulations are a step towards greater religious freedoms, they can perhaps best be described as "more of the same," a continuation of the CCP's effort to maintain political power while displaying an image of tolerance.[80] As one Chinese pastor commented, "On the surface, the Party's new Religious Affairs

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[78] "Testing the Faith: Bibles Banned from 2008 Olympic Village," *World Net Daily*, February 7, 2007, http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=58544. Accessed July 3, 2008.
[79] "Expert: China Making Rapid Headway on WTO Requirements," *People's Daily Online*, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200401/19/eng2004119_132991.shtml. Accessed July 3, 2008.
[80] "China: A Year After New Regulations, Religious Rights Still Restricted," *Human Rights Watch*, March 1, 2006. http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/01/china12740.htm. Accessed June 20, 2008.

regulations appear to be more relaxed than previously… However, the Party still sees itself as in sole control of the government and of ideology. The new religious policy is more concrete than before. It spells out clearly the punishments for those who break the new regulations."[81] Document No. 426 consists of 48 articles, many which echo the vague language of past regulations.

Of particular concern for religious followers are the increased penalties for unregistered churches. Registration laws have long been a source of tension. A 2004 government-conducted survey revealed that while there were 130,000 Protestants in Beijing, only 30,000 were registered. Many unregistered church members attended "house churches" whose locations were unknown to the government.[82] This revelation concerned the government as it revealed their increasing lack of control over the population. The survey demonstrates the difficultly in quantifying religious activity in China, making the study of religion extremely difficult.

As China closes in on its largest public event, the 2008 Summer Olympics, it is exceedingly obvious that the government is uncomfortable with their loss of control over civil affairs. In a world epoch when religion is perceived as less and less of a threat to governments in general, China still sees it as a potential powder keg. Each year people are imprisoned, harassed, and even beaten because of their religious activities. The U.S. State Department documents pages worth of acts against religion and religious persons by the Chinese government each year, classifying it as a "country of particular concern"

[81] Xu Mei, "House Church Leaders are Divided Over New Regulations," *Compass Direct*, March 9, 2005.
[82] Ibid.

under the International Religious Freedom Act.[83] China's actions have clearly begun to take a toll on its international reputation, undermining its ability to become a legitimate, major player on the global stage.

The decline of CCP power in China means common Chinese people no longer need Party favor to secure their livelihood. In today's increasingly materialistic China a valuable job skill is a surer route of advancement than Party membership. As a result, while many commoners still fear the party and refuse to register as religious followers, an increasingly number of Chinese are willing to look at religion. Like most aspects of post-Mao China, religious practices have changed tremendously. However, this change has been *de facto* rather than *de jure* as the laws governing religion have changed little over the last two generations.

Buddhist Temples in Beijing

For most of its history the CCP has opposed the presence and construction of religious buildings. While recently the government has been helpful in restoring old temples, since 1988 it has forbid the construction of new temples. The temples currently suffer from lack of funds, partially because they have been forbidden from publicly asking for funds. Additionally, the lay community is unaccustomed to donating time and money to the temples, another legacy of Mao's Cultural Revolution. Fang Litian, from the Renmin University of China, says, "Occupied with economic production and

[83] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report 2007*, http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/2007/90133.htm. Accessed June 20, 2008.

business, lay Buddhists have no time to participate in Buddhist activities and have become very weak in their faith."[84]

Consequently, generating income is a huge priority. Numerous temples have begun encouraging tourism as a way of raising money. This development has created a dilemma for the monks, many of whom struggle with their dual roles as religious entities and tour guides. The time monks have to spend on the tourism aspects of the temples has taken away from their own religious practice and their ability to make contacts with lay followers, decreasing their opportunities to attract new followers and donations. Zhao Puchu, former chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association, commented, "Some people are not firm with their faith and are relaxed in precepts and practices. These people are chasing after money and fame, living a luxurious and corrupt lifestyle. If this goes on unchecked, it may seriously imperil Buddhism's future."[85] Monks visiting other temples are sometimes forced to buy tickets to gain admittance. In the words of Venerable Jing Yin, "I attempted to ask for a waiver because I am a monk. The man was very impatient and said, 'You must pay to enter, no matter who you are. That is the regulation.' I considered it a great pity that a monk has to buy a ticket to return to his own ancestral shrine."[86] The Buddhist temples in Beijing illustrate this dilemma, market economy vs. religion.

Beijing hosts dozens of Buddhist temples, but only a fraction have been restored and reopened. The majority of the renovations have taken place since China's

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[84] MacInnis, *Religion*, 148; James Miller, *Chinese Religions in Contemporary Societies* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2006), 93.
[85] Zhao Puchu, *Thirty Years of the Chinese Buddhist Association* (Beijing: Chinese Buddhist Association, 1983), 12.
[86] Miller, *Chinese Religions*, 91.

successful bid for the 2008 Olympic Games. Between 2000 and 2008 Beijing has spent over 1.2 billion Yuan (approximately $171 million U.S.) on restoring cultural sites, an annual expenditure higher than that which was spent during the entire 1990's.[87] Although several Buddhist temples were included in the building projects, the government's objective is clearly to prepare for the Olympics, not facilitate religious worship. According to Mei Ninghua, director of the Beijing Administrative Bureau of Cultural Relics, the goal was to "showcase the capital's history to the athletes and tourists who pour in for the 2008 Olympics."[88] This is also evidenced by the large sums of money spent to make English language signs to guide tourists around the city, as well as the addition of many Western-style bathrooms.

Interviews

In May 2008 I interviewed people around Beijing regarding their personal religious beliefs and general thoughts about Buddhism.[89] I talked with people at the Yong He Gong, popularly known as the Lama Temple, as well as in Tiananmen Square and other spots around Beijing. Although the majority of people were willing to talk, there was a distinct difference in attitude between younger and older generations, the older being much more reluctant. Additionally, while the majority of the college-aged subjects agreed to give their name, most older people refused, and were also unwilling to

[87] "Beijing Launches Massive Relics Revamp," *China Daily*, November 15, 2004.
[88] "730 Year Old Stupa Facelift Finished," *China Daily*, September 30, 2003.
[89] Every school child in China studies English, and by the year 2025 the number of English speakers in China is expected to exceed the number of native English speakers in all the rest of the world. Embassy of the People's Republic of China, http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/zyxw/t400778.htm. Accessed June 18, 2008

be photographed. Everyone was asked basically the same questions, but the conversations frequently moved to safer topics when subjects became uncomfortable with the personal nature of the discussion. It was obvious that the Chinese are not used to publicly talking about topics such as politics or religion, and this hesitancy was apparent in the brevity of a lot of the responses.

On May 16, 2008, I went to the Lama Temple, by far and away the most prominent Buddhist temple in Beijing today. Though the Lama Temple is the most popular and well attended, it is fairly representative of Beijing's Buddhist temples in general. The temple was originally constructed in 1694 during the Qing Dynasty and served as the Imperial Palace for Emperor Yin Zhen, a follower of Tibetan Buddhism. Upon his death Yin Zhen decreed that the temple would be thenceforth a monastery housing large numbers of Tibetan monks. It is unclear how much damage the temple suffered during the Cultural Revolution, but it officially reopened to the public in 1981.[90] Today the Lama Temple is both the center of Tibetan Buddhism in Beijing and one of the city's most popular tourist sites. The entrance is lined with souvenir and tea shops that provide everything from incense to camera batteries. The modest entrance fee includes a mini video disc of the temple's history. Besides the opportunity to offer incense or see one of the seventy or so resident monks, most visitors come to the Lama Temple to view the Guinness Book world record statue of Maitreya, the Laughing Buddha. The sandalwood statue stands 80.6 feet tall.[91]

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[90] From the *Beijing Official Guide*, found on "Beijing This Month," http://www.btmbeijing.com/contents/en/guide/BOG2004/churches/buddhism. Accessed July 8, 2008.
[91] "Confucius He Would Say: Visit My Temple," *Beijing This Month*, April 2004.

The Yong He Gong is open daily. Buddhists traditionally make incense offerings at temples on the first and fifteenth of each lunar month, and also on special occasions such as the Buddha's birthday, days before exams, or following tragedies such as the earthquake in Sichuan province on May 12, 2008. This is done on an individual level; there are no services that resemble those held among Western religious organizations such as sermons or Bible studies.[92] The Lama Temple does not release official ticket sale numbers, and there are no records distinguishing between tourists or religious attendees. However, one temple-goer noted that there were 70,000 visitors present on the Buddha's birthday in 2008.

Upon arriving at the temple, the first person encountered was a young girl in her late teens who worked in the temple selling souvenirs. When asked if she believed in Buddhism she shook her head and laughed saying "No, I'm not a Buddhist. This is just my job." Nearby was a 26-year-old man named Wang Ton who was at the temple by himself. He was from outside the city, and noted that neither he nor his parents were religious. He said he was an architectural student and was visiting the temple, and other historic sites in the city, to study the architecture of the various buildings.

The next girl interviewed was also alone completing an incense offering. She was in her early 20's, and said this was her first time visiting the Lama Temple although she

[92] On May 12, 2008, an earthquake measuring 8.3 on the Richter Scale occurred in the Sichuan Province of China. Chengdu is the capital of Sichuan. As of July 8, 2008, 69,197 people are confirmed dead as result of the quake, and another 18,340 people are still missing. *Sina*, http://news.sina.com.cn/pc/2008-05-13/326/651.html. Accessed July 14, 2008.

had lived in Beijing for three years. When asked about her religion, she said, "I think I believe in Buddhism." She noted that her mother is Buddhist, but her father is not. [93]

A married couple visiting the temple proved to be one of the most interesting interviews. The husband, Jaime Purdreu, was from Spain and appeared to be in his late fifties. The wife, Lu Ngah was Chinese, and looked about forty. Jaime worked at the Spanish Embassy in Beijing, and they were the model of a professional couple. We conversed in Spanish, a rather surreal experience considering that we were standing in a place so strongly associated with China. Lu Ngah said she was not religious, and neither was her family. This was their first time visiting the temple even though they had lived here several years. Lu Ngah believes Buddhism is part of her Chinese culture. She also said that all religions and politics are being discussed more in China, and she thinks this is more of an expression of independence and freedom rather than religiosity. As an example she pointed out how many young people now wear Christian crosses. Lu Ngah felt they do this as expression of freedom rather than faith. She maintained very few of them would actually understand the cross' significance. Her comment has as much relevance for Americans who wear Buddhist symbols with little understanding of what it means as it does for the Chinese who wear crosses as a fashion or social statement.

The last interviews conducted at the Lama Temple were with a group of four college girls. They attended China Agricultural University in Beijing. Amazingly, one of them, Yulan Zhang, was moving to College Station, Texas, in the fall of 2008 to attend graduate school at Texas A&M University. Yulan said they were from Chengdu

[93] This young woman's English was so limited, I was unable to understand large portions of her conversation, including her name.

and were there to offer incense for the victims of the earthquake. The girls said they think most Chinese believe in the Buddha, but are not Buddhists. They noted that many people go to the temples to offer incense before exams or wear jade Buddha necklaces. Yulan said these were "kind of tradition." She believes that science is now her religion, but added that "later they may need more than that." She also said that running into me was an example of "Buddhism at work."

Interviews with people around Beijing resulted in the same multiplicity of responses found inside the Lama Temple. Wei Ye, a tour guide, talked at length about religion and Buddhism. She was around thirty years old and college educated. Wei Ye was helpful in explaining roughly the dynamics of Buddhism in China. She does not consider herself a Buddhist, but yet attends the Lama Temple on the traditional days, the first and fifteenth of each lunar month, and also prays at home. Additionally, she produced a card she carries in her wallet with the Buddha's image. Wei Ye said she goes to the temple alone, and does not interact with any people there. She burns incense offerings, prays, and makes donations. She does not study the teachings of Buddha, and said she began going to the temple and praying when she "saw non-believers having bad things happen to them." When asked what she thought about attending a Tibetan temple, the Lama Temple, instead of a Chinese Mahayana one, she became confused. She said, "The Lama Temple is Chinese." Attempts to continue this conversation made her more confused and uncomfortable. Wei Ye thinks there are many others like her, who may only go to temples once a year, but pray at home. She offered as an example the Buddha's Birthday celebration on May 1, 2008, when she said she attended the Lama

Temple along with 70,000 other people and 2,000 police officers. Her comment on the large number of police officers present at the celebration is an interesting commentary on the tight surveillance and control the government still exercises over Buddhism.

Tony Lee was another tour guide. He was in his forties and was raised in the Shang Dong Province, between Beijing and Shanghai. He now lives and works in Beijing. Tony Lee labels himself as a Confucian, not religious. His family is not religious, either. Tony Lee attends temples occasionally for fun or to learn more in preparation for his job, but never for worship. He thinks most people in China do not have a single religion, and that the number of people in China looking for religion is not rising, it is staying the same. Tony Lee said, "People in China are more concerned with improving their daily life than their afterlife."

A third tour guide, also named Tony and in his forties, said he was not religious at all, and neither were his parents. He pointed out how Communists had outlawed all religions, but now school children were taught about the various religions, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Tony visits temples occasionally, but only as a tourist and guide, not as a worshipper. He said Buddhism is part of being Chinese.

Joy works at her family's tea shop in the art district of Beijing. She has an uncle who is a Buddhist monk. Despite her close connection to Buddhism, she says that she does not frequently attend the temple even though her uncle is a monk and her aunt, to whom she is quite close, attends on the first and fifteenth of each month. When she does go occasionally, she attends the Fanyuan Temple at her university. She says she is a Buddhist, and she learns more by studying the Dharma and listening to Buddhist music.

Joy's study of the Dharma is unique among those interviewed in China, and more closely resembled those interviewed in Houston.

Nora was also a college student. She considers herself "very religious," and noted that both she and her grandmother are Buddhists. Nora does not go temples, but she burns incense in her house and "lives as a Buddhist." When asked what that entailed and if she studied the teachings of the Buddha she replied, "No, I don't study, I have a good, kind heart." It was obvious Nora was confused by the concept of studying the Dharma, or that there could be more to being a Buddhist than living a kind life.

Some of the interviewees around Beijing were busy doing their jobs, but were still polite enough to converse briefly. In Tiananmen Square Zhang was a college student working with a large crew cleaning the brick pavement of the square. When asked if she or her family was religious, she answered curtly that, "I'm not religious. My parents not religious." Elaine was a young woman who worked in the Capital Hotel. She is not religious, but "it makes her very happy that people are coming to China to see the great change." Jackie was a twenty year old man who worked guarding the entrance to Beijing's underground city. He thought he might believe in Buddhism "a little." His family is not religious, and he does not read any religious books.

The person who was most open in speaking about China's religions and politics was Aron. He works as a museum curator for the Confucius Museum. He is also an artist. He is not Buddhist, but believes in Confucianism and thinks it is a religion, not just a code. Aron sees Buddhism as more of a tradition in China than a religion and thinks most people only come to the Buddha in times of trouble. Aron is very well-

educated in Buddhism and knew the differences between Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese practices. He says most Chinese do not. Aron believes religion links Tibet and China together like a chain. He thinks the Chinese see Tibet as a part of China, hence the large attendance at the Lama Temple. He holds that young people are "losing their direction" after the end of communism, but like Tony Lee, disagrees that more young Chinese are becoming religious. Also like Tony, he argues that they are much more materialistic than religious. At the end it was evident that Aron was concerned he had been too outspoken in his opinions, and refused to have his picture taken or reveal his true name.

Conclusion

Despite Buddhism's long and complex history in China, it is clear today that in many ways the religion is still in its infancy. Though the number of Chinese people who call themselves religious is quite large, as a percentage it is in fact rather small, only 31%. The United States has roughly the same number of people who identify themselves as religious as does China, but this number represents 83% of the total population in the U.S.[94] These numbers are largely complicated by differing definitions of what it means to be religious. Nora in Beijing declared herself to be very religious, but by Western standards her actions, lighting incense and having a good heart, hardly make someone a devout follower. As evidenced by the interviews, people's motivations for practicing Buddhism vary greatly in China. While some have genuine religious intent, others, as Lu Ngah said, see religion and Buddhism as a way to express their

[94] "Religion in China on the Eve of the 2008 Beijing Olympics," *Pew Global Attitudes Project*, May 2, 2008. http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=301. Accessed June 20, 2008.

individuality and exercise freedom. In Mao's China such actions would not have been possible, giving them great symbolic appeal for today's Chinese. Even though Buddhism represents the largest religious group in China, about 100 million of the 300 million total religious persons, the government does not appear to have any long term plans to aid and promote Buddhism, despite its desire for a "harmonious society." Actions such as having 2,000 police officers at a Buddhist celebration seem to imply that "harmony" will be strictly supervised. Furthermore, recent issues with the Falun Gong and Dalai Lama suggest that the government is not and will not be inclined to relax its position on religion in the near future. The August 2007 Order No. 5 from the State Administration of Religious Affairs prohibiting Buddhist monks from returning from the dead without a permit and the stipulation that only monks within China could apply, a direct attack on the exiled Dalai Lama, is recent evidence of the tight control the government continues to exercise over Buddhism and religion in China.[95]

[95] Zizek, "How China." Traditionally, Tibetan lamas can consciously choose to be reborn, often many times, in order to continue their work. The Dalai Lama is selected from children born after their predecossors' death who are seen as embodiments of their soul. In response to Order No. 5 which would give Chinese authorities the ability to choose the next Dalai Lama, the current Dalai Lama, who is 72 years old, broke with tradition by saying his successor might be chosen before his death with the approval of the Tibetan people through a referendum. He also mentioned that other mentioned that other methods, such as a conclave used to elect the Pope, might be possible. The appointment of Lamas has been a major source of contention for Tibetans since the Dalai Lama's exile in 1959. In 1995, Chinese authorities took the six-year-old boy chosen by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama into house arrest, and he has not been seen in public since. The Chinese government chose a different candidate, a Tibetan, who travels around the country advocating China's ownership of Tibet. Order No. 5 reasserts the Chinese government's desire to control Tibetan Buddhism and the consequences of the current Dalai Lama's death. For more information, please see Richard Spencer, "Dalai Lama Says Heir Should Be Elected," in *Telegraph.co.uk*, November 29, 2007. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1570676/Dalai-Lama-says-heir-should-be-elected.html. Accessed August 8, 2008.

CHAPTER III

CHINESE BUDDHISM IN AMERICA

The Chinese Buddhist tradition in the United States is, as a whole, American Chinese rather than Chinese American
~ Charles Prebish

American Buddhism Before 1950

Contact with foreign nations was part of life in the United States since the country's beginnings. Trade routes between the U.S. and India and China provided an introduction to Asian faiths, and numerous travelers and missionaries sent back reports of their dealings with Asia and its religions. Most nineteenth century Americans failed to grasp any real understanding of Asian ideology, and neither did they have any interest in the subject. Americans generally believed that foreign religions had little to offer, and Asian religions were particularly denigrated.[96] Scholar Thomas Tweed says that until the late 1800's almost every American interpreter divided the world into four religious spheres: (1) Christians, (2) Jews, (3) "Mohametans," (4) "heathens" or "pagans." The last category included Hinduism, Buddhism, and all other South and East Asian traditions. Occasionally the East was granted the term "Oriental religion," illustrating the extent to which even intellectuals viewed the "Orient" as a single entity.[97]

Buddhism went largely unnoticed until two developments in the 1830's and 1840's – the rise of European Buddhist studies and the emergence of New England

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[96] Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), xvii.
[97] Ibid, xviii; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 6.

Transcendentalism. Like the romantics in Europe, many Americans became fascinated with the religions of Asia. Among the works that particularly sparked interest was Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* in 1844. Arnold tells the story of Siddhartha, Guatama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, in poetic form. The book sold almost one million copies in the United States and was the catalyst for many Americans' conversions to Buddhism.[98]

The World's Parliament of Religions of 1893, which was held in Chicago, also had huge impact on Buddhism's popularity in the U.S. Among the featured speakers at the Parliament were several Buddhist monks. After the Parliament, Buddhism became increasingly attractive to many Americans and was a recurrent topic of public discourse. In 1897, Dharmapala, one of the prominent speakers at the Parliament, returned to America and helped found the first official branch of a Buddhist society in the West. Within a few years there were branches in Chicago, New York, and San Francisco. By 1900, Buddhism had peaked in popularity and claimed several famous citizens including Andrew Carnegie and Henry Ford as sympathizers. The religion's popularity began to diminish around 1907, and by 1912 Buddhism had faded back into the shadows of America's religious landscape. Buddhism failed to establish itself in the United States during this era primarily because it was seen as too passive and pessimistic to have great appeal for Westerners. Where Christianity inspired great activity from adherents, Buddhism advocated a laissez-faire attitude towards life. Contributing to Buddhism's

[98] Tweed, *American Encounter*, 29-30.

limited success was that very few Buddhist texts had been translated into English at that time, and the small number of existing Buddhist organizations were poorly organized.[99]

The fledgling organizations founded during the Victorian era served as pioneer outposts for Buddhists during the first half of the twentieth century. Generally the faith remained more or less confined to bohemian quarters and was the preoccupation of a handful of spiritual seekers until the 1950's. The "Beat Zen" movement of the 1950's began a new era of American Buddhism. Led by D. T. Suzuki, Jack Kerouac, Alan Ginsberg, and Alan Watts, the Beat Generation presented the United States its first organized challenge to the cultural hegemony of Anglo-Protestantism. Buddhism, especially Zen, played an integral part of the Beat movement. The philosophical teachings of Buddhism allied with the Beats' attack on the conservative conformity of American society. The Beats were also drawn to Zen's meditative nature that related well with new drug culture.[100]

The ensuing "Zen Boom" of the 1960's was a major watershed in the history of American Buddhism. The cool, reserved Beats were displaced by a rebellious "hippie" community. Theses hippies, and their psychedelic counterculture of the 1960',s had a natural affinity for Zen and its meditative ways. Zen centers sprung up all across the United States. Although many initial attendees were only casual practitioners, these facilities provided a foundation for the growing convert Buddhist community. Many Americans who became involved with Buddhism during this time formed deeper commitments to the faith and moved away from Zen to follow other schools of

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[99] Ibid, 26-77.
[100] Coleman, *New Buddhism*, 60-63.

Buddhism, including Asian based schools. The number of practitioners and the extent to which they were interested in Buddhism (rather than mind-altering drugs) is difficult to quantify.[101]

1965 Immigration Reform

Buddhist scholars identify the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 as the single most important factor in the rise of Buddhism in America.[102] Reversing earlier immigration acts of the 1880's, 1920's, and 1930's which severely restricted the number of Asians, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, known as the Hart-Celler Act, opened the floodgates for Asian immigration. In 1961, only 8% of United States immigrants were born in Asiatic countries; by 1972 that number had risen to nearly one-third of all immigrants. In 1990, immigration laws were further relaxed, allowing even higher numbers of Asians into the country. According to immigration historian Jon Gjerde, Asians made up twenty-five percent of all immigrants to the United States.[103] The 2000 census reported that Asians made up approximately 3.5% of the total population in America. By 2005, they had grown to 5%. The number of United States residents who will identify themselves as Asian by the year 2050 is projected to be 8%, a 213% increase in the United States' Asian population from 2000 to 2050.[104]

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[101] Seager, *Buddhism*, 33-50.
[102] Thomas A. Tweed, "Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers, Adherents, and the Study of Religion," *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, eds. Duncan Ryūken Williams and Christopher S. Queen (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 71.
[103] Jon Gjerde, *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 450.
[104] Prior to the adoption of the 1965 Immigration Act, immigration policies continued the Oriental exclusion policy made explicit in earlier regulations including the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Asia

Of the Asian American population, Chinese currently make up the largest ethnic group. The 2000 U.S. Census reported that there are approximately 2.88 million Americans of Chinese descent.[105] Chinese sources argue that the Chinese population is actually much larger, around 3.6 million. Their figure includes estimated illegal immigrants as well as Chinese from places such as Taiwan and Hong Kong who generally do not register as "Chinese" on census forms. Not only are Chinese the largest Asian American group, they are also a predominately first generation immigrant community. About two thirds of Chinese Americans were born in Asia, and the majority of them migrated after the 1960's.[106] The 2000 census is only the second time China has appeared in the top ten countries of origin for immigrants to the U.S. The first was in 1880.[107]

China was not immediately affected by the 1965 immigration reforms, due to Communist controls. Not until the U.S. recognized the People's Republic of China in

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Barred Zone Act of 1917 (which denied entry to peoples from South and Southeast Asia and the islands of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with the exception of the American possessions of the Philippines and Guam), the 1924 Immigration Act (which totally excluded the Japanese and other Asians from immigration and naturalization), and the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 (which reclassified all Filipinos as "aliens" and permitted only a 50 person annual quota). For further information please read: Elliot Robert Barkin, *And Still They Come: Immigrants and American Society 1920-1990's* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1996), 115-143; or see "The American Immigration Law Foundation," a non-profit, educational organization established in 1987 to "increasing the public understanding of immigration laws and policies." http://www.ailf.org/ipc/policy_reports_2004_mccarranwalter.asp. Accessed November 22, 2007.

[105] U.S. Census Bureau, "2000 Census, Population by Ethnicity," http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFIteratedFacts?_event=&geo_id=01000US&_geoContext=01000US&_street=&_county=&_cityTown=&_state=&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=&_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&_submenuId=factsheet_2&ds_name=DEC_2000_SAFF&_ci_nbr=016&qr_name=DEC_2000_SAFF_R1010&reg=DEC_2000_SAFF_R1010%3A016&_keyword=&_industry. Accessed July 17, 2008.

[106] Xiao-hung Yin, "The Impact of Continuing Chinese Immigration on Chinese American Life," *Chinese American Forum* (October 2005): 11.

[107] Kenneth Holland, "A History of Chinese Immigration in the United States and Canada," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 37 (Summer 2007): 159.

1972 and the death of Mao in 1976, did a significant number of Chinese immigrants begin to move to the U.S. These immigrants were of a different class than the ones from the 1800's. Instead of unskilled laborers, the majority of Chinese emigrating in the 1970's were university educated professionals. The Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 also prompted a large number of Chinese to relocate, especially college students.[108] This is reflected in the profile of U.S. universities. Although Chinese and Asians only make up about 5% of the total U.S. population, they account for 8% of all college students. Their presence at the top research universities is even higher. For example, in 2001, Asians comprised 42% of the student population at UC Berkeley, 27.4% at MIT, 23.2% at Stanford, and 17.5% at Harvard.[109]

Buddhism in the U.S. Since Immigration Reform

Buddhism's growth in America clearly parallels increases in the Asian population resulting from the 1965 immigration laws. Since the 1970's, all denominations of the Buddhist religion have experienced unprecedented growth in the United States. Increases since 1990 are particularly large, reflective of the time needed to integrate into American society. Sociologists Barry Kosmin and Seymour Lachman conducted the American Religious Identity Survey (ARIS) and found that between 1990 and 2001 Buddhism has grown 170% and become the fourth most practiced religion in America. It was virtually equal with Islam, losing a third place position by a mere

[108] Ibid, 155.
[109] Yin, "The Impact," 11.

22,000 people.[110] Others have estimated the number of Buddhists to be twice the 1.5 million reported by ARIS. Dr. Richard Seager, author of *Buddhism in America*, believes, "The 1.5 million is a low reasonable number." He thinks immigrants from Asia probably account for two-thirds of the total, and Anglo coverts about one-third, underlying the importance of reform in immigration laws.[111]

Given the incredible diversity among the different types of Buddhism represented in America, and the tremendous sociological differences in the composition of various groups, there is unfortunately no infallible way to determine who is a Buddhist. Buddhism differs from other mainstream religions in its criteria for membership. Additionally, different groups use various standards for membership, and some have multiple levels of membership. Unlike Christian Churches, there are no official members of Buddhist Temples. One simply attends at their convenience, and the only record of their attendance may be that they show up on a mailing list. Many Americans who consider themselves "Buddhist" are not affiliated with any organized group and do not attend a temple, instead meditating or doing yoga on their own.[112]

Regardless of discrepancies in numbers, the increase and impact of Buddhism is obvious in America. By the 1990's Buddhism was no longer considered exotic as evidenced by the results of a recent survey in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* that found that 26,125,000 Americans, or 12.6% of the U.S. population, claim

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[110] G. R. Lewis, "Buddhism in America," *Adherents* (2006): 3-5.
[111] Jane Lampman, "American Buddhism on the Rise," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 14, 2006, 14.
[112] Peter N. Gregory, "Describing the Elephant: Buddhism in America," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 11 (2001): 233-263.

that their daily spirituality has been influenced by Buddhism.[113] For the first time in the 2,500 years since the advent of Buddhism, all types of the religion, from every Asian Buddhist tradition, are present in one country, the United States. As of 2007, there are 2,207 recognized Buddhist temples and organizations, and millions who practice some form of Buddhism privately or sympathize with the faith.[114]

Chinese Buddhism in Houston: The Jade Buddha Temple

For new Asian Americans, Seager believes, "Buddhism plays an integral role in the formation of their personal and social identity. It provides many immigrants and their children with emotional stability and a sense of community."[115] American Buddhist scholar Charles Prebish agrees and says Buddhism is especially important for Chinese Americans. He sees their tradition as American Chinese Buddhism rather than Chinese American Buddhism. The emphasis, he says, is on a conscious choice to be "Chinese."[116] Prebish thinks the Buddhist tradition serves as an important link back to China's culture for an immigrant community undergoing a radical shift in their identity due to immigration. Another important aspect of Chinese Buddhism, Prebish notes, is

[113] Lewis, "Buddhism in America," 3-5.
[114] The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, *Pluralism Project Directory 2007*, http://www.pluralism.org/resources/statistics/tradition.php#Buddhism. The Pluralism Project began in 1991 under the leadership of Diana Eck with the mission to "study the new religious diversity of the United States." The Project publishes diverse media and provides academic databases. It also hosts several annual conferences on religious studies. Accessed July 16, 2008.
[115] Seager, *Buddhism*, 158-159.
[116] Charles S, Prebish, *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 30.

the difficulty in obtaining information about their numbers or practices. He attributes this to the insularity of the community.[117]

California, New York, and Texas have the largest numbers of Buddhist Temples of any states. Houston, Texas, itself has 38 temples.[118] The Jade Buddha Temple, one of Houston's 38 temples, is an impressive illustration of the ethnic and religious dynamics Prebish and Seager discuss. Since the first Chinese immigrants arrived by boat in Houston in 1870, their numbers and presence in the city have steadily increased. Presently, in 2008, Houston has the second largest Indochinese community of any city after Los Angeles.[119] The Jade Buddha Temple is situated in the heart of Chinatown, off Bellaire Boulevard where numerous Asian restaurants and shops intermingle with more American venues such as Starbucks and Randall's Food Market. The temple covers two-and-a-half acres, and was originally built in 1989. Its impressive traditional Chinese architecture makes it a sight of interest for not only religious visitors, but also sightseers. The Grand Hall dominates the buildings, and is joined by the Kwan-Yin Hall (used to provide Buddhist services in English), a library, dining hall, youth activity center, and living quarters for resident monks and guests. The Kuan Yin Pond lies in front of the Grand Hall and creates a beautiful entrance to the facility.

The Jade Buddha Temple maintains a sophisticated web site that operates in both English and Chinese, and is a frequent return in searches for Buddhism or Houston's

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[117] Ibid, 30, 14.
[118] The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, *Pluralism Project Directory 2007*, http://www.pluralism.org/research/profiles.php#TX. Accessed July 17, 2008.
[119] Edward C. M. Chen and Fred R. Von Der Mehden, "History of Houston's Chinatown," http://www.chinatownconnection.com/houston_chinatown_history.htm. Accessed July 20, 2008.

Chinatown.[120] The paragraph accompanying those web results reads, "We, the members of Jade Buddha Temple, invite you- regardless of your background or religious affiliation- to enter our community, learn more about Buddhism, and participate in our spiritual enhancement programs. We are always eager to welcome new members into our family. For more information…"[121] In a further illustration of how the temple benefits from the internet, the Jade Buddha Temple has won "Best Buddhist Temple" in the *HoustonPress* Best Of Awards since the introduction of the competition.[122]

The temple's mission statement is also available in most of its publications:

> At the Jade Buddha Temple, our goal is to adopt and practice the Buddha's teaching of loving kindness, compassion, joyfulness, and serenity in our daily lives for the benefit of ourselves and others. Additionally, we learn to cultivate the wisdom necessary for clear understanding of both the universe and the human spirit.

The temple hosts several activities during the week, including meditation, yoga, chanting, and study of Mahayana Buddhist doctrines. Most functions occur Sunday mornings. On Sundays, yoga begins at 8:00 a.m. Meditation follows at 9:00 a.m. At 10:15 a.m. "Dharma Discussion," which closely resembles Western Sunday Schools, is held in Chinese and English. Childcare is provided for all activities throughout the week, and the Children's Group, ages five through twelve, meets on Sundays in the youth activities building for a schedule that closely resembles the adults'. One of the more popular gatherings each week is a tasty vegetarian lunch that is offered in the dining hall after services on Sundays. Additionally, the temple celebrates significant

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[120] A Google search of "Jade Buddha Temple Houston" resulted in 13,500 hits. July 20, 2008.
[121] http://www.chinatownconnection.com/jadebuddhatemple.htm. Accessed July 20, 2008.
[122] http://houstonpress.com/bestof/2005/award/best-buddhist-temple-41964. Accessed July 19, 2008.

days such as the Buddha's birthday, and it also holds many special services for events including memorials, retreats, and even baby showers. The Jade Buddha Temple is also involved with various community and outreach activities, especially the Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston organization, which is comprised of volunteers representing ten different faith communities including Buddhists, Jewish, Christians and Hindus. This group focuses on social services in Houston, and provides much of the manpower and resources for operations such as Meals on Wheels, and is also is a primary provider of refugee services.[123] Other examples of the temple's outreach are a yearly college scholarship open for local students, and participating in local relief efforts to assist victims of China's May 2008 earthquake.[124]

The Jade Buddha Temple claims to have over 1,000 participating members, but there are no official attendance records or membership requirements.[125] Each Sunday there are several hundred in attendance, engaging in various levels of participation. The population is almost exclusively Asian, even in the English Dharma Discussion group. Although the Sunday schedule gives the impression of a structured program, in fact it is more a free flowing affair. People come and go throughout the sessions, and attendees quite often do as much of the talking as do the monks or lay leaders of discussions. Guests are warmly received and encouraged to stay for lunch and "fellowship."

Another principle function of the Jade Buddha Temple is its role in the Texas Buddhist Association. As the Asian immigrant community grew in Texas grew during

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[123] Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, http://www.imgh.org. Accessed July 22, 2008.
[124] Please see http://www.jadebuddha.org/english/newsletter/Edge_2008_Q2.pdf. Accessed July 20, 2008.
[125] http://www.jadebuddha.org/english/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=43&Itemid=144. Accessed July 20, 2008.

the 1980's, the number of Buddhist groups and temples there saw a parallel increase. Communication between the various groups was limited, due to language, ethnic, and religious barriers. In the fall of 1991, a delegation of officials from the American Buddhist Congress visited Houston to aid Texas Buddhists in establishing a state-wide association that would improve Buddhist life in Texas through a united Buddhist community. In 1992, the senior monk Reverend Hung-I Shih of the Jade Buddha Temple, along with three additional senior monks from other Texas temples, agreed to found the Texas Buddhist Association as a non-profit organization.[126]

The Jade Buddha Temple has served as headquarters for the Texas Buddhist Association (TBA) since its inception. The Association is prominently mentioned on all the Jade Buddha Temple's publications, and on Sunday mornings lay leaders wear vests with the TBA logo. The TBA's mission statement includes the following goals:

1. To preserve and nurture the Buddha Dharma in Texas, realizing and respecting the diversity of Buddhist traditions within the state;

2. To unify Buddhist practitioners across Texas by increasing communication between temples, study groups, and individuals from various schools and by providing opportunities for mutually beneficial interaction;

3. To bring the teachings of the Buddha to the mainstream of American life in Texas through education and opportunities for social service;

[126] Texas Buddhist Council, http://www2.cs.uh.edu/~tihuang/tbc. Accessed August 6, 2008.

4. To serve as a consultant to and advocate for Buddhist temples, study groups, and individuals on matters of cultural, legal, and political concern related to the preservation and promotion of the Buddha Dharma in Texas;

5. To provide an open forum and clearinghouse for Buddhist issues and concerns in America and in the state of Texas;

6. To acquire land and facilities through donations or other means in order to establish one or more retreat centers to be made available to members and other interested parties and to provide for the maintenance and preservation of those lands and facilities; and

7. To perform charitable activities within the meanings of Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3) and Texas Tax Code Section 11.18(c)(1).[127]

Members of the Texas Buddhist Association come from diverse ethnicities, the majority of the groups being Southeast Asian. Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, the three main schools of Buddhism, are all represented, as well as various sub-sects within the schools. The TBA conducts a variety of programs including educational forums, retreats, consulting, a biannual directory, and a semiannual newsletter. The Board of Directors meets quarterly at sites that rotate around the state, and a general membership meeting is held each spring.[128]

[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.

In addition to the Texas Buddhist Association, temple and outreach activities, the Jade Buddha Temple has another mission, the development of the American Bodhi Center, a 512 acre retreat located sixty miles northwest of Houston near the town of Hempstead, Texas. Although the Bodhi Center is officially an outreach of the TBA, it, like the Association, is almost exclusively supported and operated by the Jade Buddha Temple. The idea for a center began in the 1990's, as a natural progression of the group's goal of "further developing Buddhism in the U.S." Land for the center was purchased in 2001, after the Jade Buddha Temple determined their facilities were no longer adequate for the TBA and its work. Construction began almost immediately. Instead of being designed as a traditional temple, the facility has a number of buildings that are designed to operate as "a cultural, educational, and altruistic activity center of Buddhism." The Bodhi Center consists of:

> The Zen lobby and the Chanting lobby will be places for meditation. The Buddhist College will be a place of learning. The forest of quiet living will accommodate either individual members or groups of members. The Haihuei building will either be for administrative business or holding group activities. The outdoor activity area will be used for recreational gatherings, camping trips, and picnics. The audio-visual center will provide members with information through a wide range of documents and literature. The Memorial Park will replace Buddha Light Temple to become a park for towers (stupas) in memory of loved ones who have passed away. When the time is ripe, the Bodhi Center also intends to build a Grand Hall in honor of the Buddha. It will serve to remind us that the world we are in now could also be Pureland. We plan to preserve as much of the forest land as possible to allow our facility to be surrounded by the beauty of nature.[129]

[129] American Bodhi Center, "The Concept of the Bodhi Center," http://www.jadebuddha.org/BodhiCenter/Englist%20HTML/E_Origenation.htm. Accessed July 21, 2008. The Pureland mentioned in the quote refers to a perfect realm of bliss where enlightenment is attained, much like "heaven" for the Christian faith.

Phase I of construction is nearly completed, and since 2006 the Bodhi Center has frequently hosted guests, special events and Buddhist retreats throughout the year. Activities include: Zen meditation groups, such as yoga and tai chi; family activities and retreats; counseling and advice retreats; lectures and classes in, for example, health, gardening, nutrition, cooking, and interpersonal relations; Samadhi forest retreats; camping; nature activities, and memorial services.[130]

The American Bodhi Center is an expensive undertaking, and attendees at the Jade Buddha Temple are copiously encouraged to donate to the cause. Adjacent to the entry of the main temple is a donation box, the first of many prompts to contribute. Regular devotees of the temple are given piggy banks shaped in the form of the Bodhi Center's main building. A yearly golf tournament is another popular fundraiser.[131] Sponsorship of a brick or roof tile costs fifty dollars, and more substantial gifts are rewarded with subscriptions to *Dharma Garden* magazine. The most generous donors have their names engraved on a Supporter's Plaque prominently located at the front of the Bodhi Center.[132] This PBS-style pledge drive is another revealing illustration of the westernization of Chinese Buddhism.

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[130] American Bodhi Center, "Frequently Asked Questions," http://www.jadebuddha.org/BodhiCenter/Englist%20HTML/E_Q%20and%20A.htm. Accessed July 22, 2008.
[131] American Bodhi Center, "Chronicle," http://www.jadebuddha.org/BodhiCenter/Englist%20HTML/E_Event%20and%20Progress.htm. Accessed July 22, 2008.
[132] American Bodhi Center, "Donation," http://www.jadebuddha.org/BodhiCenter/Englist%20HTML/E_Donation.htm. Accessed July 24, 2008.

Interviews

Since my first visit to the Jade Buddha Temple in the spring of 2008, I have made several friends and learned much about Buddhism and the Chinese community in Houston. The people there are extremely friendly and excited to have a non-Asian showing interest in Buddhism. They are also very proud of the American Bodhi Center. They shower visitors with Buddhist paraphernalia, and enjoy long discussions with newcomers about Buddhist doctrines. Although they are quite extroverted when trying to feed and recruit visitors to Buddhism, when it comes to discussing their personal motivations for attending the Jade Buddha Temple, most people are similar to the mainland Chinese in their shyness. Also like in China, younger people are more likely to be willing to be recorded and photographed. Unlike in China, where both men and women were similarly approachable, in Houston the women seemed much more open than the men. Perhaps this was because I was generally alone in Houston, but with a male friend or with groups of people when doing interviews in China.

Fifteen random attendees of the Jade Buddha Temple on July 13, 2008, were interviewed. Surprisingly, all of them were first generation immigrants, substantiating the importance of the temple as a source of community and stability for immigrants as argued by Prebish and Seager.[133]

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[133] Prebish, *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, 30; Seager, *Buddhism in America*, 158-159. Everyone was asked basically the same questions: Where were they from? How long had they attended the Jade Buddha Temple? Why did they attend? Were they religious before coming here? What was their favorite thing about the Jade Buddha Temple? After these initial questions the conversation would often lead to topics that varied among the respondents. The Chinese as a whole are very private people. Common "get to know you" questions asked in the West are considered rude in China. For example, in the weeks proceeding the Olympics the Chinese government posted signs around Beijing listing questions not to ask foreigners, including income, age, love life or marriage, health, home or address, personal experience,

The first person interviewed at the temple was typical of many of the respondents, a first generation immigrant who had no previous associated with Buddhism or religion until the Jade Buddha Temple. Johnnie, one of the lay workers at the temple, is about thirty years old, and moved from Beijing to the U.S. nine years ago. He was not religious in China, and neither was his family. He lived in Chicago the first three years, and did not meet any Buddhists there or practice any type of religion. After moving to Houston three years ago, Johnnie says he came to the temple at first to meet Chinese people, but quickly wanted to learn more about Buddhism. At first, he went through a program the temple offers for new Buddhists. Now, he says he attends and volunteers at the temple about twice a month, and comes both to learn more about Buddhism and to be with friends. Unlike in China, where people are surrounded by those of their own ethnicity, in Houston the temple is one of the few places where Chinese people can go to talk with people of their own native culture. In China, Wei Ye noted that she did not go to the temple with friends and in fact did not speak with others while there.[134] Similarly, most of the people interviewed in China were present at the temple alone, whereas in Houston most people have come with friends or to meet friends.

Enna also sees the temple as a place where her friends are. She is in her mid-twenties, and emigrated to the U.S. as a young girl from China. She has attended the Jade Buddha Temple for about five years. She says most of her friends are there, and

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religious beliefs, political views, and profession. As a result, the personal information provided on the interviewees was that which they offered or was readily observable. Tim Johnson, "The 'eight don't asks' of the Olympics," www.yahoo.com Accessed August 8, 2008.

[134] Please refer to pages 36-37 for the interview with Wei Ye, one of the guides on my trip.

that it feels like her family. In contrast to the Beijingers interviewed who attend the temple twice a month at most, Enna noted that she especially enjoys attending the celebrations and activities that take place throughout the week. She did not mention Buddhism as a religion. Enna was seated next to her friend Selina, who also has been living in the U.S. since she was a little girl. She said she was thirty years old, and came from a small town in South China. She has been a follower at the Jade Buddha Temple since it originally opened. Selina's mother was a Buddhist, and Selina claims she is present at most everything the temple offers, from classes and study groups to yoga. These activities are examples of programs that the temples in China do not offer. Enna did not note whether her reasons for attending the Jade Buddha Temple were more social or religious.

Ida and Eva were another pair of friends who did not practice Buddhism until moving to the United States approximately a decade ago. Ida is a bright lady in her mid forties, who has been in Houston since she moved from Hong Kong as a girl thirty-five years ago. The temple is close to her home, and she now comes regularly each Sunday. She claims her motivation to attend is the study of Buddhism, and when asked her about coming to meet friends she laughed and said, "If I wanted to meet Chinese friends, I would go to a Christian church. They have much better social programs." Eva appeared to be about the same age as Ida, and she also emigrated from Hong Kong when she was young. Eva says she has been a Buddhist and coming to the Jade Buddha Temple for nine years. She did not become interested in religion until she was older. She chose

Buddhism because she was Chinese, indicating a choice made along ethnic lines rather than spiritual ones. She said she attends the temple every Sunday.

In contrast to Ida and Eva who enjoyed the classes the Jade Buddha Temple offers, Xing, a soft-spoken man in his mid-thirties who emigrated from Taiwan when he was young, was more akin to the interviewees in Beijing. He said he has been attending the temple since it opened, and has visited lots of different temples in the U.S. He did not say whether his family was Buddhist. Xing does not go to any classes or participate in any temple activities. He visits the temple once a week to make offerings to the Buddha. He was alone. Xing was comparable to the interviewees in Beijing who attend the temple less frequently and simply make offerings without participating in all of the extra-curricular activities so popular at the Jade Buddha Temple.

Several other interviewees were similar to many visitors of the Lama Temple in that religion had nothing to do with their reason for attending. Kathy was sitting outside the temple. She is around thirty, and said she came to Houston from South China as a little girl. Kathy is not Buddhist, and has no interest in religion. She brings her mother to the temple every Sunday to make offerings to the Buddha. Kathy sits outside with her seven-year-old daughter while her mother attends services and socializes with her friends. She says her mother was a Buddhist in China, but could not attend temples during the Cultural Revolution. It seems like that Kathy's mother would have many counterparts in China who are now exploring religion after years of having to keep such thoughts private.

Sue and Bill were also non-Buddhists present at the temple. They were sitting outside in the garden area near the kitchens. Sue moved to the U.S. from mainland China "many years ago," and looked to be in her mid forties. When asked about Buddhism and why she came to the Jade Buddha Temple, Sue looked at Bill and they both began to laugh. She then admitted she was not Buddhist or religious at all, she just likes volunteering in the kitchen on Sundays to be with her friends and have lunch. Sometimes Sue goes to Tai Chi class, but she has no interest in learning more about Buddhism. She has been volunteering in the kitchen for about a year. Bill is also from mainland China, and said he was twenty-five years old. His reasons for being at the temple were the same as Sue's. Bill's best friend and co-worker is a regular devotee at the Jade Buddha Temple, and Bill stays in the kitchen with Sue and the others while his friend goes to services. He says he likes to cook, and the food at the temple is the best.

The next lady questioned also stressed the social aspects of the temple. Lan, is a lady in her mid thirties who grew up in Northeast China, and has only been in the U.S. for eight years. She spoke in broken English. Lan has been attending the temple for about four years. She says she comes most Sunday mornings to see her friends, and she likes the activities. Lan did not mention classes or Buddhism. Wo Yeh was standing close to Lan, and seemed suspicious and was reluctant to talk. Wo Yeh looked about forty years old, and said she had moved from China thirty years ago. She said her family was not religious in China, and neither was she. She said she had been coming to the temple for a long time, and that she liked it, but would not give any reasons why she came.

Wen Ban's responses contrasted with Lan and others who spoke mainly about the social aspects of the temple. Wen Ban is an intelligent young man, about thirty years old. He has only been in the U.S. for five years. He became a Buddhist while attending a university in Northeast China. Wen Ban said he lived across the street from a temple and saw people going there and decided to go, too. He added proudly that 25-30 years ago there was no Buddhism in China, but now there is. Wen Ban began attending the Jade Buddha Temple as soon as he moved to the U.S. He says he has learned much more about Buddhism since he moved. He has gone to classes to learn more, and tries to attend every Sunday. At the end of the conversation he added that he has many friends here at the temple.

The last people interviewed gave some of the most thoughtful responses. They were a professional married couple reminiscent of the Spanish man, Jaime Purdreu, and his wife Lu Ngah, at the Lama Temple in Beijing. The husband's name is Qiang, and the wife is Song. They are in their mid forties. Qiang emigrated from Beijing in 1995. Song is also originally from Beijing, but she moved to the U.S. in 1993. They met in America, and presently live in Austin. Qiang travels a lot with his work, which was why they were in Houston that Sunday. Qiang says he was a Buddhist before emigrating, but his family was not. He attends many different temples, depending on where his work takes him. Qiang has no interest in the social side of the temple, nor does he have time to go to classes or study. His idea of practicing Buddhism is similar to the Chinese in Beijing in that he feels his only duty as a Buddhist is to make incense offerings at the temple and be a good person. Song, on the other hand, does not consider herself

religious at all. She only comes to please Qiang. She says she makes offerings in the temple, but would not comment anything more.

A young woman in her early twenties was standing nearby, and obviously listening to the conversation. She seemed eager to join in. Her name is Jane. She was from Beijing, too, and came to the U.S. about ten years ago. She said her family in China was not religious, but she has become very interested in religion in the past few years. She began coming to the Jade Buddha Temple about two years ago, but cannot attend very regularly because of her work. She wants to learn more about Buddhism, and says this is much more important to her than the social activities the temple offers.

Jane began to chat with Qiang and Song about their Beijing connection, and the metamorphosis occurring in the city. They were emphatic in their conviction that religion is not important in China today. They agreed that Chinese people in the U.S. know much more about Buddhism than mainland Chinese, a conclusion born out by my own observations. They were not taught anything about religion in schools in China, and their families never mentioned it. They attributed this to the Cultural Revolution. Though, as Tony noted, school children are now being taught about the five accepted religions, among the older generation there is still a great deal of mystery surrounding religion due to the long shadow of the Cultural Revolution.

Conclusion

Although Buddhism has been present in the United States since the nineteenth century, it has only been in the last generation it has taken hold. As more and more

Asians have come to the United States in the wake of the 1965 immigration laws, and as the 1960's counterculture has sunk its roots, attendance at Buddhist temples has skyrocketed. While most of the Chinese people I interviewed at the Jade Buddha Temple acknowledged they were not Buddhist in China, since arriving in the United States they have begun attending the temple. Though a few maintained that their reasons were strictly religious, most admitted that the opportunity to socialize with members of their own ethnicity was a large reason, in many case *the* reason, they attend the temple. The social aspect of the temple is readily evidenced by all of the extra activities the temple offers, such as yoga classes and the Meals on Wheels programs, and the responses of many interviewees.

The institutional structure of the Jade Buddha Temple largely mirrors that of other religions prominent in the United States. The weekly meetings on Sundays, Dharma Talk (akin to Sunday School), lunches following service, childcare, and exercise classes are all programs that can be found at most churches of any denomination in the United States, but are not part of Buddhist temple activities in China. The Chinese are not the first immigrant group to adapt their religion to a new region after arriving in the United States: the Irish, Jews, and Italians are just three groups that made similar religious adaptations.[135]

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[135] For scholarly works on immigrants and religion, please see: Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History From Colonial Times to the Present* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); Christine Harzig, Maria Anna Knothe, Margaret Matovic, Deirdre Mageean, and Monika Blaschke, *Peasant Maids-City Women: From the European Countryside to Urban America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); or Thomas J. Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History* (New York: The Free Press, 1984).

Because of these adaptations, the nature of Buddhism has changed in America. Whereas in China the monks are the only people who have a deep understanding of the Dharma and the commoners are content to "have a good heart," in the United States practitioners are encouraged to study the Dharma themselves. As a result, Chinese Americans are much more knowledgeable about Buddhism than their counterparts in China.

Though the teachings of Buddha are universal, it is clear that the practice of the religion has been greatly transformed in the United States. One can hardly imagine the monks at the Lama Temple holding a golf tournament to fund their various building projects. In many ways this is simply the latest chapter in Buddhism's fascinating history of adaptation. Since the beginning Buddhism has been able to acclimate to its particular surroundings and appropriate aspects from new regions without compromising its basic principles. The hosting of golf tournaments and the like is just the newest means of spreading the Dharma. Though the core tenets of Buddhism in China and the United States are the same, regional characteristics have greatly altered the look of the religion in these places.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness.
~ The Dalai Lama

As the previous two chapters have made clear, Buddhism today is practiced quite differently in China and the United States, despite the comparable newness of the religion in both countries. The impact that region has on social development has long been studied by historians, perhaps most famously by Frederick Jackson Turner in his essays on the American frontier.[136] Using Buddhism as a test case reveals the impact that fundamentally differing regions can have on the practice of a religion. There are several key contrasts between China and the United States that have explicitly affected the trajectory of Buddhism's growth in those two countries.

The United States was founded in part on the ideal of separation of church and state. Religious dissenters established several of the colonies that eventually became part of the United States, and that tradition of free worship continued in the Constitution. Despite the sometimes strong religious beliefs of the country and its leaders, this separation has ensured that religion has never posed a genuine threat to the government. The Mormon Wars are perhaps the biggest exception, but by any standard that conflict was relatively minor.[137] In contrast, throughout China's two millennia of history many rebellions, including a fair number that succeeded, were grounded in religion. Many

[136] Frederick J. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (1894): 199-227.
[137] Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 60-62.

dynasties sanctioned an official religion, and used them as both a tool and weapon against their predecessors and potential successors. In the long run, the United States government's relatively benign nature towards American religion has allowed the unfettered development of most faiths. On the other hand, the power of religion came to be feared by a great many Chinese rulers. After taking power in 1949, Mao worried that religion would be used as an organizing tool by his opponents, and established the People's Republic of China as an officially atheistic nation. Throughout the 1950's Mao placed increasing restrictions on the five religions that remained, before officially outlawing all religious practices during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960's. As a result, while practitioners in the United States have generally been able to freely worship, in China religious practices are still not completely free.

Part of the reason religion has been fairly safe in the United States is due to the democratic form of government. Whereas in China individual leaders could unilaterally favor or disfavor a particular religion or religions in general at their whim, in the United States there is no single authority with that power. Though several of our presidents have been deists, including Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, because of the limits on their power they had no ability to outlaw religion. On the other hand, during the Cultural Revolution, Mao single-handedly and overnight virtually erased religion from China and its history. These differing forms of government, democratic versus authoritarian, have greatly impacted the status of Buddhism in these regions.

The diametrically opposed economic systems present in the United States and China have also contributed to the divergent structures of religion. Under the feudal

system present in China until the twentieth century the common people had little disposable income with which to support their faith. Under the communist policies implemented by Mao, they had even less. In the United States, on the other hand, a prosperous capitalist system has provided lay people with sufficient disposable income that they have been able to support churches and other religious programs. In neither place is religion funded by the government, making the people's support essential for survival. Though Chinese today have disposable income, they have no history or tradition of giving to the churches, and thus the temples have turned to tourism to fund their continued existence.[138] As Tony Lee said, "People in China are more concerned with improving their daily life than their afterlife." This was clear from the extremely long hours that most Chinese people worked and their obvious desire to acquire material goods, particularly those with an American label. On the contrary, as shown by the Jade Buddha Temple and the new American Bodhi Center, Chinese American Buddhists have disposable income and are happy to support their faith. Whereas in China the temples can only offer a location to make offerings, the Jade Buddha Temple provides programs including Dharma Talks, yoga classes, retreats, childcare, and lunches, as well as community outreach programs like Meals on Wheels and college scholarships for area youth. Additionally, the American temples are able to support a much greater number of monks in proportion to their Chinese counterparts. Clearly, the economic systems of these areas have had a great influence on Buddhism.

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[138] Since reforms beginning in the late 1970's, China's economy has grown over ten fold, and has been the world's fastest growing economy with annual steady GDP growth of over 10%. The US-China Business Council, 2008. http://www.uschina.org/public/documents/2008/02/2008-trade-performance.pdf

In neither region is attending a Buddhist temple all about religion. Despite this seeming similarity, Chinese and Chinese Americans largely have contrasting motivations for going to the temples. In the United States many Chinese Americans attend the temple as a part of the assimilation process accompanying immigration. In a country that is new and different for them, the temples offer a ready-made peer group to ease the transition. A great many Chinese people, on the other hand, seek out the temples to break from "the group" and assert their independence. In Beijing, Lu Ngah noted that although Buddhism is a part of Chinese culture, she sees its increasing popularity as more of an expression of freedom than religiosity. Thus, while Chinese Americans go to the temples in order to find and become part of a group, in China attendees are just as likely to be looking to break away from a group and assert their independence.

Yet another factor influencing the regionally variant structure of Buddhism is the level of exposure to other religions. China sees itself as the Middle Kingdom or center of the world, and resists outside influences. Though Buddhism is extremely adaptable, until very recently foreign influences were almost non-existent in China. While Buddhism did mix with and adopt parts of Confucianism and Daoism in China, these were two of the only other religions to which it was exposed. In the United States, Chinese Buddhism has encountered not only all the other strains of Buddhism, but also dozens of other world religions. The impact is obvious. The Jade Buddha Temple features pews, pianos, Sunday School (Dharma Talk), lunches, and other activities including fundraising that have been adapted from Western religions. Whether these

adaptations are a conscious effort to fit in, an attempt to keep up with the Joneses, or an evolution of the religion, is unclear. Perhaps it can simply be chalked up to being surrounded by a nation of immigrants rather than nested in a country dominated by a single ethnicity.

Despite the improving status of religion in China and the increasingly democratic and capitalistic reforms, Mao's shadow still lingers over the country. The tremendous number of "little red books" present in Beijing, the few number of changes to official restrictions on religion, and the reticence of many to speak openly, all evidence a country in transition. In a globalizing era when individual world regions are coming to have less meaning, it seems likely that Buddhism in the United States and China will eventually come closer. As Chinese Americans drop the hyphen, as the Italians, Irish, and Jewish people have done, they will no longer need to go to the temple to find their "group." At that point it seems likely that they will become more like the ethnic Catholics who call themselves religious but only attend Church on a few major days each year. In this way they will move closer to the Chinese practitioners of Buddhism in Beijing. Similarly, as China moves further out of Mao's shadow, it stands to reason that individual Chinese people will seek to explore Buddhism without fear of government repercussions, moving them closer to the Chinese American practitioners of Buddhism in Houston. For the present, however, region remains a dominant force shaping religion.

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