THAI BUDDHISM IN AMERICA: AN HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW

Wendy Cadge and Sidhorn Sangdhanoo

This article describes the history and practice of Thai Buddhism in America from the early 1970s, when the tradition first arrived, to the present. It is the first systematic historical overview of the tradition in the United States and is based largely on unique information gathered over an eighteen-month period in interviews with the Abbots of eighty-seven Thai Buddhist temples in America. After providing a brief history of Thai immigration, the paper presents and analyzes the history and current locations, leadership, attendership, and activities of Thai Buddhist temples in the United States. At the center of the paper is evidence of the multidimensional ways Thai Buddhism is adapting in the American context.

On 13 June 1999 more than 80 Buddhist monks from Southeast Asia and the United States gathered to celebrate the opening of a new building at Wat Buddharatanaram, a Thai Buddhist temple in north central Texas. It was founded on an acre and a half of land in 1982 by Thai and Lao immigrants, and between 1994 and 1999, monks and lay people worked almost continuously to build the new traditional Thai-style temple building on a thirteen and a half acre piece of land they had purchased. Sixty tons of steels were used for the frame and roof of the building, which houses a sixteen foot tall, six foot wide gold statue of a sitting Buddha that temple attendees believe is the largest Buddha statue in the United States. After its opening, the new building became the center of activities for the mostly Thai and Lao people who are involved with the temple. Some people come to the temple daily to offer food to the monks while others come on weekends to hear Buddhist teaching or dharma talks or to participate in one of the large festivals held several times each year. Children attend Thai language classes at the temple on weekend mornings that include lessons in traditional Thai dance and handicrafts, and a few boys are ordained as novices or temporary monks for two weeks each summer to learn more about Buddhism. The head monk occasionally speaks about Buddhism at a local high school when invited, but otherwise stays close to the temple to teach and support the people who are involved.¹



While Wat Buddharatanaram would easily blend in in Bangkok with its distinctively pitched red and white roof and its marble pillars imported from Southeast Asia, visitors to Wat Buddhawararanam in Denver, Colorado often do not recognize it as a Thai Buddhist temple. Founded in 1976 in a former Salvation Army church, Wat Buddhawararanam holds regular programs and services for Thai immigrants and non-Thai and non-Asian-Americans in the Denver area. As at Wat Buddharatanaram, people come to the temple on a daily or weekly basis to make offerings to the monks and to listen to Buddhist teachings, but these people include Thais and Laotians as well as native-born non-Asian-Americans who want to learn about Buddhism. During the week and on weekends some meditation instruction is offered in English, and in June and November of each year seven-day to fourteen-day meditation retreats are held. These retreats are normally attended by twenty to thirty Thai people and English speaking non-Asian-Americans. Monks from the temple regularly give dharma lectures at area high schools and colleges, and it is not uncommon for students from area schools to visit the temple on weekend mornings. Despite the inclusion of non-Asian-Americans, Thai language and cultural classes, including well-attended Thai classical music and dance classes, are also held at the temple on a regular basis and the monks regularly offer blessings for births, marriages, and deaths to members of the three hundred Thai, Laotian, and Cambodian families (about 1300 people) that are involved with the temple. Although the temple is not immediately recognized as a Thai Buddhist temple from the outside and serves people beyond the Thai-speaking and Laospeaking communities, it is very much a part of the Thai Buddhist tradition in the United States.²

Wat Buddharatanaram and Wat Buddhawararanam are two of close to ninety Thai Buddhist temples currently located in twenty-nine states across the United States. Housed in buildings that resemble traditional Buddhist temples in Thailand, mobile homes, houses, former Protestant churches, former schools, and even a former YMCA, the number of Thai Buddhist temples in the United States has increased dramatically since the early 1970s when the first temples were started. Led by male monks, largely born and trained in Thailand, these temples serve as ethnic and cultural centers as well as places where a wide range of Thai and non-Thai people learn about and practice Buddhism. While researchers often describe the religious centers started by first-generation immigrants as ethnic, cultural, and social centers exclusively for immigrants and their children, Thai Buddhist temples in the United States today are tremendously diverse in the activities they hold and the people who are involved. At a few Thai temples, Thai people are the only ones involved but, at most, some combination of Thai, Lao, Cambodian, and American-born non-Asian-American people participate. While first-generation Thai immigrants often dominate numerically, many of these temples regularly welcome a much broader range of people, and teachings are offered in Thai, Lao, Cambodian, and English languages, sometimes simultaneously.³ Some temples like Wat Buddharatanaram in Keller, Texas offer primarily Thai-centered or Asian-centered cultural and ethnic activities like Thai language classes, Thai classical dancing classes, and celebrations for all of the Thai holidays, while others like Wat Buddhawararanam in Denver offer a broader range of activities including meditation classes and retreats in English aimed at non-Asian-Americans. While temples like Wat Buddharatanaram hold visions of ethnic and cultural preservation at their core, others like Wat Buddhawararanam maintain dual goals of ethnic preservation and engagement, in numerous ways, with non-Thai-American and non-Asian-American people in the United States.

A great deal of recent research by social scientists and scholars of American religion describes religious organizations started across the United States by first-generation immigrants, many of whom arrived after changes in the immigration laws in 1965.⁴ Some research focuses on traditional gateway cities, like Houston, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC, through which many immigrants arrive in the States, while other projects catalogue immigrants' religious centers in large cities as well as in smaller towns and rural areas across the country.⁵ These projects analyze how immigrants are adapting their religious traditions in America and provide important insights into the social processes, such as the congregational forms of gathering, the emergence of greater lay leadership, and changes in gender relations, that seem to be shared by immigrant groups in different religious traditions and locations across the United States.⁶

Researchers, particularly social scientists, investigating questions about religion and immigration have tended to focus their research on particular religious centers or sets of centers in the same geographic region, often a gateway city. ⁷ The narratives that emerge from these projects, as a result, are often place centered rather than tradition centered, emphasizing commonalities among immigrants' mechanisms of adaptation across religious traditions rather than similarities and differences in how people within a particular tradition have translated and adapted it in the United States. Simon Jacob and Pallavi Thaku's study of Jyonthi Hindu Temple in the Houston area, for example, is an insightful examination of a Hindu organization in the suburbs of Houston and, in the context of the other studies of immigrants' religious organizations in Houston in the book in which it appears— Religion and the New Immigration: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations—contributes a great deal to our understanding of religion and immigration in the Houston area (Jacob and Thaku 2000, Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000). By design, however, this article says little about how Jyonthi Hindu temple compares with the Hindu organizations Prema Kurien has studied in California or the Hindu temple Aparna Rayaprol studied in Pittsburgh (Rayaprol 1997; Kurien 1998, 1999, 2001). While the broader development and practice of Hinduism in America can be inferred from these studies, they have not been conducted in a manner that places understanding this history and development at their core.

We approach the history and development of religion among new immigrants to the United States in a different way here by describing a particular religious tradition comprehensively, rather than focusing on a particular center or geographic region. We focus on the history of Thai Buddhism or Buddhism as practiced by Thai people in America. Rather than comparing how Thai Buddhist

temples in a particular city or state compare with religious centers started by immigrants from other countries or religious traditions, we gathered all of the information possible about Thai Buddhist centers in the States started by first-generation immigrants from Thailand. This approach allows us to analyze how individual Thai temples were started and contributed to the development of Thai Buddhism in the United States as well as to catalogue and better understand the various ways different temples in the Thai Buddhist tradition become a part of the American religious environment. This history of Thai Buddhism in America and what it suggests about the range of ways Thai Buddhist temples become a part of the American religious tapestry point to the importance of looking at the religious organizations of post-1965 immigrants within their broader religious traditions, as well as geographical contexts, and to the range of ways religious traditions, particularly those that were majority religious traditions in their homelands are, adapting as minority religious traditions, in the United States.

A Brief History of Thai Immigration to the United States

Before 1965, few people born in Thailand other than students and those on official diplomatic missions lived in the United States. Changes in the immigration laws in 1965 opened the door to increased immigration from many countries, including Thailand, and professionals, largely doctors, nurses, engineers, scientists, and pharmacists, were the first people from Thailand to arrive. Inflation was high, and job opportunities and professional mobility low in Thailand at the time; factors that led many Thai professionals to decide to migrate to the United States. In addition to professionals, a number of Thai women who had married American serviceman stationed or visiting Thailand during the Viet Nam War also immigrated to the United States during this time. Immigration from Thailand continued through the 1970s, as is evident in Table 1, as less skilled Thai immigrants in search of economic opportunities also

TABLE 1Admissions to the United States from Thailand

Year	Admissions
1969–72	10,093
1973-76	21,039
1977-80	14,828
1981-84	21,127
1985-88	33,044
1989-92	32,733
1993-96	21,589
1997-2000	12,362
Total	166,815

Sources: 1969–75, Annual Reports of the Immigration and Naturalization Service; 1976–2000, Immigration and Naturalization Service Statisticial Yearbooks.

began arriving in the States. Thai immigration continued, and peaked in the 1980s as changes in immigration laws again allowed more Thai people to enter and remain in the United States.⁹

US Census data, as presented in Table 2, show that the number of people either born in Thailand or who identify racially or ethnically as Thai increased steadily from 1980, when this data was first available, to the year 2000. These official numbers probably undercount the number of Thai people who actually live in the States by not including those who enter the country illegally each year and probably did not complete census forms. The census data further suggest that, largely as a result of marriages between Thai women and American-born men who served in Viet Nam, more women than men born in Thailand have lived and continue to live in the United States.

Like other immigrants from Southeast Asia to the United States, Thais have tended to live in California, Texas, Illinois, and New York, and largely in urban rather than rural areas. Educationally and economically, there is a bifurcated distribution among Thais and Thai-Americans overall, with one group working in highly paid highly skilled professions and another in low-skill low-paying service industries. People who do not fall into either of these groups tend to be small business owners of grocery stores, florists, car garages, shipping, and import-export companies (Lewis 1997). The majority of Thai people in the United States do not live in ethnic enclaves, like traditional Chinatowns, and speak English well,

TABLE 2US residents born in Thailand or identifying racially or ethnically as Thai, according to the US Census

Year	Total	Percentage who are women
1980	45,279	60
1990	91,360	60
2000	150,283	58

Note: Census data from 1990 and 2000 include people who were born in Thailand as well as people born in the United States who identify racially or ethnically as Thai. Census data from 1980 include only those people who were born in Thailand. Sources: US Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population, vol. 2, Subject reports, PC80-2-1E, Asian and Pacific Islander Population in the United States, issued January 1988. US Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population, Asian and Pacific Islanders in the United States, issued August 1993, table 1: General characteristics of selected Asian and Pacific Islander groups by nativity, citizenship, and year of entry. US Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 2, Advanced National. These data represent people who listed an Thai group alone or in any combination. It is not possible to determine the number of people in the States from Thailand prior to 1980. The 1970 census shows that 14,416 people reported Thai, Siamese or Lao as their mother tongue (US Bureau of the Census, 1970 U.S. Census, Subject Reports, National Origin and Language, table 19). In the 1960 census, 1666 people listed Thai, Siamese or Lao as their mother tongue (US Bureau of the Census, 1960 U.S. Census, Mother Tongue of the Foreign Born, table 2).

with less than one-third living in linguistically isolated households (Paisano et al., 1993).

The majority of people in Thailand are Buddhist and they bring this religious tradition with them when they migrate to the United States. ¹⁰ Buddhism in Thailand takes many forms, and this diversity is represented among Thai immigrants who come from different regions, ethnic groups, and backgrounds within the country. According to a small pilot survey of post-1965 legal immigrants to the United States, Thais comprise about one-fifth of all immigrants who are Buddhists. ¹¹ A small network of Thai Christian churches has also formed in the United States, but the number of people who attend them is most certainly smaller than attendance at these Thai Buddhist temples. ¹²

Thai Buddhism in America: Research Strategies

Apart from a few scattered articles, very little research has been published in English about the history, development, and practice of Buddhism by Thai immigrants and their (often native-born) children in America. Paul Numrich's (1996) important book *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples*, presents preliminary information about fifty-five Thai Buddhist temples in the United States and detailed information about the history and development of one temple, Wat Dhammaram, in Chicago, Illinois. We build on this research primarily by examining the (few) primary written sources available about Thai Buddhism in America and by gathering detailed information through telephone interviews, personal visits, and web pages of all of the Thai Buddhist temples in the United States we could contact.

To gather information about the complete population of Thai Buddhist temples in the United States in 2001, when this research was first initiated, we compiled a list of all of the Thai temples in the United States based on listings of temples on the web pages of the Thai Embassy in Washington, DC, two overarching Thai Buddhist organizations—the Council of Thai Bhikkhus in the USA and the Dhammayut Order in the USA—and several other lists of Thai temples available on the Internet. A total of one hundred and one different temples were included on all of these lists. Over the next year, Sidhorn Sangdhanoo attempted to contact each of these temples by telephone; many of the telephone numbers were not in service, so we searched national telephone databases and often called Thai restaurants in the vicinity of the temples to determine whether particular temples still existed and how to be in touch with them.

We confirmed the existence of eighty-seven temples by either speaking to a monk at the temple in person or by telephone, successfully communicating with a monk at the temple by email, or determining through current records of the Council of Thai Bhikkhus or the Dhammayut Order that the temple belonged to one of these organizations. What constitutes a Thai Buddhist temple can be ambiguous because of the range of people who attend and temples' lack of clear organizational memberships or affiliations. We defined a Thai Buddhist temple as

such and include it in the history presented here if it was included on one of the lists of Thai temples on the Internet described earlier, had Thai or Thai-American people who attended, and was led by an Abbot or Head Monk who spoke Thai. We initially thought that we could define a temple as Thai only if it belonged to the Dhammayut Order or the Council of Thai Bhikkhus, the two oversight type Thai Buddhist organizations in the United States, but this was not possible because a number of admittedly Thai temples do not belong to these organizations because they prefer to be independent or are just opening and have not yet been accepted for membership.¹⁵

Sidhorn Sangdhanoo conducted telephone interviews in Thai with the Abbot or Head Monk at sixty of the eight-seven temples whose existence we confirmed (the interview guide is presented in Appendix A). These telephone interviews lasted between thirty minutes and two hours. We also gathered information through personal visits to the temples, web pages, or from published sources about an additional sixteen temples. For the remaining eleven temples, we confirmed their existence through membership lists of the Council of Thai Bhikkhus or Dhammayut Order or from temple web pages but could not, despite repeated efforts, contact the temples directly. We also wrote to the Presidents of both the Council of Thai Bhikkhus in the USA and the Dhammayut Order in the USA requesting information. Wendy Cadge met with and interviewed Phra Rātchakittiwēthi, the President of the Council of Thai Bhikkhus, and he shared published information about the Council with her. For a more in-depth examination, Cadge also conducted detailed ethnographic research over a period of eighteen months at Wat Mongkoltepmunee, a Thai Buddhist temple in the suburbs of Philadelphia, described elsewhere (2005). It is important to note that, by design, the information presented here comes primarily from Thai temples founded in the United States that were still in existence in 2001. Failure rates for temples in some areas are probably relatively high, but we were not able to locate information about those temples that once existed in the United States but no longer do.

Thai Buddhism in America: A Historical Overview

1970s: Early Years

The first Thai Buddhist immigrants who wanted to organize a Buddhist center worked with American-born Buddhists in the 1960s to start the Buddhist Study Center in New York. The Center was granted legal status in 1965 but it was not until 1973 that they invited a monk from the Thai Buddhist temple in London to advise them about starting a Thai temple in New York, which was formally established as Wat Vajiradhammapadip in 1975 (Payutto 1999, 206-10). In the interim Thai immigrants in Los Angeles had started to organize, and in 1970 a Thai monk, Ven. Phrakhru Vajirathammasophon of Wat Vajirathamasathit in Thailand, was invited to Los Angeles to teach and perform Buddhist ceremonies. The Thai

community there formed the Thai-American Buddhist Association that year, and three additional monks visited the United States to plan the founding of a temple. In June 1971 a mission of Thai monks led by Ven. Phra Dhammakosacharn arrived in Los Angeles, and lay people began to raise funds to purchase land. In 1972, land was donated and construction began on a main hall, a two-story Thai-style building that was completed and dedicated in 1979. Buddha images for the shrine hall and two sets of scriptures were carried to the United States by monks and lay people from Thailand, and in 1979 the king and queen of Thailand presided over the casting of the principal Buddha image for the temple, to be called Wat Thai Los Angeles, at Wat Po (officially called Wat Phra Chētuphon, or the Monastery of the Reclining Buddha) in Thailand. This temple, known colloquially as Wat Thai LA, grew quickly into the largest Thai temple in the United States.¹⁶

As in Los Angeles, a group of Thai lay people in Washington, DC who sensed a 'spiritual void' also began to meet in the 1970s, calling themselves the 'Assembly of Buddhists'. In 1974, monks came from Wat Thai Los Angeles to Washington, DC for Songkran, the Thai New Year festival in April, and held ceremonies that raised funds for a temple there. Two visiting monks from Bangkok took up residence there later that year and in February 1975 Phra Maha Surasak Jivananta arrived from Bangkok to be the Abbot or Head Monk of Wat Thai DC, a position he still holds. Wat Buddhawararam in Denver and Wat Dhammaram in Chicago were also started in the United States in the 1970s (Payutto 1999, 211-9). In addition, Wat Mongkolratanaram in Berkeley, California and Wat Dhammagunaram in Layton, Utah were started in the late 1970s, although both at different locations than where they are presently. The Thai wives of US serviceman stationed at nearby Hill Air Force Base were particularly central to the founding of Wat Dhammagunaram. Each of these temples was attended by Thai people and also by people from Laos in the 1970s.

The Council of Thai Bhikkhus, an oversight organization affiliated with the largest main group of temples, the Mahanikāya, in Thailand, began in June 1976 when monks from five of the Buddhist temples started thus far in the United States gathered at Wat Buddhawararam in Denver. Their goal, as P.A. Payutto explains, was to 'set up the means of effectively maintaining the unity and uniformity of monastic life and practice of Thai Buddhist monks amidst different environments in different parts of the United States; to exchange knowledge and ideas; and to achieve cooperation among themselves in the performance of Buddhist activities and their religious duties' (Payutto 1999, 219-220). The Bylaws and Constitution of the Council stipulate that all monks who are in the United States for religious duties with the approval of the Buddhist Order of Thailand are members of the Council and will meet once a year in June. Since 1976, the Council has overseen its member temples in the United States, which were most of the temples started in the 1970s and 1980s, by arranging religious worker visas for new monks, helping with administrative matters, helping groups of lay people who want to start a temple, and providing guidance to temples on a wide range of issues. In 1999, fifty-one Thai Buddhist temples sent representatives to the annual meeting of the Council.

1980s and 1990s: Growth

Many more Thai Buddhist temples were started in the 1980s and 1990s than in earlier years, as shown in Figure 1, and it was during these years that some temples began to have programs in English for non-Asian-Americans.

In the 1980s, thirty temples were started in states like California and Illinois where temples already existed as well as in Texas (where four temples were started), Florida (where three temples were started), and other states. Forty-one more temples began in the 1990s mostly in California (where fourteen new temples were started between 1990 and 2000) but also in Texas (five new temples), Washington (three new temples) and Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, New Mexico, and Nevada (two new temples each between 1990 and 2000). Some of these temples were affiliated with the Council of Thai Bhikkhus and others belonged to the Dhammayut Council of the USA, a second oversight organization affiliated with the reform minded Dhammayut Order in Thailand, officially registered in the United States in 1993.¹⁸

The founding of new Thai Buddhist temples in the 1980s and 1990s generally happened in one of two ways. One way began with Thai people organizing a temple a few years after they arrived in a particular area and had personally and collectively amassed the resources. These lay people, often either lay men or the Thai wives of US serviceman who lived near a particular base, came together around the idea of having a place to gather, celebrate religious festivals, and learn about Buddhism.¹⁹ These groups of lay people, sometimes called lay

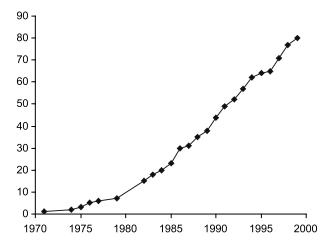


FIGURE 1Number of Thai Temples in the United States, 1970–2000

committees, generally consulted with a monk they knew in Thailand, with the Abbot or Head monk of Wat Thai LA or Wat Thai DC, or with a representative from the Council of Thai Bhikkhus about how to begin a temple. Fundraising was a first step and they often rented a building, usually a house, while they raised or borrowed the money needed to support a monk and to purchase land or buildings. Wat Buddharangsi of Miami, one of the first Thai Buddhist temples started in Florida, was started in Miami in 1982 when recent Thai immigrants and students at area universities came together to celebrate Thai culture and religious heritage. They flew a monk from Wat Thai DC to Miami to lead them in ceremonies while they gathered funds that eventually enabled them to purchase a house, support a monk, and later to construct a building. Monks do not live with lay people and therefore cannot take up residence at a temple until a separate building has been secured and funds raised to bring and support him. It is the presence of a monk or monks that allow rituals and ceremonies to take place on a regular basis and signifies, to the people involved, the true beginnings of the temple.

The second way Thai Buddhist temples began in the 1980s and 1990s was through schism when a conflict developed at one temple that was resolved by the temple dividing into two. Schisms have been prevalent in the Chicago area and in California, where there are many Thai people and temples. In Chicago, tensions around lay leadership, temple administration, and temple focus led two new temples to divide off from Wat Dhammaram in 1986, ten years after it was founded. In May 1986 after a general election at the temple, one of the monks was asked to become the 'spiritual leader' of a new temple and a number of lay people left Wat Dhammaram to form the Buddhadharma Meditation Center. A few months later, a second group of people left Wat Dhammaram to form Wat Padhammachart, known legally as Natural Buddhist Meditation Temple of Greater Chicago (Numrich 1996). While monks from an initial temple often divide with lay people to form a new temple, it is important to note that monks themselves rarely form new temples because they generally do not have the resources to do so.²⁰

Few (of the many) temples started in the 1980s and 1990s remained in the buildings and specific locations where they were initially located either because problems with zoning developed or because the people at the temple had raised enough money to purchase a building, or land on which to construct their own Thai-style temple. Wat Yarnna Rangsee in Sterling, Virginia, for instance, moved several times. Monks first took up residence in Falls Church, Virginia in 1988 but the temple quickly outgrew that space and moved to a new location in Fairfax in 1991. The new location was a single family home in a residential area not zoned for religious centers so temple leaders tried, and failed, to have the zoning changed. Neighbors complained when large numbers of people came to the temple and the temple moved again. By this point, leaders were aware of the zoning laws and needs of their growing religious community, and eventually purchased a farmhouse that met all of their requirements: proper zoning, a county sewer line, easy access, enough land for many people, and a reasonable price. Other temples

moved not because of zoning or other problems, but to acquire new land and buildings. Wat Buddhabucha in Decatur, Georgia was started in a rented house in 1982. In 1983, the temple purchased property and moved to the six acres of land with one log cabin, where it remains. When the land was purchased, the log cabin had two bedrooms, a dining room, a living room, two bathrooms, and a kitchen. In 1988 a large room to hold religious services was added to the cabin; in 1996 a second building was constructed for visitors; and in 1997 a second plot of land was purchased. This adding of buildings and additional parcels of land to existing spaces is not uncommon.

As Thai Buddhist temples moved and purchased buildings and land in the 1980s and 1990s, leaders took advantage of many different kinds of spaces, spaces that often lead passers-by in Denver and elsewhere to not see or recognize the temples as such. Almost one-half of Thai Buddhist temples are located in houses. While Wat Buddhabucha in Decatur has not constructed a building that resembles a Thai-style temple on the property, many temples have—usually next to or in front of the house where they initially met. Thai architects either in Thailand or in the States often design these buildings and materials for their construction are imported from Southeast Asia. Rather than building new buildings, the leaders of some temples decided to purchase and move into existing buildings, often former churches. Nine temples are housed in former churches including Wat Phrasriratanaram Buddhist Temple of St Louis that is in a former Assemblies of God Church and Wat Dhammagunaran located in a former Christian church in Layton, Utah. Two temples are located in former schools and one in Fort Walton Beach, Florida is in a former YMCA. Several are housed in mobile homes or trailers and many occupy a combination of buildings, often a house, an outdoor pavilion, and a temple building. At a few of the temples we contacted in 2001, we could hear the construction in the background as we interviewed the head monk.

The financial support for temple creation and building expansion in the 1980s and 1990s came primarily from first-generation Thai immigrants in the United States. A few temples received funds from temples or other organizations in Thailand, although the majority did not. Many of the funds were raised at festivals, held eight to ten times a year at most temples. Thai Buddhists generally believe that by making donations to the sangha or order of monks and the temple they make merit and increase their chances of a favorable rebirth in the next life—so they are generous in making donations to their temple.

Some of the financial support, although very little, may also have come from the non-Thai, non-Asian, largely white, people who became involved with some temples during the 1990s. Precise information about these people and the number of temples with which they are involved does not exist, although Paul Numrich (1996) found a 'parallel congregation' at Wat Dhammaram when he conducted research there in the early 1990s. 'Parallel congregations' are those where Thai or Asian Buddhists and non-Asian, normally white, people meet at the same place under the guidance of the same monks although at different times to do different activities. The Thai or Asian Buddhists generally chant, meditate,

participate in rituals and ceremonies, hear Buddhist teachings, and make donations to the monks while the non-Asian Buddhists normally meditate and receive meditation instruction from the monks. The non-Asian Buddhists are often well educated and from a range of religious backgrounds. They often have as much interest in meditation as in Buddhism and generally come to temples interested in learning more.²¹

Additional growth in the numbers of temples in the 1990s was caused by the emergence of a third set of temples in the States—those affiliated with the Dhammakaya movement in Thailand. In addition to temples affiliated with the Mahanikāya and Dhammayut Orders in Thailand via the Council of Thai Bhikkhus and Dhammayut Order in the USA, temples connected to the Dhammakaya movement and Wat Dhammakaya outside of Bangkok opened in the 1990s in New Jersey, California, Georgia, Washington, and Illinois.²² Started as a reform movement in Bangkok in the 1970s, the Dhammakaya movement is the fastest growing religious group in Thailand. It is based on the unique meditation teachings of Thai monk Phra Monkhon Thepmuni, former Abbot of Wat Paknam in Thailand, which are presented apart from traditional rituals and ceremonies as an alternative to the hierarchical and ritualistic practice of Thai Buddhism. These teachings have been skillfully conveyed in Thailand via modern technology and the media, and have been distributed in the States as well. At some centers in the States, for example, people gather on Saturday evenings (which are Sunday mornings in Thailand) to watch (and participate in), via a live broadcast over the Internet, ceremonies happening at Wat Dhammakaya outside of Bangkok. Centers affiliated with Wat Dhammakaya are mostly attended by Thai people and are organized and operate quite differently than most other Thai Buddhist temples in the United States.²³

2000: A Current Overview

In 2001 when we conducted this research, we located eighty-seven Thai Buddhist temples in twenty-nine states. Not surprisingly, the largest number of Thai temples existed in California (twenty-two temples), Texas (nine temples) and Illinois (six temples), the states with the largest numbers of Thai people. Forty eight of these temples reported belonging to the Council of Thai Bhikkhus in the USA, twenty-eight to the Dhammayut Order in the USA, one to the Council of Lao Bhikkhus, and five to no organizations. Between 350 and 375 monks lived at and serve these temples, and it is difficult to determine how many lay people attend. Most temples do not have members, and their mailings lists range from one hundred people who live right near the temple to several thousand people in many different states. When we asked the Abbots in interviews how many people attended the temple in the week before our conversation, estimates ranged from seven or eight to five hundred with an average of about ninety people. Just over one-half of the Abbots told us that fewer than fifty people had visited their temple in the week before we talked with them.

Started initially to provide Buddhist teachings and ceremonies for Thai immigrants and their families, Thai Buddhist temples today offer a wide range of activities to a broad set of people. Every morning and evening, the monks at most temples gather in their main meditation space, be it the living room of a mobile home or the large assembly hall of a Thai-style temple, for morning and evening chanting. Lay people, often less than five, attend the chanting at about one-half of these temples. During the day on weekdays, monks talk with visitors, visit people's homes to do blessings, do chores around the temple, study, or take English lessons. Weekends are the busiest times, when ten to several hundred people gather to offer food to the monks, chant or meditate, listen to dharma talks, and help with chores around the temple. Some temples have scheduled services on Saturday or Sunday mornings that include chanting, meditation, ceremonies, and dharma talks while others have looser arrangements, doing these activities only when people come and request them.²⁴ Funerals, blessings for babies and blessings for weddings take place regularly at most temples. Dharma talks and Buddhist teachings are regularly given in Thai, Laotian, Cambodian, and English languages. At only seven of the temples that we learned that about were teachings given only in Thai. Most often teachings are given in Thai and Laotian or Thai and English. Some of the monks teach in more than one language, but more often the talk is translated, particularly into English, by a Thai lay person who is present so everyone there can understand.

Most temples currently hold eight to ten festivals every year, which are their largest gatherings. On festival days, people often spend all day at the temple making offerings to the monks, listening to the Buddha's teachings, and visiting with friends. At some temples these festivals are celebrations of Thai culture and are centered on Thai food made by Thai families who come to the temple wearing traditional Thai dress. Dhammaratanarm Temple in Tucson, Arizona, for example, rents a church or a big hall for large festivals that include opportunities for the lay people to offer food to the monks and make donations to the temple as well as to enjoy Thai dancing, Thai kicking boxing and Thai food. This temple and others collect large portions of their yearly budgets at festivals through direct donations as well as raffles and sales to benefit the temple. At other temples, these gatherings are broader celebrations of Theravada Buddhist, rather than Thai, holidays and include people and food from several of the Theravada Buddhist countries of Thailand, Laos, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Burma as well as the United States.

The Thai cultural versus broader Theravada Buddhist orientation of a particular temple can often be assessed based on the festivals it holds, with more broadly oriented temples not celebrating the Thai cultural holidays and including a much wider range of people. Most temples start the year with a New Year's Festival in early January. Makhabūchā is then held in the middle of February to celebrate an assembly of the Buddha's disciples. Songkrān, the Thai New Year, is celebrated in mid-April at all of the Thai culturally oriented temples, as is the Queen's birthday in August, Wan Chāt, a harvest festival in September, and the King of Thailand's birthday in December. More broadly oriented temples generally do not celebrate all

of these holidays, but instead celebrate Visākhābūchā in May in honor of the birth, death, and enlightenment of the Buddha, They also celebrate Āsālāhābūchā in July in commemoration of the Buddha's first sermon and the Tot Kathin festival, normally in the middle of October, that marks the end of the Buddhist Lent or rain retreats, a period during which the monks stay close to their temples for study and meditation. These three festivals are also celebrated at culturally oriented Thai temples.

Outside of festivals and regular weekend gatherings, some temples, and especially those with strong Thai cultural orientations, offer Thai language and dance classes for children on a regular basis. These teachings are probably the best indicator of the extent to which the temple is focused on Thai people and cultural preservation. Thai language classes are held at about one-third of Thai Buddhist temples.²⁵ Generally this teaching is free and provided by a monk or lay person. A number of temples also have summer language programs for children that bring teachers from Thailand to teach. At Wat Dhammagunaram in Layton, Utah, for instance, Thai classes taught by the monks and Thai volunteers from Chulalongkorn University in Thailand are held each summer from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and thirty to forty children, and sometimes a few adults, attend.²⁶ Thai dancing classes are also held at about one-quarter of Thai Buddhist temples.

Education for children at temples with strong ethnic and cultural orientations is generally centered around Thai language and culture rather than specifically Buddhist study. Some Abbots did, however, mention doing temporary ordination for boys in the summer so they can learn more about Buddhism. At Wat Pa Buddhayanandharam in Las Vegas, Nevada, for example, the monks have a summer camp attended by eight to ten Thai-American children. At the camp, the children learn how to ask for precepts, arrange the altar, and practice mindfulness by using self-awareness meditation. The children also help the monks develop the area around the temple by planting plants and trees. At Wat Buddharatanaram in Keller, Texas a novice group ordination for boys is held in June. Boys age seven and older can be ordained as novices or temporary monks for two weeks, during which time they hold eight precepts or guidelines for contact and then ten precepts and learn about what it is like to be a monk.

In addition to classes and education for children, a number of temples, and particularly those with broader orientations, have regular weekly classes about Buddhism and meditation for adults. These classes are attended by Thai and Lao adults as well as by non-Asian adults. About ten temples hold regular Buddhism classes for adults and thirty-four have regular meditation classes for adults. Two forms of meditation developed in and from the Theravada Buddhist tradition that are taught at these temples: *vipassana* or insight meditation, and *samatha* or concentration meditation. Most of the Abbots told us that they teach meditation by instructing students to follow their breathing while thinking of phrases like 'Budd-ho' or 'Yup naw-pong naw' while inhaling and exhaling. Just over twenty temples also have regular meditation retreats lasting from one to several days, often during the three-month monastic rain retreats.

At some temples these Buddhism and meditation classes include Thai and non-Asian people and are taught in English or a combination of languages at the same time, while at other temples classes in different languages are held at different times during the week. Wat Buddhawaram in Denver, for example, holds meditation retreats centered on breathing meditation in February and June for seven to fourteen days, as mentioned earlier. Twenty to thirty Thais and non-Asian-Americans attended recent retreats that the Abbot told us were taught in both Thai and English languages. At Wat Promkunaram in Waddell, Arizona the monks hold retreats a few times each year that are attended by Thai and American-born non-Asian people, to provide training in calmness, breathing meditation, and lovingkindness meditation. At Wat Buddharatanaram in Keller, Texas, the Abbot told us that Thai and Laotian adults come to the temple to hold eight precepts on Visakhabucha Day, the day that celebrates the birth, death and enlightenment of the Buddha. They wear white and meditate for one day and night. Three times per year the temple also has seven-day retreats when a famous monk from Thailand comes to teach.

At just over one-third of Thai Buddhist temples, non-Asian-Americans participate on a regular basis. At some of these temples, everyone meets together; while at others, the groups are more parallel, meeting at separate times, what Paul Numrich has described as 'parallel congregations'. At Wat Buddhadhammo in Morino Valley, California, for example, two groups of people gather separately for classes. Five to ten Asians come to study dharma and are taught by a monk in Thai. A second group of five to ten non-Asian-Americans also gather and the monk teaches them in English. On Sundays at Wat Mongkolratanaram in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, Thai people come to offer food to the monks in the morning and non-Asian people often come to practice meditation at the temple in the afternoon. On Friday evenings, at Wat Buddhajakramongkolratanaram in Escondio, California and on Saturday evenings at Wat Dhammagunaram in Layton, Utah, non-Asian people gather for dharma teaching and meditation instruction. Many of the non-Asian English speakers involved with these parallel congregations are white, although the Abbots of temples in California, Texas, and Florida told us that a number of Mexican and Mexican-Americans also attend their temples. More non-Asian men than women tend to attend and turnover rates are often quite high. More detailed research needs to be conducted to provide a more comprehensive picture of the range of temples that include non-Asian-Americans and the ways that they include them.

In addition to the activities held at Thai Buddhist temples, the Abbots of more than one-half of these temples spoke about the ways they or lay leaders are involved in activities in their local communities via cultural, educational and other activities. In some areas, monks and temples participate in community fairs, cultural centers, Thai associations, and Southeast Asian centers. Some temples organize their young people to present Thai classical dancing, Thai kick boxing, or Thai food in cultural venues while others provide spaces for visitors from Thai Embassies, particularly in Los Angeles, Washington DC, and New York, to visit and

make offerings. A number of temples also serve as mobile polling stations for elections in Thailand.

About one-half of Thai Buddhist temples maintain relationships with specific temples in Thailand through letters and email, often with the temple where the Abbot in the States ordained as a monk. The temples occasionally reported sending money to Thailand in response to a natural disaster or crisis but there seemed to be little material support sent from temples in the United States to Thailand, aside from a very few temples that support scholarships for students in Thailand or meal funds for students in Thai villages. Likewise, Abbots of temples in the United States reported receiving books, amulets, and sometimes Buddha images, but rarely money from temples in Thailand.²⁷

Primarily, temples focus their social service efforts not on Thailand, but on the communities around their temples. Several Abbots spoke with us about attending meetings about safety in their communities. Others belong to local chambers of commerce and allow their buildings to be used for voting on American election days. Some monks work with ministerial and social service organizations to donate food and supplies to charities and homeless shelters, and a few visit prisons to teach interested inmates about Buddhism. The Health Department in one city specifically invites the monks to visit and give support to sick people a few times a year. Many temples also make financial donations to their local communities or national organizations to help with national disasters.

Thai Buddhist temples' largest social service efforts are likely in the educational work they do about Buddhism and Thailand in their regions. Many monks are regularly invited to give lectures about Buddhism in high schools and colleges across the country. The University of Hawaii, for example, invites monks to give lectures about dharma and to teach breathing meditation. Students are regularly welcomed into many temples across the country as visitors and several monks reported engaging in email correspondence with interested students. One Abbot even spoke with us about working with the high school curriculum committee in his area on teaching materials to use for addressing moral and ethical problems. Another spoke about his commitment to writing a regular column about Buddhism for the local paper.

In addition to working with other ethnic, cultural, educational, and social service organizations, a number of Abbots also work with other religious groups in their area. Some temples participate in religious activities at other temples in the area and invite representatives from other Buddhist temples to attend their events. About one-half of the temples reported belonging to other Buddhist groups like the Midwest Buddhist Council, the American Buddhist Congress, and Buddhist Councils like the Buddhist Council of Greater Saint Lewis. Others are invited to visit local Christian churches to speak about Buddhism, or attend interfaith gatherings in their cities.

While some temples are involved in all of these activities, language and cultural differences are a barrier to involvements for other temples. The Abbots of a number of temples are not directly involved in the larger community but send

other monks or, more often, lay representatives to various community meetings. A number of Abbots told us that they had been invited to participate in different gatherings and events but had declined because of language barriers.

Emerging Themes

Thai Buddhism has developed dramatically in the United States since the first Thai Buddhist immigrants and monks arrived in America in the mid-1970s. Unlike Catholic immigrants from Latin America and other areas that fit into (and change) existing religious organizations in the States, early Thai Buddhist immigrants created the institutional infrastructure of Thai Buddhism in the United States from the ground up. While some temples, like Wat Buddharatanaram in Keller, Texas, physically resemble temples in Thailand, many others do not, externally or internally, as Thai Buddhism as taken a new shape in the States in the past thirty years.

The most significant change in Thai Buddhism in America is the degree to which it has been shaped internally and externally by people who are not Thai. The first Thai Buddhist organization in the States was formed by Asian and American-born Buddhists, and other Southeast Asian Buddhists, most especially Lao Buddhists, have been integrally involved in the development of temples across the United States. Mostly white American-born Buddhists are involved in more than one-third of temples via different kinds of parallel congregations and, while generally not in leadership positions, are part of a broader kind of Thai Buddhism that has emerged in the States. This type of Thai Buddhism is made possible by the large number of Thai immigrants who are professionals, speak English well, and interact on a daily basis with non-Thai-Americans, as well as by the fact that many Thai women are married to non-Thai-American-born men, a factor that probably makes them more open to difference than immigrants, like some Chinese or Koreans, who live in tight ethnic enclaves and do not speak English well.²⁹

The distinction between ethnic or culturally oriented temples like Wat Buddharatanaram and temples with broader orientations like Wat Buddhawararanam, however, is best conceptualized as a continuum, although one whose increments are still changing and developing. While it would be easy to imagine that temples that do not celebrate Thai Cultural (non-Buddhist) holidays and hold meditation classes in English are clearly at the broader end of the continuum, some of these temples hold Thai language or dance classes and participate in local cultural and ethnic events. Similarly, it is not surprising to find temples that seem to be focused exclusively on the local Thai and/or Thai and Laotian population that have a few non-Asian-Americans that are integrally involved. The broad distinctions between temples made here are conceptually helpful but, due to the newness in the States and the different constituents of Thai people that may coexist with different visions inside some Thai temples, these categories do not always map perfectly on to all Thai Buddhist temples in the States in predictable ways.

The range of activities, orientations and participants in Thai Buddhist temples today are particularly interesting in light of the fact that these temples continue to be led almost exclusively by monks born and trained in Thailand. Some temples, like Wat Buddha Lela in Whittier, California, are led by just one monk, while others like Wat Samakkidhammaram in Long Beach, California have ten or more. These monks range from age twenty to eighty-eight and have educational backgrounds that range from high school graduation to doctorates. Some monks like Phra Maha Surasak Jivananta, the Abbot of Wat Thai DC, have been in the States for more than twenty-five years, while others have been here for just a few months.

Monks' English-language abilities and the geographic location of particular temples are the factors that seem to have the largest influence on the ways particular temples develop and the kinds of activities they pursue. Temples that have or had a monk who speaks English well are, not surprisingly, often more broadly oriented and involved with local community events simply because the temple is better able linguistically to engage with its surroundings. The majority of Thai people in the States speak English well, but it is the English-language abilities of the monks that primarily influence a temple's development. Also, the geographic location influences how broadly oriented a temple is, with isolated temples in areas with fewer Thai people often, although not always, welcoming a broader range of people. Laotian, Cambodian, Sri Lankan and other Theravada Buddhists in the region surrounding a more remotely located temple often come to that temple because they do not have the choices they would in a more central location. Sri Lankans who live in Los Angeles, for example, generally attend one of the Sri Lankan temples in the city while those who live in parts of New Mexico would be more likely to attend a Thai temple since there are no Sri Lankan temples in the state. At Wat Mongkoltempunee in the suburbs of Philadelphia, many firstgeneration Thai immigrants attend but there are also a few Laotians, Indonesians, and Chinese people. Cambodians used to attend until they started their own temple in the city of Philadelphia. Similarly, English-speaking non-Asian-Americans who are interested in Buddhism have fewer other places in more remote areas to go to learn about the tradition and so may express interest in the temple that could lead it to become more broadly oriented. On the other hand, temples in areas where there are other Thai Buddhist temples or other Buddhist centers are able to develop more of a niche because they do not have to provide welcome to so many different groups of people.

Implicit throughout this historical discussion is the impact on Thai Buddhism in the United States of moving from being a religious tradition of the majority in Thailand to a minority religious tradition. This transition works differently depending on ethnic and religious tradition, as Carolyn Chen has argued (Chen 2002). It was Taiwanese Buddhists rather than the Taiwanese Christians, Chen found in her ethnographic research, that were more open to engaging with others, in an attempt to make Buddhism seem less outside of the mainstream. The case of Thai Buddhism, as described here, shows that individual temples and

monks have adapted to being a minority religious tradition in a plethora of ways that defy clear categorization. Some temples have become more broadly oriented, perhaps to attract more constituents, while others have become less so, perhaps to provide a comfortable space where their constituents can be sheltered from the many other challenges of life in the United States. Despite becoming minority religious organizations in the States, however, there is little evidence that temples within the Council of Thai Bhikkhus work or communicate very often with temples within the Dhammayut Order in the USA. Like in Thailand, monks in each order generally do not mix and temples seem to work together very little. Despite being in a new country where conditions might lead them to work together more, high levels of competition also remain between different temples within and between these two main groups. While many of the larger temples have helped the smaller temples get started, this competition remains not just for resources but for respect, with the Abbots of smaller temples telling us that they have to work hard to gain the respect of the larger temples. This competition is probably related to the fact that, at least among Mahanikāya temples, new temples cannot join the Council of Thai Bhikkhus, a mark of status, until they can show financially and otherwise that they are relatively stable.

Most broadly, the tradition centered rather than place centered approach to understanding how post-1965 immigrants, in this case Thai Buddhists, developed religious organizations and became a part of the American religious environment clearly illustrates the diversity within religious traditions new to the United States. The history of Thai Buddhism presented here adds considerably to broader research about Buddhism in America, which tends to draws clear conceptual distinctions between white and Asian Buddhists that are more ambiguous, as evident here, in lived religious life.³¹ Rather than focusing on just one organization or pointing towards similarities among religious centers started by immigrants in many different traditions, this approach complicates recent research about religion and immigration by further showing that Thai Buddhism, like other religious traditions of immigrants in the United States, is not monolithic and needs to be understood in its complexity as it continues to become a part of the American religious landscape.

Future Challenges

Despite their diversity, most of the Abbots interviewer gave surprisingly consistent answers when asked about the future plans for their temple and challenges they expect to face. Many hoped to construct new buildings, often places for ceremonies, in quieter, more serene, or more easily accessible environments. Many planned to have more teachings for the English-speaking community, including Buddhism and meditation classes for Thai and non-Asian children and adults. Some also hoped to have more cultural activities like Thai language classes and classical dancing for the second-generation children who attend the temple.

The biggest challenge Abbots most often noted was debt, accumulated both through construction projects and daily operation costs. About one-third of the Abbots we interviewed spoke openly about their temple's debt and the extent to which it stands in the way of their future plans. Part of this debt may actually be related to the increasing number of Thai Buddhist temples in the States. As one monk explained, when temples hold festivals, they generally send a letter announcing the festival and an envelope so that people unable to attend can send a donation. As the number of temples has increased, many people are now on the mailing lists at multiple temples and receive announcements for holiday festivals from each temple. Rather than sending one hundred dollars to one temple, people may dilute their contributions by sending thirty or forty dollars to several different temples.

Looking at the history and configuration of Thai Buddhism in the States more broadly, a number of additional issues that may confront Thai Buddhism and Thai Buddhist temples in America in the next ten to twenty years are evident. If immigration from Thailand continues, as it has in the past, Thai Buddhist temples in the States could continue operating as they are, perhaps indefinitely because they would be continually replenished by first generation immigrants. Without a supply of new first-generation immigrants, however, these temples face serious challenges in their attendance and leadership. The majority of people who attend Thai Buddhist temples are first-generation immigrants from Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and other countries. Members of the second generation attend Thai language and dancing classes and festivals at the temples but few attend on a regular basis or after they have finished high school or started to live separately from their parents. As the Abbot of the New York Thai temple Wat Vajiradhammapadip argues, fewer people will probably come to Thai temples in the future because the second generation understands little of what takes place there. While it is possible that some members of the second generation will return to the temples when they marry and begin to have children, at the present time they are largely uninterested. Without the social and financial support of the second generation, many of today's Thai Buddhist temples will have a difficult time getting out of debt, let alone building new buildings or beginning new programs in the future if immigration from Thailand decreases.

Closely related is the issue of leadership. Monks born and trained in Thailand are ideal leaders of temples populated with first-generation immigrant lay people. While some members of the second generation speak Thai and some monks speak English, a large cultural gap exists between first-generation Thai monks and second-generation Thai or Thai-American children. So long as first-generation Thai people continue to dominate numerically and control the decision-making processes at Thai Buddhist temples, there probably will not be major leadership problems. If the number of second-generation Thais (or Laotians or Cambodians) increases, however, or more non-Asian-Americans get involved with these temples, a need for monks or leaders that can overcome this cultural gap may develop. One response may be to create a sangha or order of monks born in the States, although most Thai parents report not wanting their children to become monks and the few

non-Asian (white) men who have been ordained as monks have generally not been very interested in leading temples.³² Perhaps the future will see the merging of Thai temples so there is a more limited need for leaders, or, as evident in some Japanese Buddhist organizations, perhaps Thai people will continue to come to the temple for cultural reasons and greater numbers of native born non-Asian-Americans will begin coming for more religious or spiritual reasons (Asai and Williams 1999).

Regardless of what happens in the future, Thai Buddhism will be significantly influenced by the diverse ways it developed in its first thirty years in the United States. The range of people who have, and continue, to be involved in Thai Buddhist temples point to the varied ways this religious tradition has adapted and to creative possibilities for its future adaptation and change in America.

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NOTES

- For more information about the opening of the new building and about the temple generally, see their web page (http://www.watkeller.com/). See also Amy Roquemore's 'Monks working round-the-clock to finish Keller temple' (The Dallas Morning News, 9 May 1999), and the article 'Buddhists celebrate new temple' (The Dallas Morning News, 18 June 1999).
- For more information, see the temple's web page (http://www.watthaidenver. org/Eng/).
- 3. Depending on the specific region they are from, some Thai and Lao people can understand each other's languages. Other Southeast Asians who attend Thai Buddhist temples generally do not understand the teaching that takes place there in Thai. Much of the chanting at these temples, however, is conducted in Pali, the scriptural language of Theravada Buddhism that is common to most Theravada Buddhist ceremonies. While people do not normally know or understand Pali language, it sounds familiar and distinctly 'Buddhist' to people from the Theravada Buddhist countries of Thailand, Sri Lanka, Laos, Burma, and Cambodia.

- 4. See, for example, Warner and Wittner (1998), Bankston (1997), Chen (forthcoming), Levitt (2003), Lin (1996), Menjivar (1999), Min (1992), VanEsterik (1992), and Haddad et al. (2003).
- 5. The gateway cities projects have been funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and examine the religions of post-1965 immigrants in Houston, Washington, DC, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, and San Francisco. Publications include Ebaugh and Chafetz (1999, 2000, 2002). Studies of many smaller towns and cities have been conducted under the guidance of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University. For an overview, see Eck (1997, 2001). A complete list of the Pluralism Project's publications and working papers is available online (//www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralsm/).
- For overviews of these general findings see Yang and Ebaugh (2001) and Warner (2000).
- 7. For important exceptions of projects based around particular immigrant groups see for example Kwon et al., (2001) and Yang (1999).
- 8. See Footrakoon (1999). Some Thai women married to non Asian-American men in the United States also came to the States as mail order brides, primarily in the 1980s and 1990s. The number of people in these kinds of situations, is unknown. For one woman's story, see Larsen (1989).
- 9. For more information, see Lewis (1997), Desbarats (1979) and Niland (1970).
- **10.** For a description of Buddhism as practiced in Thailand, see Swearer (1995).
- 11. For more information about thus survey, see: http://nis.princeton.edu/about/about.htm. For an overview of the religions of immigrants examined in the pilot study, see Jasso et al. (2003).
- 12. For a list of these Thai Christian churches see: http://www.thaiembdc.org/index.htm. The only research conducted about these churches is Codman-Wilson (1992).
- 13. Important exceptions are Padgett (2002) and Perreira (2004) .
- **14.** These web pages were as follows: www.thaiembdc.org/directory/wat_e.html; www.dhammayutusa.iirt.net/watlist.html; http://www.thaitempleusa.iirt.net; www.ethai.com/temples.html.
- 15. By other definitions, it is possible that a few of the eighty-seven temples described in detail here are not Thai temples. Many temples serve Thai and Laotian populations and are led by monks who speak both Thai and Lao, making the distinction, particularly between whether a temple is Thai or Laotian, often problematic.
- 16 The founding of Wat Thai LA, officially called the Theravada Buddhist Center, Inc., is much longer and more complicated than the brief summary presented here. For a complete description of what some call 'the saga', see Payutto (1999) and http://www.watthaiusa.org.
- 17. Pamphlet: History of Wat Thai Washington D.C., 1997.
- 18. See Swearer (1995) and Jackson (1989) for a detailed discussion of the two main groups or nikāya of temples in Thailand and their relationship with one another.

- **19.** Wat Mongkolratanaram near Tampa is an example of a temple started largely by the wives of US servicemen. See Padgett (2002).
- 20. In the United States, as in Southeast Asia, monks live by the vinaya or code of conduct outlined by the Buddha and followed by Theravada Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia. These guidelines are quite detailed (see Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1996, 2001) and guide what a monk may wear, what and when he may eat, how he may interact with other people, and a wide range of other topics. Monks generally do not wear clothes other than their robes, do not prepare their own food, do not drive, and do not marry or have sexual relations with women.
- 21. Additional research is needed to better understand what brings non-Asian-Americans to Buddhist temples to learn rather than to meditation centers or other convert Buddhist organizations where these teachings are also available.
- 22. These are the Dhammakaya International Meditation Center of California, the Seattle Meditation Center, the Atlanta Meditation Center, the Dhammakaya International Meditation Center of Chicago and the Dhammakaya International Meditation Center of New Jersey.
- For a history and description of the Dhammakaya movement, see Swearer (1991).
- 24. Some people also come to the temple on wan phra days, days that correspond to the cycle of the moon that are traditionally reserved for study and meditation.
- 25. Lao language class is held at five temples.
- **26.** Temples could also be a good place to teach English, particularly to new immigrants, but English is only taught at four of the temples contacted.
- 27. The new temples that do receive support from temples in Thailand are generally the larger temples rather than the smaller temples that receive limited funds from the Religion Department of the Ministry of Education in Thailand.
- 28. For more information about these kinds of councils, see Numrich (1999).
- **29.** Todd Perreira (2004) describes these families, particularly their children, at Wat Buddhanusorn in Freemont, California.
- 30. The paths through which individual monks came to serve temples in the States vary. Most were born in Thailand, where they became monks as children or adults before coming to the States. All received Buddhist training and lived at Buddhist temples in Thailand, where they completing various degrees of Buddhist study. Some of the monks who first came to the United States in the 1970s did so because they knew people who had immigrated and wanted to help them establish temples. Later, most came because specific temples needed an additional monk or because a current monk was going back to Thailand. The process through which individual monks came to the States remains more informal than formal. When an Abbot or Head monk in the States had a place for a monk, he let his colleagues in the United States and Thailand know of the need. A monk is then selected informally either from

a temple in Thailand or from another temple in the States. Among the Abbots interviewed, ten had lived at other temples in the States before coming to their current temple. Monks coming from Thailand then attended a training program organized separately by the Mahanikāya and Dhammayut Orders. Monks ordained at a Mahanikāya temple and coming to live at a Mahanikāya temple in the United States under the auspices of the Council of Thai Bhikkhus attend an eighty-day training program in chanting, English language, and Western culture before receiving their passports and being allowed to leave Thailand. The Dhammayut Order holds two months of orientation for the monks before they leave that includes computer training, among other things. Geoff DeGraff/Thanissaro Bhikkhu, the Abbot of Wat Metta, a Dhammayut Temple near San Diego, is an interesting exception to this pattern, He is a white American-born man. He graduated from Oberlin College before going to Thailand in the 1970s where he ordained as a monk and practiced meditation for many years under the guidance of Ajahn Fuang Jotika, a teacher in the Thai Forest tradition. He returned to the United States and in 1991 began helping with the leadership of Wat Metta. He became the Abbot or Head Monk of the temple in 1993. Within the Council of Thai Bhikkhus in 2000 there were ten non-Thai monks.

- 31. Scholars of American Buddhism have been debating for years how Buddhism in America is best conceptualized. For example, see Prebish (1999), Williams and Queen (1999), Tweed (1999), Numrich (2003) and Nattier (1998).
- 32. For a discussion of prospects for an indigenous sangha, see Numrich (1998).

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Wendy Cadge, Harvard University, 34 Kirkland Street, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA. Tel: +1 617 496 6219; Fax: +1 617 496 1636.

E-mail: wcadge@rwj.harvard.edu

Appendix A: Thai Buddhist temples in the United States

Contact Information:

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Website(s):

What language are the websites in:

1. Leadership at present

How many monks?

Name of head monk?

How long has head monk been at the temple?

Name of monk spoken to:

Language interview is conducted in:

Date of phone call:

History:

- 2. Year Started:
- 3. How started:

Activities:

Weekly and Monthly schedule:

- 4. Do you have chanting or meditation services every day at your temple? (If yes, When? What is chanted or what kind of meditation? How many people come on average? What language is the service in?)
- 5. Do people come to the temple on Sundays for a service? (If yes, When? What happens in that service? How many people come on average? What language is the service in?)
- 6. Do people come to the temple on Saturdays for a service? (If yes, When? What happens in that service? How many people come on average? What language is the service in?)
- 7. Do you have Thai language classes at your temple?
- 8. Do you have English language classes at your temple?
- 9. Do you have Thai music or dance classes at your temple?
- 10. Do you have a Sunday School or Buddhist school for children at your temple? (If yes, what language is in it?
- 11. Do you have a dhamma school or Buddhist school for adults at your temple? (If yes, what language is it in?)
- 12. Do you have meditation classes at your temple? (If yes, when? What kind of meditation? How many people come on average? What language are they taught in?)
- 13. Is your temple involved with other programs in your community? If yes, what sorts of programs?
- 14. At your temple, do monks perform services for people who died?
- 15. At your temple, do monks perform services for newborn babies?
- 16. Do monks at your temple perform or attend weddings?
- 17. What festivals are held each year at your temple?

Publications:

- 18. Do you have any weekly or monthly publications?
- 19. If yes:
 - a.) what language are they in?
 - b.) how many people are on the mailing list?

Attendance:

- 20. What kind of a building is your temple?
- 21. Do Asian people who are not Thai come to your temple? (If yes, what countries are these people from?)
- 22. Do non-Asian people come to your temple? Do these people come with Asians or by themselves?

- 23. How many people would you estimate came to your temple last week?
- 24. How is your temple supported financially? Is it in debt?

Relationship with other Buddhist groups:

- 25. Do you belong to the Council of Thai Bhikkhus or the Dhammayut Order?
- 26. Are you involved with any Buddhist groups in your area?
- 27. Do you have a special relationship with certain temples in Thailand?

Future:

28. What do you have in mind for the future of the temple?