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Locally Translocal American Shin Buddhism

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IN HIS STUDY ON THE AMERICAN iterations of the Japanese-derived post-pregnancy loss ritual *mizuko kuyō*, *Mourning the Unborn Dead*, Jeff Wilson rightly points out that “Japanese-American Zen temples tend to be partially obscured by convert Zen on the one hand and Japanese-American Jōdo Shinshū on the other, [and] additional Japanese forms of Buddhism in the United States are more or less completely invisible to both the scholarly and popular media communities.”¹ While this is certainly an accurate observation, it is also a bit misleading in regards to the amount of scholarly literature on American Shin Buddhism. Yes, a majority of the work done on Japanese American Buddhism has focused on Shin Buddhism, but in the last three or four decades since the academic study of American Buddhism has begun to flourish, this majority is a minority compared to the much larger body of literature on American Buddhisms more generally. There are very few book-length treatments on the subject, the most thorough of which include Testuden Kashima’s *Buddhism in America: The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Organization* and Donald Tuck’s *Buddhist Churches of America: Jōdo Shinshū*, both of which are now out of print.² Michihiro Ama’s forthcoming work on the pre-World War Two history of the Buddhist Mission of North America attests to the need for more research on American Shin Buddhism.³

Most edited volumes on American Buddhism include a chapter or two on American Shin Buddhism; however, their scarcity suggests that a generalized interest in the topic remains low. Moreover, these treatments have by and large not been particularly positive. Leaving aside Kashima’s sociological surveys and Arthur Nishimura’s historical survey,⁴ most of the scholarship has cast American Shin Buddhism in the role of traditional, conservative, and static; Richard Hughes Seager’s survey *Buddhism in America* devotes an entire chapter to the

Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), but this chapter is tellingly titled “Jōdo Shinshū: America’s Old-Line Buddhists.”⁵ This appellation is in stark contrast to James William Coleman’s depiction of “convert” communities as America’s “new Buddhism,” suggesting that the BCA remains separate from a dynamic, homegrown American Buddhism.⁶ Beginning with the assumption that the BCA is but an ethnically homogenous Japanese American community, Kenneth Tanaka openly questions whether or not the “BCA can make the effective transition from being traditionally ethnic-centered to becoming more Dharma-centered.”⁷ There is a persistent narrative of decline that hangs over the BCA in the academic literature, buttressed by George Tanabe’s repeated warnings that American Shin Buddhism is but a few days shy of dying out completely.⁸ It is little wonder that no one would take American Shin Buddhism as a serious object of study; the overall consensus seems to be that American Shin Buddhists have not done much of anything in over a century and are going to completely vanish any minute now.

How then do we talk about American Shin Buddhism and the Buddhist Churches of America, its largest iteration in the United States? Is the BCA nothing more than an ethnic Japanese organization? Is it purely a form of Japanese Buddhism that happens to reside in the United States? Or is it an authentic and “home grown” variant of American Buddhism, broadly defined? Is it a participant in what might be called a global Japanese Buddhist ethnoscape?⁹ Or, sixty-five years after internment, is it finally able to claim its American-ness, unapologetically? The present paper, based in part on an ongoing research project, presents a brief snapshot of the Buddhist Churches of America at present and suggests that far from being either a fully Americanized or thoroughly Japanese form of Buddhism, it is both of and in between these extremes. That is, American Shin Buddhism is *locally translocal*; it is impacted by the local concerns of the broader American religious and cultural landscape while being beholden to a transnational, global Shin Buddhist discourse. Here, I argue that the local concerns within BCA churches have impacted the training and ordination procedures for American-born Shin Buddhist ministers. These procedures are attenuated by the larger, transnational institutional structures of both the BCA and the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha in Japan resulting in a locally translocal form of Buddhism. This research suggests that American Shin Buddhism can be used as a test case for newer research

on transnationalism and globalization, issues that will certainly only increase in importance and influence in American Buddhism moving forward into the twenty-first century.

A SNAPSHOT OF AMERICAN SHIN BUDDHISM

The Buddhist Churches of America maintains a complex relationship with the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha in Japan. This relationship, however, does not mean that the BCA is merely a transplanted form of Japanese Buddhism residing in the United States. American Shin Buddhism differs significantly from its Japanese forms while nevertheless participating in a transnational Shin Buddhist discourse. To best understand this complex relationship, I will begin with a brief overview of the Buddhist Churches of America, its institutional structure, and its relationship to the Hongwanji.

In 1899, at the behest of Japanese immigrants to the United States, the Buddhist Mission of North America (BMNA) was established in San Francisco as an overseas mission of the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha. Over the first decades of the twentieth century, a number of small lay Buddhist organizations had sprung up along the West Coast, usually beginning as Young Men's Buddhist Associations. One by one, these groups affiliated themselves with the BMNA and established themselves as formal churches serving primarily the growing Japanese American population. The BMNA became the Buddhist Churches of America during World War Two internment, and following the war continued to serve the Japanese American community while simultaneously making small forays into the wider discourse on American Buddhism.¹⁰ At present, the BCA, still headquartered in San Francisco, acts as an umbrella organization that oversees sixty-one temples, churches, and *betsuin*, as well as six "fellowships," that are divided into eight districts. The BCA collects dues from each of these organizations based on their number of dues-paying member families; in exchange the BCA offers a number of educational programs and resources, and, as an overseas district of the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, assigns ministers to local sanghas. BCA-affiliated sanghas are alternately labeled churches, temples, and *betsuin*, and for all intents and purposes, there is little substantive difference between these types of institutions. Many "churches" have been called "churches" since their foundation more than a century ago and continue to call themselves such out of tradition more than anything.

Despite the rhetoric of decline that suggests that the BCA is becoming increasingly irrelevant, overall membership has actually remained rather steady over the past three decades. Of course, the business of “counting” Buddhists in North America is problematic on several fronts, the first being the difficulty of gathering reliable statistics. For example, recently the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted a survey that suggested that the United States is only 0.7% Buddhist with more than half being of Euro-American descent. The survey, however, was criticized by scholars¹¹ who pointed out the limitations of accounting for Buddhists with a survey conducted only in the continental United States, only in English and Spanish, and only via land-line telephones, and therefore missing the high percentage of Buddhists in Hawai‘i, Buddhists whose native language may be any of a number of Asian languages, and younger Buddhists reachable only via cellular phones or the Internet. Secondly, there remains the problem of accounting for liminal persons, persons who may hold multiple religious identities or no identity at all while still participating in religious communities. These are, to use Thomas Tweed’s phrasing, Buddhist “sympathizers,” those who may or may not belong to a formal community but, nevertheless, have a Buddhist identity to some degree and influence the overall American Buddhist landscape. These liminal identities and their influence are overlooked by relying on the static categories used by such surveys as the Pew Forum.¹²

Whereas these issues may impact our ability to quantify the Shin Buddhist presence in the United States, there are further issues specific to the case of the Buddhist Churches of America. BCA membership is generally determined by family memberships, not individuals, which makes arriving at precise figures difficult at best. For example, in his 1977 study, Kashima estimates fourteen thousand member families representing nearly forty-five thousand individuals.¹³ In research from the late 1980s, he reports a total BCA membership of just over twenty thousand. However, this “definition of membership includes both families . . . and single members,” and Kashima makes no effort to estimate how many individuals this number represents.¹⁴ Moreover, because member churches must pay dues to the BCA based on their number of member families, some local churches have been suspected of regularly undercounting their membership numbers as a way of saving money. Finally, relying on membership numbers alone obscures the participation of non-members within local BCA communities as well

as those who may self-identify as Shin Buddhists but have no formal affiliation with a BCA church or sangha.

One test case, that of the Berkeley Buddhist Temple, can be illustrative. At present there are 220 dues-paying member families representing approximately 350 individuals.¹⁵ In addition to regular member families and individuals, there are also approximately eighty children enrolled in the Berkeley Buddhist Temple's Dharma School. While many of these children's families are regular dues-paying members, others are not. According to David Matsumoto, the Berkeley Buddhist Temple's current resident minister, some Dharma School parents enroll their children in Berkeley's Dharma School because that is where they happen to live; however, they may have long-standing familial connections to another BCA church in the area at which they are official members. Others bring their children to Dharma School but never join the temple as official members while still participating in services or other events. Matsumoto reports that one such Dharma School mother told him that she never joined the temple officially "because no one ever asked me."¹⁶ Finally, regardless of whatever number we arrive at when examining membership lists, there are an untold number of "unofficial members" as well as members of the general Berkeley population who attend the community's many annual events such as the Bon Odori festival. Many of these "sympathizers" and other nominally Buddhist persons may contribute to the temple financially, but their identity or affiliation, Buddhist or otherwise, is difficult if not impossible to ascertain. All told, there may be upwards of one thousand people who are in some way or another affiliated with the Berkeley Buddhist Temple.

Despite the fact that overall BCA membership has remained more or less stable for the past few decades, the rhetoric of decline that suggests that membership levels are falling and falling fast is not far off in smaller, rural areas. Small churches that were established more than a century ago in farming communities up and down the West Coast are suffering the effects of larger demographic shifts in the United States. To the extent that these communities were deeply tied to first generation Japanese immigrant communities that have long since left for more centrally located urban areas, we will no doubt see many small BCA churches vanish in the decades to come.¹⁷ Despite these losses, however, many ministers from larger urban communities report year-over-year membership increases that may make up for whatever losses the BCA suffers in rural communities.¹⁸ Furthermore, while the

BCA remains overwhelmingly Japanese American, this demographic is shifting as well. To assume that the BCA is Japanese through and through is problematic to the extent that this stereotype blinds one to the increasing number of non-Japanese converts and life-long members, many of whom take very active and prominent leadership roles.¹⁹

Reacting to demographic shifts such as an increase in non-Japanese members and a movement away from rural areas to urban locations represents some of the ways that American Shin Buddhism is being impacted by broader American population trends. In short, the BCA reacts, as it has for more than a century, to a changing American religious and cultural landscape. However, to the extent that the BCA is inextricably linked to the global Shin Buddhist community, and specifically to the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, it is also impacted by transnational concerns.

The BCA is one of several overseas organization of the Kyoto-based Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha. Whereas “Hongwanji” may refer to a specific temple complex in Kyoto, it also refers to the umbrella organization that oversees a large number of individual temples spread out across Japan. These temples are all members of the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha in a manner similar, though not identical, to the relationship between individual American churches and the BCA. The most important difference between American churches and Japanese temples is that Japanese temples are hereditary institutions. Leadership is passed from father to (usually) eldest son in a patrilineal line of succession stretching back, in some cases, centuries. The Hongwanji, therefore, has no direct authority over local temples’ leadership and is not responsible for assigning ministers in the same way that the BCA has authority over the assignment of ministers to local American churches.

It is a commonly held belief that American Shin Buddhists have incorporated Anglo-American and, frankly, “churchy” language as a result of external pressure to “fit it,” to be more “American” in the face of rampant racism and anti-Japanese sentiment leading up to World War Two. And whereas this is no doubt true, it is also somewhat naive to believe that there was a straight and uncontested line of translation from Japanese to English; history is rarely that neat. We must recognize that American Shin Buddhist churches are significantly different from Japanese Shin Buddhist temples. Most significantly for our present purposes, it is important to note that within the Hongwanji hierarchy, temples (that is, *-ji*²⁰), are a specially designated category of community

that have special rights and responsibilities that other types of Shin Buddhist organizations do not enjoy. Specifically, Japanese temples are hereditary institutions whose leadership is a matter of patrilineal succession. American churches, on the other hand, are run primarily by non-ordained lay leaders whose ministers are assigned to them by the Shin Buddhist hierarchy. It is important to note that no BCA church is considered to be a temple by the Hongwanji with one exception—ironically, the San Francisco Buddhist Church.

Compare this use of “temple” with *betsuin*. In Japan, *betsuin* have a different relationship to the Hongwanji hierarchy than regular temples; however, this is not the case on the American side. There are five BCA-affiliated churches that are designated *betsuin* and, like their Japanese counterparts, their resident ministers hold the title of *rinban*. Whereas these five American *betsuin* are listed by name within the Hongwanji’s records, in practice they are institutionally no different from other BCA churches. In general, American *betsuin* are far larger and older than other BCA churches, and their *rinban* tend to be older and more experienced ministers, affording them special status within the community at large. With their larger size and status, they are often responsible for overseeing local churches that may not be able to support a full-time minister. However, this “older and larger” designation or the ability to oversee smaller churches does not necessarily make a temple a *betsuin*. Arguably, the oldest community in the BCA is the San Francisco Buddhist Church, which is not a *betsuin*. And whether as a result of a shortage of full-time ministers in more rural areas of the country or long-standing cross-temple relationships, many churches that are not *betsuin* oversee other smaller churches. Finally, despite their special designation, the relationship between individual American *betsuin* and the Hongwanji hierarchy is no different than the relationship between any BCA church; that is, all churches and *betsuin* are subordinate to the San Francisco Buddhist Church, which does have a direct relationship to Kyoto. Thus, whereas in the American context, there is little substantive difference between churches, temples, and *betsuin*, the same cannot be said on the Japanese side.

In Japan, temples (again, *-ji*) and *betsuin* are not at all the same type of organization. Japanese *betsuin* are run and maintained directly by the Hongwanji temple in Kyoto and act as large regional centers spread out across Japan; *betsuin rinban* ministers are assigned directly by the *monshu*, the titular head of the Hongwanji.²¹ And while Japanese

temples follow a patrilineal pattern of succession and are thus managed not unlike a “family business,” the same is not true in the United States. BCA churches are run by boards of directors, elected bodies of volunteer laypersons who are charged with overseeing the day-to-day functions of the community, managing temple funds, and maintaining the building and property. Whereas ministers meet with their boards and certainly have influence and input on day-to-day decisions, there is a diffused power structure within these communities that gives non-ordained, lay members considerable power and influence. Boards are typically not only responsible for running the temples, they also hire their ministers and set the annual ritual and liturgical calendars. Moreover, almost all BCA communities run Dharma Schools, programs of Buddhist education for youth, which are run almost exclusively by lay members of the community, primarily women.

In general, lay leaders within American Shin Buddhist communities have significantly more day-to-day involvement with the running of churches than one may expect to find in Japanese temples where the minister has more authority and oversight. An American minister is, for all intents and purposes, an employee of his or her church’s board of directors. Technically, of course, ministers are not hired by their local churches; rather, ministers are appointed by the *socho* (bishop) of the Buddhist Churches of America. The process of assigning ministers to temples is detailed in the *Shūmon hōkishū* (lit. *Buddhist Sect Laws and Regulations*),²² a manual of rules and regulations written by the Hongwanji leadership in Japan. According to the *Shūmon hōkishū*, the bishop has the authority to assign ministers to specific churches; however, the individual church’s board of directors must approve these assignments. And it is fairly clear from my interviews with BCA ministers that much of these decisions are handled in unofficial conversations between all interested partners well before any actual assignments are made. These conversations may involve the bishop, individual members of the board of directors, and other lay leaders, but they may also involve several churches and leaders across an entire BCA district.

Thus whereas the Buddhist Churches of America remains deeply intertwined with a transnational Shin Buddhist organization and is therefore part of a larger Japanese Shin Buddhist diaspora, there are significant differences in institutional structure between the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha and its mission in the United States. The reasons for these differences are multifaceted. As an institution that

developed within an immigrant community, there was at the beginning of the BCA's history no assurance that there would be a "second generation" to whom to pass the churches or temples. Many first generation immigrants had no intention of staying in the United States but instead had come to work, save money, and return to Japan. Thus, the ministers who were sent from Japan to serve these communities had no long-standing familial ties to the community. They had no temples to inherit or bequeath. Moreover, as time went on and the communities developed and grew, they had to incorporate their institutions according to United States laws, not Japanese ones.²³ These laws favor democratically structured, non-profit religious organizations, not hereditary ones. Finally, from its inception, the BCA has been considered a missionary outgrowth of the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha whose ministers have the charge to propagate the Buddha's and Shinran's teachings abroad. From the point of view of Japan, the BCA's position is clearly subordinate to the Hongwanji leadership. Thus, while we can detect significant differences between the Japanese and American Shin Buddhist institutions, they remain deeply interconnected. And this interconnection and its attendant translocal lines of influence is further attenuated by the process of ministerial training and ordination.

TRANSNATIONAL MINISTERIAL TRAINING AND ORDINATION

The Hongwanji has at present four overseas districts and several areas of missionary activity, including: North America, Canada, Hawai'i, South America, Australia and Oceania, Europe, Mexico, Taiwan, and Thailand. The North American District is, in essence, the Buddhist Churches of America, and this subservient role requires that all BCA churches must conform to the rules and regulations set forth by the Hongwanji as contained in the *Shūmon hōkishū*. This relationship is felt most strongly in the area of ministerial training and the assignment of ministers to American churches. The *monshu* has the sole authority to ordain new ministers. As an overseas district of the Hongwanji, the BCA's ministers must be ordained by the *monshu*, who has the authority to assign ministers to specific overseas temples. In the case of the North American District, the only "official" temple is the San Francisco Buddhist Church. Thus, on paper, all BCA ministers are ministers of this one temple and are then assigned to local branch churches by the BCA's *socho*. The BCA's role in the training, ordination, and assignment of ministers is not completely at the whim of the Hongwanji leadership

in Japan, of course, nor has this relationship remained unchanged over the course of its history.²⁴ Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, it has been assumed that the path to ministry leads inexorably through Kyoto.

At present, the normative process of becoming a BCA minister begins with an individual expressing interest in becoming a minister and receiving encouragement from his or her local BCA minister to enroll in a Hongwanji-approved training institution. While there are several options if one is willing to relocate to Japan, historically, the only approved institution in North America has been the Institute of Buddhist Studies (IBS) in Berkeley, though this has recently changed as we will see below. Regardless, after a period of study at the IBS or elsewhere, the aspirant will be granted ministerial candidate status by the *socho* following a number of interviews, a psychological evaluation, and approval by the BCA's Ministers Training and Development Committee. At this point, the candidate will be eligible to travel to Japan to complete the first level of ordination, *tokudo*, a two week ritual at the Hongwanji temple in Kyoto that includes a rigorous schedule of work, classes, chanting, ceremonies, and other rites. Initiates are required to ritually shave their heads as though they are taking formal monastic vows (women may opt out of this requirement), but they do not shave their eyebrows. The ritual itself is based largely on preexisting Tendai forms and is meant to replicate the process of ordination that Shinran himself went through, including ritually renouncing monastic vows.²⁵ Following this first level of ordination, *tokudo* ministers are required to serve in a BCA church, usually as a minister's assistant, for a period of time before returning to Japan for *kyōshi*, a second level of ordination. *Kyōshi* confers upon ministers the right to teach the dharma, and, generally speaking, most Hongwanji ministers have this level of ordination as a bare minimum if they wish to work as a Shin Buddhist minister. BCA ministers, like all overseas ministers, must complete one additional level of ordination, *kaikyōshi*, a certificate allowing one to minister outside Japan. Thus, somewhat ironically, American-born Shin Buddhist ministers hold the same position as Japanese-born Shin Buddhist missionaries.

However, this normative process to become a BCA minister has been recently circumvented by the establishment of the Minister's Assistant Program (MAP). As we have seen, within the normative timeline of becoming a minister, most ministerial aspirants will serve as a

minister's assistant for a period of time, a sort of internship or training period before they are allowed to lead their own community independently. Traditionally, the minister's assistant's role was to do just that—assist the minister—and came with clearly defined roles and boundaries. For example, assistants were not allowed to conduct certain rituals or services, especially funeral or memorial services, and only those who have received *tokudo* were allowed to sit within the *naijin* or altar area of a Shin Buddhist temple. However, as the position of the minister's assistant has grown in importance, these boundaries have become more flexible, regardless of ordination status, and especially in those communities outside of the immediate San Francisco Bay Area, far removed from the centers of American Shin Buddhist authority. As a consequence of this developing role, a formal Minister's Assistant Program of training was begun and championed by Socho Koshin Ogui in 2004.²⁶

The Minister's Assistant Program is designed to allow interested individuals to train for careers in the BCA ministry and work toward *tokudo*, *kyōshi* or *kaikyōshi* without necessarily relocating to Berkeley or Japan. The program includes a significant amount of study done via the BCA's Center for Buddhist Education's online correspondence course and participation in several intensive retreats held throughout the year at the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley. The bulk of the training is done by local ministers who have the burden of responsibility to train their assistants at their respective churches. Thus, the MAP training program allows individuals a new track toward ministry that does not require extended study at the IBS or a Japanese university; on the other hand, to the extent that it is something of a part-time course of study, it takes a substantially longer period of time to complete.

One of the initial justifications for the program was as a solution to the "minister shortage problem"; at present, of the sixty-one BCA temples and churches, nearly a third do not have a full-time resident minister, and a significant number of the remaining ministers are nearing retirement age. The hope was that the MAP program would be a way to make the path to ministry simpler and more appealing to a wider number of people who in turn would go on to serve these smaller communities. The hope that the MAP program would solve the ministerial shortage led to its inclusion within and oversight of the BCA's preexisting Ministers Training and Development Committee. Significantly, the Hongwanji's *Shūmon hōkishū* was amended to allow

for MAP participants to qualify for *tokudo*, reflecting the transnational influence the “subservient” BCA in practice has within the Kyoto hierarchy. Whereas it is still too early in the history of this program to judge whether or not it will in fact solve the ministerial shortage problem, it is important to note that less than half of those who have enrolled in the MAP program have actually gone on to become *tokudo* ministers, let alone *kyōshi* or *kaikyōshi* as required by the Hongwanji establishment.²⁷

Nevertheless, the MAP program and position of the minister’s assistant represent a significant creative adaptation and response to larger demographic shifts both inside and outside the community proper. While the Center for Buddhist Education does not keep track of demographic information, anecdotal evidence culled from interviews and fieldwork suggests that a majority of MAP participants are converts to the BCA, non-Japanese-American, or both. Many minister’s assistants, while not technically authorized to perform certain rituals or services, push the boundaries of what is acceptable behavior for non-ordained members of the community. By leading Dharma Family Services or performing Buddhist weddings, minister’s assistants seem to have a greater level of spiritual responsibility within their communities, a trend that seems particularly strong in the mountain states. While it is mere speculation at this point without further research, it seems reasonable to suggest that the MAP program and the position of the minister’s assistant represent a way for converts to participate within the larger BCA community apart from the well-established, often family-centric and multi-generational relationships at play within local church organizations. But of course this increase in involvement on the part of converts is also a point of friction. One ministerial aspirant, a non-Japanese life-long member of the community, feels as though many converts are not sensitive to the BCA’s Japanese American heritage, that the increased number of non-Japanese converts are attempting to change the tradition too much too fast.²⁸

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Arguably, over the past few decades Buddhism has entered the American religious discourse in a way that is contrary to traditional Shin Buddhist practice. As Americans increasingly embrace meditative and mindfulness-based practices, they expect that to be a Buddhist is to be a meditator. As a matter of doctrinal orthodoxy, Shin Buddhism

has eschewed such “self-powered” practices as seated meditation, and in practice its members have relied on the recitative practice of chanting the *nenbutsu*. One might conjecture that in order to attract new members, the BCA could promote seated meditation to potential converts who have come to expect that Buddhists meditate. Indeed, such attempts have been made but have not yet been successful. The Minister’s Assistant Program, however, has been successful, attracting a growing number of both converts and life-long members of the community. Being a minister’s assistant provides one an opportunity to more directly engage the spiritual life of a Shin Buddhist community by participating and even leading rituals and services. This level of engagement is quite different from the sort of “mundane” engagement lay Shin Buddhists typically enjoy through membership on a board of directors or within a lay group. Perhaps American Buddhists do not necessarily want to *meditate* as much as they want to *participate*, and being a minister’s assistant provides one an opportunity within a Shin Buddhist context.

This uniquely American impulse and the BCA’s response to it illuminates one way that American Shin Buddhism is affected by the local and is differentiated from Japanese Shin Buddhism. Nevertheless, the position of the minister’s assistant does not exist in a vacuum; minister’s assistants’ authority comes from the recognition given by the BCA. And this recognition is itself a result of the BCA’s relationship to the larger, transnational institution of the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha. The rules governing the training and ordination of Shin ministers, written and codified by a Japanese institution, have been attenuated by concerns arising in a specifically American context. It is this relationship that allows us to conceive of American Shin Buddhism as locally translocal.

The local/translocal nature of American Shin Buddhism is not merely an institutional or theoretical construct. It impacts individuals and shapes their practice. Consider the following hypothetical example. Suppose there is a Japanese American woman who was born and raised in the Central Valley farming community of Lodi, California, approximately eighty miles east of San Francisco. Coming from a lower socio-economic background, she has lived and worked in the Lodi area her whole life, rarely traveling beyond her local community. She has never been to Japan, and her only association with her ethnic heritage is through the local Lodi Buddhist Church. She is as likely to attend the

city's annual wine-grape festival as she is the Buddhist church's annual *obon* festival. Thus, her experiences as a Buddhist will be informed by her specific locality. Nevertheless, to the extent that she belongs to a BCA-affiliated church, she is impacted by the larger translocal Shin Buddhist network. The minister who is assigned to her church will be assigned by the BCA's bishop. This minister will be the person from whom she learns about Buddhism, the person who will perform important rituals for her and her family. And this minister is likely not a Lodi native. He may have been trained in Berkeley (or possibly in Japan) according to the rules set forth by the BCA and the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha. The minister's appointment to the Lodi church is entirely at the pleasure of the BCA bishop who, if it is warranted, may reassign the minister to another church without replacement, leaving the Lodi church to fend for itself spiritually, perhaps allowing a lay minister's assistant to take on greater responsibilities within the community. Thus, this woman's experience as a Buddhist will be shaped by the specific locality of a small farming town; but it is not immune to the larger translocal networks of Buddhist institutions and discourses, networks that should not be overlooked in our discussions of American Buddhism.

Is the local-translocal character of American Shin Buddhism an exception or the norm for American Buddhisms broadly speaking? The surest way to answer that question, of course, would be to dedicate one's life to conducting fieldwork across the country before a sufficiently adequate answer could be reached. Here we can only speculate that to the extent we can identify ways in which other American Buddhist communities participate in translocal discourses, to the extent that Buddhist practice in the United States is often the result of hybridized Asian- and Euro-American cultural tendencies, and that the subsequent communities in which these tendencies are enacted are bound up within larger translocal networks of institutional power, it seems reasonable to suggest that American Buddhisms in general are locally translocal. It is important to be attentive to the local, to be attentive to how local conditions on the ground will impact specific Buddhist communities. It is also important to recognize how these local conditions are often the result of far larger translocal networks of power. Thomas Tweed's aquatic metaphors for describing religion in his *Crossing and Dwelling* present an intriguing way of conceptualizing modern global religious discourse, but we should not forget how

cultural waterways are impacted by global, economic, and political power structures. “Organic-cultural flows,” he asserts, “are propelled, compelled, and blocked, directed this way and that by institutional networks.”²⁹ And a fuller understanding of how Buddhism is enacted in the West must be attentive to these institutional, translocal networks.

NOTES

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2. Testuden Kashima, *Buddhism in America: The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Organization* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977); and Donald Tuck, *Buddhist Churches of America: Jōdo Shinshū* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1987).
3. Michihiro Ama, *Immigrants to the Pure Land: The Modernization, Acculturation, and Globalization of Shin Buddhism, 1898–1941*, Pure Land Buddhist Studies (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2011).
4. Tetsuden Kashima, “The Buddhist Churches of America: Challenges for Change in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Shin Buddhism: Historical, Textual, and Interpretive Studies*, ed. Richard K Payne (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2007), 321–340; Tetsuden Kashima, “Japanese Religiosity: A Contemporary Perspective,” in *North American Buddhists in Social Context*, ed. Paul David Numrich (Boston: Brill, 2008), 107–143; Arthur Nishimura, “The Buddhist Mission of North America 1898–1942: Religion and Its Social Function in an Ethnic Community,” in *North American Buddhists in Social Context*, ed. Paul David Numrich (Boston: Brill, 2008), 87–106.
5. Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
6. James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); cf. James William Coleman, “The Emergence of a New Buddhism: Continuity and Change,” in *North American Buddhists in Social Context*, ed. Paul David Numrich (Boston: Brill, 2008).
7. Kenneth K. Tanaka, “Issues of Ethnicity in the Buddhist Churches of America,” in *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, ed. Duncan Ryūken Williams and Christopher S. Queen (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 14.
8. George J. Tanabe, “Grafting Identity: The Hawaiian Branches of the Bodhi Tree,” in *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Linda Learman, Topics in Contemporary Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005), 77–100; George J. Tanabe, “Heresy and the Future of Japanese Buddhism

in Hawaii,” *Patheos*, July 5, 2010, <http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Heresy-and-the-Future-of-Japanese-Buddhism-in-Hawaii.html>.

9. Steven Kemper has used Arjun Appadurai’s concept of an “ethnoscape” to refer to a transnational Buddhist community bounded by its connection to a specific ethnicity. While his work is specific to the case of Sinhala Theravāda Buddhism, this model is clearly applicable to other forms of diasporic Buddhisms. See Steven Kemper, “Dharmapala’s *Dharmaduta* and the Buddhist Ethnoscape,” in *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Linda Learman, Topics in Contemporary Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 22–50; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

10. Michael Masatsugu’s work on the Shin Buddhist and Beat Buddhist connection in the 1950s and early 1960s is a particularly revealing look at how the American Shin Buddhist community interacted with the broader American Buddhist discourse in the post-war years. See Michael Kenji Masatsugu, “Reorienting the Pure Land: Japanese Americans, the Beats, and the Making of American Buddhism, 1941–1966” (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2004); Michael K. Masatsugu, “‘Beyond This World of Transiency and Impermanence’: Japanese Americans, Dharma Bums, and the Making of American Buddhism During the Early Cold War Years,” *Pacific Historical Review* 77, no. 3 (2008).

11. The full Pew report can be found at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>; for a discussion of the limitations, see the Buddhism forum of Humanities Net of March 3, 2008, <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=lx&list=h-buddhism&user=&pw=&month=0803>, as well as Wakoh Shannon Hickey, “Two Buddhisms, Three Buddhisms, and Racism,” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 11 (2010).

12. Thomas A. Tweed, “Who Is a Buddhist? Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures,” in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 17–33.

13. Kashima, *Buddhism in America*, 142.

14. Kashima, “The Buddhist Churches of America,” 323.

15. Berkeley Buddhist Temple, 2010 Directory and Monthly Toban Lists (2010).

16. Rev. Matsumoto, interview with the author, September 28, 2010.

17. Elizabeth Eastman, “Incense at a Funeral: The Rise and Fall of an American Shingon Temple,” in *Transbuddhism: Transmission, Translation, Transformation*, ed. Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield, and Abraham Zablocki (Amherst Northampton: University of Massachusetts Press in association with the Kahn Liberal Arts Institute of Smith College, 2009), 69–85.

18. Rev. David Matsumoto, interview with the author, April 22, 2009; Rev. Gregory Gibbs, interview with the author, September 28, 2008.
19. Jeff Wilson, “The Convert Experience in North American and Hawaiian Shin Buddhism,” paper presented at 14th Biennial Conference of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies, Kyoto, Japan, 2009.
20. Temples are ordinarily designated with the suffix *-ji* 字 in Japan; there are, however, a number of different categories of temples with various relationships to the Hongwanji and places within the larger hierarchy, a complexity I have over-simplified for the sake of clarity here. See Kashima, *Buddhism in America*, 167ff., for more details on the institutional structure of the Hongwanji.
21. The closest English equivalent to *monshu* would be “abbot” to the extent that an abbot is the head of a particular religious community, order, or monastery, and the Hongwanji’s *monshu* is, on paper, the head of the Hongwanji temple. However, the *monshu*’s influence extends well beyond this one specific temple, having an impact on the broader Jōdo Shinshū community.
22. Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, *Shūmon hōkishū* 宗門法規集 (Religious Laws and Regulations), 60th ed. (Kyoto: Shūmusho, 2010); this manual of rules and regulations for the Hongwanji was first published in 1950 and is updated annually.
23. Wendy Cadge, “De Facto Congregationalism and the Religious Organization of Post-1965 Immigrants to the United States: A Revised Approach,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 2 (June 2008): 344–374; Michihiro Ama, “The Legal Dimensions of the Formation of Shin Buddhist Temples in Los Angeles,” in *Issei Buddhism in the Americas*, ed. Duncan Ryūken Williams and Tomoe Moriya (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 65–81.
24. Michihiro Ama, “Immigrants to the Pure Land: The Acculturation of Shin Buddhism in Hawaii and North America, 1898–1941” (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2007); Michihiro Ama, “The First White Buddhist Priestess,” paper presented at Buddhism without Borders: Contemporary Developments in Buddhism in the West, Berkeley, CA, March 18–21, 2010.
25. For a more detailed depiction of this process, see Eisho Nasu, “Ordination Ceremony of the Honganji Priests in Premodern Japanese Society,” in *Engaged Pure Land Buddhism: Challenges Facing Jōdo Shinshū in the Contemporary World: Studies in Honor of Professor Alfred Bloom*, ed. Kenneth Tanaka and Eisho Nasu (Berkeley: WisdomOcean, 1998), 201–220.
26. There were of course precursors to the current MAP program. For several decades the BCA had conversations about the role of *kaikyōshi-ho* (lit. ministerial assistants), and Bishop Watanabe championed a training or ordination program at the turn of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, it

was not until Bishop Ogui's tenure that these programs were formalized and given recognition by the Hongwanji hierarchy.

27. Rev. Matsumoto, interview with the author, April 22, 2009.

28. Anonymous ministerial candidate, interview with the author, July 15, 2009.

29. Thomas A. Tweed, "Crabs, Crustaceans, Crabiness, and Outrage: A Response," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 2 (June 2009): 454.