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Insular Buddhist Communities and Attendance Patterns: The True Buddha School and the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple's Outreach to the Wider Community

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Insular Buddhist Communities and Attendance Patterns: The True Buddha School and
the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple's Outreach to the Wider Community

by

Jacqueline Ho

A THESIS

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Abstract

The overarching focus of my proposed research is: What are the necessary factors for people in a community to practice their religious tradition together? In North America, the majority of Buddhist groups practice in separate communities. For instance, the East Asian Buddhists practice within their own cultural group, and the non-Asian Buddhists gather independently. One Buddhist group known as the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple (a branch of the True Buddha School organization) has claimed to devote much effort, since its establishment in 1992, to create a harmonized congregation in which Canadians, both Chinese and non-Chinese, can practice together. The purpose of this endeavor is to reinforce the notion of community or *sangha*, one of the three foundations or jewels of the Buddhist tradition as taught by the historical Buddha. Based on ongoing discussion with the temple's core members, however, they claim that despite their efforts for over two decades, they have been unsuccessful. Their perceived lack of success is based on the low membership numbers of non-Chinese and second-generation Chinese. The board members of the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple claim that while there is a steady flow of visitors to the temple interested in their group and interested in participating in their activities, they have been unable to *retain* a non-Chinese and primary English-speaking membership base.

In an effort to combine the interests of the scholarly and the local community together, the researcher proposes to shed light on the above issue with the following dissertation question: What are the causes for the departure of potential participants, and what do these causes reveal about the cultural preferences and assumptions of both East Asian and non-Asian Buddhists?

An underlying question of concern to both the scholarly community and the Pai Yuin Temple's members is whether or not the long-term survival of their group in Canada is

threatened by their inability to retain second-generation members and members outside of their ethnic community. In other words, will their inability to expand beyond the ethnic community lead to their impending doom? In this way, the proposed research is crucial because these concerns do not only apply to the survival of East Asian Buddhist groups but they also apply to other ethnic religious communities in Canada. According to Mark Mullin's pioneer research of Japanese Buddhists in Canada, when the membership base of an ethnic religious group is no longer supported by subsequent generations of members, the base gradually dwindles and faces the danger of becoming extinct.¹ An example of this phenomenon was demonstrated by the amalgamation of five Alberta Jodo Shinshu (Japanese Pure Land School) communities, which include the districts of Raymond, Rosemary, Picture Butte, Taber and Lethbridge, into one Southern Alberta branch in 2009 due to an aging congregation and stagnant growth.²

The research question is answered through the lens of three academic disciplines, which include religious studies, anthropology and Canadian studies, to facilitate a multi-faceted understanding of the issue. The research involves both quantitative and qualitative field research, including field observations and interviews with members and participants of the temple's services.

Though Buddhist scholars have suggested that the lack of popularity among East Asian Buddhist groups is based on disinterest towards devotional aspects of Buddhism, this research suggests that the main hindrance regarding the growth of non-Asian members lies in key sociological and cultural factors.

Sociological factors include the intimidation felt by non-Asian participants among Asian group dynamics, the post-modern attitude of picking and choosing various aspects of established

¹Mark Mullins, "The Organizational Dilemmas of Ethnic Churches," *Sociology of Religion* 49 (1988): 229.

²John Harding, "Jodo Shinshu in Alberta," in *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada*, edited by John Harding, Victor Sogen Hori, and Alexander Soucy (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 151.

traditions without committing to formal membership, and the time crunch or lack of time resulting from contemporary lifestyles. These findings contrast with popular opinion in Buddhist scholarship that East Asian Buddhist groups are insular based on intellectual differences. In fact, in-depth interviews suggest that non-Asian participants attended temple services despite conceptual differences with the Asian members towards the notion of devotion, due to the development of affective social bonds with other members.

Differences in cultural attitudes toward social bonding also underlie the intimidation experienced by non-Asian participants. Whereas social bonds are fostered by individuals that establish commonality with one another in Western culture, social bonds are created through family units and social roles in East Asian culture. In turn, the divergences in social bonding carry over into the group dynamics in Buddhist temples.

The research also investigates the diverse religious and sociological factors that affect attendance, and compares the Pai Yuin Temple's attendance patterns and characteristics with national statistics and attendance patterns. The findings suggest that members of the ethnic community at large continue to rely on Buddhist temples and clergy to perform funeral services and rituals concerning ancestor veneration, in Canada. These observations contrast with statistics about the public's decreased reliance on Christian groups to perform end of life services and rites of passage such as weddings.

Finally, the research suggests specific strategies to the Pai Yuin Temple's members to achieve their aims, which could also be adapted by other religious groups that have the same endeavor of fostering a hybrid congregation and which face similar challenges in Canada. The overall aim of the research is to create awareness about the ethnic-cultural barriers that hinder the potential for the harmonious co-existence within Canadian religious communities.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vii
<u>List of Illustrations</u>	
Illustration 1.1 – The Ling Shen Ching Tze Temple in Redmond, WA	xiii
Illustration 1.2 – Grandmaster Lu Confers Blessings to the True Buddha School’s Disciples	xiii
Illustration 1.3 – Grandmaster Lu Delivers a Dharma Talk	xiv
Illustration 1.4 – Grandmaster Lu Performs a Consecration Ritual	xiv
Illustration 1.5 – The Calgary Pai Yuin Temple	xv
Illustration 1.6 - Inauguration Day of the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple’s Board of Directors	xv
Illustration 1.7 – A Monthly Ceremony Held at the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple	xvi
Illustration 1.8 – Weekly English Group Meditations	xvi
Illustration 1.9 – The Calgary Pai Yuin Temple’s Congregation Gather for a Picnic	xvii
Illustration 1.10 – The Taiwan Leizang Temple located in Taizhong, Taiwan	xvii
<u>Chapter One: Introduction</u>	1
Calgary Pai Yuin Temple, True Buddha School, and Grandmaster Sheng-Yen Lu	4
Thesis Question	6
The Need for Interdisciplinary Studies	6
Definitions of Culture and Community	7
Thesis Outline and Methodologies	13

Chapter One: Introduction (Continued)

Weaknesses and Personal Connection to the Study	18
Research Difficulties	23
Reflections about Insider Status	25
Research Assumptions	26
Stages of Field Research	29
Buddhism in Canada versus Canadian Buddhism	31
Goals and Aims	32

Chapter Two – Grandmaster Lu and The True Buddha School’s Cosmology

Purpose of Vajrayana Meditation	34
True Buddha Tantra	36
Differences between Vajrayana Meditation and Other Forms	37
Function of Rituals	40
The Guru’s Role	41
Treatment of Desires in Vajrayana	43

Chapter Three: Organizational Factors of Success

Organizational Factors of Success	45
True Buddha Foundation	45
Administrative Hierarchy	48
Roles of Masters (<i>Acharyas</i>)	48
Roles of Dharma Professors	49
Roles of Reverends	49
Roles of Dharma Assistants and Dharma Instructors	53

Chapter Three: Organizational Factors of Success (Continued)

Roles of Lay Volunteers	54
Incentives for Volunteering	55
Diverging Views About Identity and its Effect on Growth	56
Publications & Technology	59
Challenges and Developments in the English-Speaking Community	61
Adjustments at the Branch Level	64
Predictions About Future Growth	65

Chapter Four: Patterns and Trends of Religious Attendance in Canada

Secularization as Cause for Decline?	68
Decline in Child Baptisms and Church-Conducted Funerals	69
Patterns Among Christian Denominations	70
Patterns Among Immigrants	71
Characteristics Among Canadian Buddhist Groups	74
Threatened Survival of Ethnic Buddhism	78
Attendance Patterns within the True Buddha School	80
Patterns within the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple	83
i) Visitor Statistics	83
ii) Ratio of Females to Males	84
iii) Buddhist Women	85
iv) Aging Congregation Results in Lower Attendance	86
v) Families, Seniors, Children, and Volunteers	87
vi) Importance of Ancestor Veneration in Chinese Community	88

Chapter Four: Patterns and Trends of Religious Attendance in Canada (Continued)

vii) Unrealistic Expectations and Cultural Differences	89
viii) Other Factors Affecting Attendance	91
Conclusion: Supply vs. Demand Factors	92

Chapter Five: Outreach Challenges Based on Outside Factors

1) Antagonism Towards Organized Religion and Authority	97
2) Contrasting Attitudes about Authority	100
3) Contrasting Notions of Karma and the Chinese Emphasis on Ritual Propriety	111
4) Reasons for Learning about Buddhism	119
5) Psycho-Therapeutic Healing	125
6) Preferences for Iconoclastic and Non-Denominational Organizations	129
7) Wealth and Temples	135
Summary	137

Chapter Six: Outreach Successes Based on Grandmaster Lu's Charisma

Grandmaster Lu's Charisma	140
Humor as Pedagogy	142
Storytelling as Pedagogy	144
Simplification of Tantric Practices to Attract Members	147
Inquiry as Pedagogy	148
Appeal to the Emotions	151
Addressing the Concerns of the Audience	155
Disenchantment and Members Leaving the Organization	157

Chapter Six: Outreach Successes Based on Grandmaster Lu's Charisma (Continued)

Efficacy of the Power of Deities and its Effect on Membership Numbers	163
Non-Chinese Views about Devotion	166
Grandmaster Lu's Personal Involvement	168

Chapter Seven: Reflection on Research Results

Low Interest in Institutional Activities	171
Lack of Time	177
Sources of Attraction for English-Speaking Participants	178
Group Meditation versus Personal Meditation	179
Postmodern Culture and the Collapse of the Metanarrative	180
Predispositions that Increase the Rates of Attendance	191
Sources of Attraction for Chinese-Speaking Participants	193
Factors Affecting Rates of Conversion	195
Current Factors of Success	200
Exceptions to the Case	201
The Possibility of a Hybrid Congregation	205
Strategies Moving Forward	206
1) Enlisting Second-Generation Chinese and Non-Chinese Clergy and Volunteers	207
2) Creating an Intimate Environment	209
3) Adaptability	212
4) Dispelling Assumptions	215
What Does the Future of the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple Look Like?	217

Chapter Seven: Reflection on Research Results (Continued)

Update on Attendance Numbers in 2015	218
Essential Elements of Growth for Ethnic Buddhist Groups	221
<u>Bibliography</u>	222
Appendix 1: Sample of Interview Consent Form	234
Appendix 2: Sample of Interview Transcription	238

Illustrations

Illustration 1.1 – The Ling Shen Ching Tze Temple

The Ling Shen Ching Tze Temple is the main temple where Grandmaster Lu conducts services and ceremonies for the True Buddha School. It is located at 17012 NE 40th Ct. Redmond, WA, USA, 98052. Photo taken by researcher on August 26, 2014.



Illustration 1.2 –Grandmaster Lu confers blessings to the True Buddha School’s disciples

Grandmaster Lu gives a blessing to the disciples of the True Buddha School following a dinner service at the Ling Sheng Ching Tze Temple in Redmond, WA. Global disciples gather at the temple every August during the school’s major annual ceremony. Photo taken by researcher on August 22, 2014.



Illustration 1.3 – Grandmaster Lu Delivers a Dharma Talk

Grandmaster Lu delivers a dharma talk at the Ling Shen Ching Tze Temple, which is broadcasted live over the internet, on his 70th birthday. Photo taken by researcher on June 14, 2014.



Illustration 1.4 – Grandmaster Lu Performs a Consecration Ritual

Grandmaster Lu performs a consecration ritual to bless the plaques of the disciple's deceased ancestors in the Ksitigarbha Hall at the Ling Shen Ching Tze Temple. Photo taken by researcher on September 15, 2014.



Illustration 1.5 – The Calgary Pai Yuin Temple

The True Buddha School's Calgary Pai Yuin Temple is located on a busy street north of the city's downtown at 1809 Centre Street NW, Calgary, AB, Canada.



Illustration 1.6 – Inauguration Day of the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple's Board of Directors

The Pai Yuin Temple's board of directors gather for their inauguration. The uniforms highlight the specialized roles of volunteers and clergy. Photo taken by researcher on February 2, 2014.



Illustration 1.7 – A Monthly Ceremony Held at the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple

Participants and members attend a monthly ceremony held on Sundays at the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple. Photo taken by researcher on February 2, 2012.



Illustration 1.8 – Weekly English Group Meditations

English group meditation is conducted weekly on Saturday mornings at the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple.



Illustration 1.9 – The Calgary Pai Yuin Temple’s Congregation Gather for a Picnic
Members and participants gather at nearby Calgary parks for social activities, which include potlucks and barbecues. Photo taken by researcher on August 4, 2013.



Illustration 1.10 – The Taiwan Leizang Temple in Taizhong, Taiwan
The True Buddha Foundation, the administrative body of the True Buddha School, offers centralized training to clergy and teaching personnel at the Taiwan Leizang Temple, which is located atop a mountain. Photo taken by researcher on November 21, 2013.



Chapter One: Introduction

By the splendor of their architectural beauty, Asian Buddhist temples attract a steady flow of local visitors and tourists.³ Buddhist temples enable urban dwellers to step foot into an exotic escape with wafting clouds of incense and colorfully adorned statues without having to leave the city. Free vegetarian lunches offered by the temple also serve as a source of attraction. Temples are associated with the pursuit of spiritual practices such as meditation and mindfulness, which are seen by some as benefitting one's emotional wellbeing and for reducing stress. Additionally, temples are linked with the teachings of espousing inner peace, tranquility, happiness, and spiritual awakening. To pursue and expand one's knowledge of other cultures and beliefs has been at the forefront of Western intellectualism, and this curiosity has driven waves of visitors to enter the doors of Buddhist temples. However, beneath the surface of the awe and excitement of the initial visits, there is an undocumented phenomenon. The visitors who express interest in learning more about Buddhism and meditation rarely return, though they often leave with smiling faces. Among the few visitors who return, even fewer of them stay for extended periods, let alone to join the temple's congregation. These visitor patterns of coming and going have led to a sense of frustration on the part of the temple's members. After all, temples are established with the lofty goal of benefitting all beings and that goal is not achieved when the congregation is exclusively made up of Asian members. The temple's doors are open to the public and the members view the temple as a shared cultivation ground that belongs to the community, rather than a private place of worship for a sole ethnic group.

This phenomenon, which has occurred at the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple for over fifteen years, has caused the temple's board of directors to contemplate on the reasons for the absentee

³In this dissertation, the word Asia and Asian refers to the East Asian countries that are part of the Chinese cultural sphere, which include China, Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, and Korea.

participants. The reasons for their concerns can be summed by the following question: “Is there something that we’re doing wrong?” Despite numerous meetings on the issue, the members have left the meetings shrugging their shoulders at the visitor’s seeming lack of interest in the temple’s activities, and the phenomenon continues without change.

This issue has prompted the researcher to explore the reasons why the visitors do not return. In other words, what do the lack of return visitors reveal about contemporary attitudes about spirituality? Is the lack of temple attendance caused by local issues such as the congregation’s interaction with the public or societal factors such as the time crunch associated with contemporary lifestyles? Are there deeper cultural incompatibilities behind the developments of the Asian and non-Asian Buddhist community? In spite of the apparent benefits that this topic lends to the temple’s members, why is this issue important? First, Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in Canada with an estimated 366,830 adherents, based on a survey conducted by Statistics Canada in 2011.⁴ While extensive research is available about the attendance patterns among Christian traditions including Catholics and Protestants, there is little data about attendance among Eastern Religious groups. National statistics indicate that church attendance has decreased across Canada among Christian groups.⁵ Subsequently, the concerns of the researcher are part of a larger discourse about how Buddhist groups compare with national patterns. In another manner of speaking, do religious institutions have control over participation or are potential participants simply too busy with their lives to pay any attention to organized religious practices? What are the attitudes towards organized participation?

Second, there appears to be popular interest in Buddhism based on the availability of

⁴Statistics Canada, “2011 National Household Survey: Data Tables,” *Statistics Canada Catalogue* No. 99-010-X2011032, available at <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/dt-td/Index-eng.cfm> (accessed April 4, 2014).

⁵A detailed discussion about the rates of national attendance is discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Buddhist books at Canadian bookstores, the large audiences that attend the Dalai Lama's talks, and the commonplace sighting of Tibetan prayer flags, singing bowls, and Buddhist statues at local gift shops.⁶ Yet, based on initial observations, this interest does not appear to be translating into formal membership numbers. What do these patterns of consumer consumption reveal about the practice of religion? The research topic also pertains to the scholarly dialogue about the types of things that participants are looking for in a religious community and what community means to them. What makes a religious organization successful? What aspects draw members in? What aspects turn them away? All of these questions fuse the concerns of theory with practice, and call attention to what is happening on the front lines at religious institutions in our own backyards.

Third, Asian Buddhist groups are characterized as being insular.⁷ Claire Alexander *et al.* add,

The dominant assumption, enshrined in [government] policy, has been that minority individuals and groups "choose" to self-segregate and live "parallel lives" outside (and opposed to) mainstream culture and society.⁸

The efforts of achieving a hybrid congregation by the Pai Yuin Temple, however, challenge this assumption. Scholars have suggested that the insularity of Asian Buddhism may, instead, be attributed to the lack of popular interest in Asian orientations of the tradition. Alexander Soucy discusses,

The ritual emphasis of most of the Buddhist traditions practised by Asian immigrants too closely resembles, it seems, the traditions that Westerners have rejected.⁹

⁶To cite an example, the Dalai Lama's tour in Calgary, AB on September 30, 2009 attracted an audience of 15,000 people. See Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), "Dalai Lama Talks Peace in Calgary," *CBC News* [official website], available at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/dalai-lama-talks-peace-in-calgary-1.795006> (accessed April 4, 2014).

⁷Stuart Chandler, "Chinese Buddhism in America," in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, ed. by Charles Prebish (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 14.

⁸Alexander Claire, Rosalind Edwards, and Bogusia Temple, "Contesting Cultural Communities: Language, Ethnicity and Citizenship in Britain," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33 (2007): 785.

⁹Alexander Soucy, "The Possibility of a 'Canadian Buddhism,'" In *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada*, ed. by John S. Harding, Victor Sogen Hori, and Alexander Soucy (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 53.

Soucy further calls attention to a common discriminatory view, “The implication is that Westerners do even Asian religion better than Asians,” which refers to an assumption about “scrap[ing] off the layers of culture that hide the true teachings of Siddhartha Gautama.”¹⁰ These comments raise the following questions: Are there specific orientations within Asian Buddhist organizations that are unpopular with Western Buddhist sympathizers and why? Is it possible for hybrid communities of Asian and non-Asian followers to exist amidst the language and cultural barriers? What challenges hinder the development of hybrid communities? These issues have prompted the thesis objective to merge the interests of both the scholarly community and local religious institutions towards the study of multi-ethnic religious communities.

Calgary Pai Yuin Temple, True Buddha School, and Sheng-yen Lu

The Calgary Pai Yuin Temple was built in 1994 through the concerted efforts of a small group of disciples who wanted to practice and spread Buddhism according to Grandmaster Sheng-yen Lu’s teachings.¹¹ It is located at 1809 Centre Street North West, situated between a pub and a sewing machine repair shop, in a busy district that is North of the city’s downtown. Though Grandmaster Lu had founded the True Buddha School in Redmond, Washington in 1983, subsequent temples and chapters were formed by his disciples.¹² The name “Pai Yuin” literally means “White Cloud,” and the temple claims to have over one thousand lay members and seven ordained members in Calgary.¹³

Grandmaster Lu was born in Chiayi, Taiwan in 1945 and he immigrated to the Seattle

¹⁰Soucy, “The Possibility of a ‘Canadian Buddhism,’” 53.

¹¹*Celebration of The Calgary Pai Yuin Temple’s Tenth Anniversary* (Calgary: Pai Yuin Temple, 2004), 4.

¹²Herein, True Buddha School will be referred to as TBS. *True Buddha School Introductory Handbook* (Redmond: True Buddha Foundation, 2009), 47.

¹³*Celebration of The Calgary Pai Yuin Temple’s Tenth Anniversary*, 4.

area in 1982, where he entered an intensive retreat to practice Vajrayana yoga.¹⁴ Subsequently, he established the True Buddha School, which is a new Vajrayana Buddhist sect that “integrates the teachings of Taoism, Sutrayana Buddhism, and Vajrayana Buddhism.”¹⁵ According to *True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, Grandmaster Lu “condensed the teachings into a series of simple, concise, and yet effective practices specifically tailored to meet the pace of a modern society.”¹⁶ Thus, the True Buddha School represents Grandmaster Lu’s interpretation of Vajrayana Buddhism for a contemporary society. The goal of the True Buddha School is to guide others to “realize the mind, see the Buddha nature, and gain mastery over life and death.”¹⁷

The True Buddha School claims to have over five million members and over four hundred chapters worldwide.¹⁸ Though the organization has not released statistics about the number of members in each country, it is estimated that the majority of members are in Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Singapore.¹⁹ In North America, the True Buddha School has established eleven branches and chapters in Canada, and twenty branches and chapters in the United States.²⁰ In May of 2009, Grandmaster Lu gave a dharma talk where he raised the following concern about the low membership numbers in North America:

When I was in Taiwan I gave a dharma teaching there. . . . Although there was only a week’s notice, 35,000 people attended the ceremony. In Singapore there were 60,000-70,000 people in attendance. It was the same in Malaysia. There were tens of thousands. In Seattle, I know that the number would only reach a few thousand people. These

¹⁴*True Buddha School Introductory Handbook* (Oakland: US Daden Culture, 2008), 42.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁹This estimate is based on the fact that these places have the highest number of branches compared to other regions. See “Worldwide Chapters,” *True Buddha School Net*; available at <http://www.tbsn.org/chinese2/chapterindex.php>; accessed on 6 June 2009. In addition, Lu speaks of attendance numbers in those places as being the highest in TBS. See Sheng-yen Lu, “The Importance of Our Thoughts,” *Padmakumara* [digital audio recording]; available at <http://www.padmakumara.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=7017> (accessed on 3 June 2009).

²⁰See sub-heading “Canada” and “USA” for a list of temples in “Worldwide Chapters,” *True Buddha School Net* [Official Website], available at <http://www.tbsn.org/chinese2/chapterindex.php> (accessed on 6 June 2009).

numbers show that in North America, we have not put enough effort into it.²¹

Thesis Question

Grandmaster Lu's comments about the different polarities in attendance numbers between Asia and North America within the True Buddha School draw attention to the following two-part thesis questions: What factors cause Asian Buddhist organizations to be popular amongst one cultural group while being unpopular with others? What does the departure of potential participants reveal about the cultural preferences, assumptions, and attitudes of the Chinese and English-speaking visitors, who may be potential converts? This question will be answered through the case study of the Pai Yuin Temple, its parent organization the True Buddha School, and its founder Grandmaster Sheng-yen Lu. In particular, the research will focus on the interaction between the temple's members and the public at the ground level to shed light on the thesis question.

The Need for Interdisciplinary Studies

In order to provide a comprehensive and rounded answer to the thesis question, an integrated approach of relying on the various perspectives and scholarly literature from the main disciplines of Religious Studies, Anthropology, and Canadian Studies will be adopted.²² Although the initial stages of the thesis rely on quantitative data, participant observation, and in-depth interviews to shed light on the experiences of visitors and members, the perspectives provided by the multiple disciplines are used to interpret the qualitative data and responses. In particular, the research will center on three areas of focus, which include the teachings of Buddhism (Religious Studies), and the issues surrounding culture (Anthropology) and

²¹Sheng-yen Lu, "The Importance of Our Thoughts," available at <http://www.padmakumara.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=7017>; accessed on 3 June 2009.

²²The research also overlaps with the respective disciplines of Education and Sociology in regards to assessing the teaching techniques of Grandmaster Lu and the use of quantitative data about church attendance in Canada.

community (Canadian Studies), in regards to the conversion experiences of Chinese and English-speaking participants, and the interactions between the various levels of community at the congregation, public, and national level.²³ Although the research relies on the lenses provided by the multiple disciplines, it should be noted that there are no clearly discernible lines between the various disciplines in regards to the way that the data is presented. Instead, the thesis problem is approached from the perspective of an integrated whole, as opposed to a compartmentalized analysis. Further details about the thesis methodologies are discussed in the following sub-sections of this chapter.

Prior to the emergence of Interdisciplinary Studies, Judith Fox observed that there was a “lack of consensus on the issue of NRMs [new religious movements]” based on the fact that “the scholars involved in the debates have different disciplinary backgrounds, often giving rise to different presuppositions, approaches, experiences and conclusions.”²⁴ Consequently, Interdisciplinary Studies not only diversifies “the ways in which new religious movements are represented in scholarly discourse,” but it also aids in bridging the gap between disparities in the increasingly popular dialogue of new religious movements among scholars who study religion.²⁵

Definitions of Culture and Community

In this thesis, culture is defined according to the anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s conceptualization in “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” described

²³The main languages spoken at the Pai Yuin Temple are Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. As a native of Taiwan, Grandmaster Lu’s primary dialect is Taiwanese and Mandarin and thus, Cantonese speakers from Guangdong, China or Hong Kong often learn Mandarin through Grandmaster Lu’s sermons and through conversing with the other members. Likewise, Mandarin speakers from Taiwan and Mainland China learn Cantonese through the other members. The main types of dialects spoken at each branch are different. For instance, the bulk of members at the Edmonton Chin Yin Temple, another branch of the TBS, consists of Chinese immigrants from Brunei and Malaysia. Thus, one of the main Chinese dialects spoken there is Hakka, which is prominent in the Fujian Province of China. Due to the large number of immigrants from the Yin Ping region of Guangdong, China to Vancouver, BC, a sizeable proportion of members at the Vancouver Pu Ti Tang Buddhist Society speak the Yin Ping dialect.

²⁴Judith Fox, “New Religious Movements,” in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnells (New York: Routledge, 2005), 323.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 324.

as follows:

The concept of culture I espouse . . . is a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning.²⁶

Although Geertz does not deny that culture is an object that can be studied, the role of the ethnographer in interpreting meaning from his or her observations for the outsider is of equal importance.²⁷ He clarifies that an ethnographic account of culture

does not rest on its author's ability to capture primitive facts in faraway places, but on the degree to which he is able to clarify what goes on in such places, to reduce the puzzlement . . . to which unfamiliar acts emerging out of unknown backgrounds arise.²⁸

In this way, Geertz emphasizes the dual significance of thick description, the process by which an ethnographer sorts through "structures of signification," and the role of the ethnographer "to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers."²⁹ In order to discover meaning or symbolic significance, ethnographers simultaneously sort through a host of factors in their observatory lens to compile data, but Geertz maintains "that what we call our data are really our constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to."³⁰

Given the adoption of Geertz's definition of culture, this dissertation research directs attention to "extremely small matters" or minute phenomena that occur in the Pai Yuin Temple, as a way of understanding behavior in light of "theoretical interpretations" concerning societies and civilizations.³¹ In particular, the ethnographic observations are concerned with the backdrops of the Chinese cultural sphere, which draw influence from classical Chinese literature such as the Confucian classics, and the Western cultural sphere, which are rooted in Greco-Roman thought

²⁶In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973).

²⁷*Ibid.*, 5.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 16.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*, 9.

³¹Geertz, "Thick Description," 21.

and the disciplines of rationalism, philosophy, and the natural sciences.

The value systems and preferences are mainly analyzed according to the dichotomy along language lines. In particular, participants are described as belonging to either a Chinese or English-speaking audience in this research, as opposed to ethnic categories such as Asians and non-Asians, for the following reasons: First, the ethnic dichotomy between Chinese and non-Chinese preferences does not accurately apply to the second and third generation Chinese. Although there may be considerable overlap between the cultural values of Asians and Chinese-speaking people, the formal categorization along language lines attempts to recognize the subtle nuances among second and third generation Chinese, who may not share the same values as their parents. For example, it is suggested that the beliefs and values of second and third generation Chinese, whose main language preference is English, align closer with Western values in many cases.

Second, the ethnic dichotomy also does not apply to non-Chinese individuals who live in blended families. For example, some of the interviewees include Caucasians who speak fluent Chinese, who have a Chinese spouse, and who have lived for extended periods of time in Asia. Based on their accounts, their value systems align closer with Chinese belief systems.

Third, the Pai Yuin Temple's congregation also includes other ethnicities such as those from Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Italy, and Brazil, for instance.

Lastly, the temple currently offers separate Saturday services conducted in English and Chinese respectively, and it is their perception that the growth of the English meditation group has been stagnant. The English and Chinese group meditations are offered every Saturday at the Pai Yuin Temple at 9:30am and 8:00pm respectively.

It should be noted that the characteristics asserted about the Chinese and English-

speaking groups are general observations that do not account for the diverse perspectives and nuances among sub-groups and individuals. For example, Chinese-speakers may include those from Hong Kong, Mainland Chinese, Taiwan and various other blended heritages such as Chinese-Vietnamese, Malaysian-Chinese, and Indonesian-Chinese people. Thus, each sub-group has its own unique characteristics, which are determined by their local environment. Where the growth of Buddhism is kept in check and strongly regulated in Mainland China, for instance, new Buddhist organizations have been allowed to flourish and grow in Taiwan, which have served as ideal Buddhist models for international chapters. Despite these nuances, field observations reveal that common East Asian practices including funerary and ancestral rites, and soul deliverance or *bardo* ceremonies, have served as common grounds for bringing people from the respective sub-groups under one roof, which is further discussed in Chapter Four.

In this thesis, community is broadly defined as an imagined construct, which assumes “a homology between individual and group identity, and cultural and linguistic needs.”³² Community is envisioned as a group of people with shared interests, needs, and values. The thesis discussion is framed around the distinctions between 1) the greater community, 2) the cultural-language community, and 3) the organization’s community or congregation. The aim of this framework is to analyze the interaction between these categories of community.

The greater community is seen as the national community and public outside of the temple’s membership base. The cultural-language community is viewed as a sub-group within the greater community, marked by the boundaries of their preferred spoken languages; namely, the distinction between speakers of Chinese and English, and the cultural values associated with the language groups.³³ However, it should be clarified that many people are fluent in both

³²Claire et al., “Contesting Cultural Communities,” 790.

³³In particular, the thesis will shed light on the preferences of Confucian and North American preferences,

Chinese and English, and thus the term ‘Chinese-speaking member’ refers to the individual’s main preferred language, and vice versa for an ‘English-speaking member.’ Claire *et al.* further comment on the importance of language in defining community,

Language, as a key symbol both of “community” and its polyglot mediations, provides at once an example of, and a route through, the complex contours by which individual, familial, local and collective/ethnic identities are performed and negotiated, within and across the boundaries of “community” itself.³⁴

The temple’s community is defined as both a formal community institution and a mental construct, in regards to a sense of emotional belonging or attachment towards a group of people, which stands “as a mediator between ‘the community’ and wider society.”³⁵ The “institutional framework” of the temple is seen as embodying the “particular characteristics and needs” of an “ethnic and cultural group.”³⁶ Such organizations “function as important cultural and linguistic intermediaries.”³⁷ Alexander *et al.* elaborate on the roles of formal community institutions,

The formal institutions of “community” serve a dual purpose – looking inwards to service its members and providing a bridge to the broader society outside of these boundaries.³⁸

The researcher is aware of the problems associated with such broad generalizations about culture and community, which assume homogeneity and neatly “bounded identities of difference.”³⁹ For example, Canadians pride themselves on the ability to celebrate both the ethnic differences of sub-groups through the spirit of multiculturalism, and individual identities by encouraging personal voices and opinions. At the same time, however, Canadians hold onto shared core values of tolerance and mutual respect for others. Hence, “the ability to speak English [and French, in the case of Canada,] is increasingly tied to the rights and duties of

which is based on discussions with participants and members of the TBS.

³⁴Claire et al., “Contesting Cultural Communities,” 786.

³⁵Based on Alexander et al.’s reference of C. Alexander, *The Art of Being Black* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). See Claire et al., “Contesting Cultural Communities,” 791.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*, 792.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 788.

citizenship,” and are thus a central component of national identity.⁴⁰ Language is the common uniting voice that allows Canadian to share in those identities. The researcher is also aware that the “abstract version(s) of community” do not necessarily reflect actual reality about the networks that bring people together.⁴¹ Alexander *et al.* claim that in actuality, “‘community’ is created through diverse personal networks of friends, family and neighborhood” that are built on “emotion, trust and security.”⁴² As a result, interview responses will reveal the nuances of individual perspectives within these abstract categories of community.

A hybrid temple community is defined as a congregation that is made up of both Chinese and English-speaking members. Visitors are regarded as any persons who enter the temple, whether they are accompanying a family member who may be an active member or whether they are curious by-passers or tourists, who are not participants or formal members.⁴³ Alternately, participants are defined as those who attend formal services conducted by the temple but they are not formal members. Members are defined as those who have formally taken refuge in Grandmaster Lu and the True Buddha School by partaking in the initiation ritual and filling out the accompanying registration form. During the ritual of taking refuge, initiates kneel before the shrine while Grandmaster Lu or other masters sanctioned by Grandmaster Lu pour holy water from a *bhumpa* or ritual vase onto their cupped hands. The initiates then take a sip from the water and pour the remainder over their heads, which symbolizes ritual purification and a spiritual rebirth. Certificates of refuge are issued to each member. Where participants and members are included in the definition of the temple’s congregation, visitors are not included based on their lack of prolonged association with the temple.

⁴⁰Claire et al., “Contesting Cultural Communities,” 786.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., 786 and 788.

⁴³I relied on the clergy’s recognition of visitors and formal members.

Thesis Outline and Methodologies

The presentation and methodology of this thesis is modeled after the scholarly debate between Joel Thiessen of Calgary's Ambrose University and Reginald Bibby of the Lethbridge University in their respective articles, "Marginal Religious Affiliates in Canada: Little Reason to Expect Increased Church Involvement," and "Why Bother with Organized Religion? A Response to Joel Thiessen."⁴⁴ The overarching debate between the sociologists lay in their interpretation about whether or not religious organizations have any control in increasing church attendance numbers, which have generally decreased across Canada. Thiessen's qualitative study of relying on in-depth interviews revealed that factors outside of the control of churches such as the time crunch of modern life were largely responsible for the empty pews in churches.

Bibby, on the other hand, countered Thiessen's gloomy outlook. Based on his administration of nation-wide questionnaires and analysis of the quantitative results spanning over a decade, Bibby claimed that the majority of inactive church-goers could be encouraged to go to church, so long as the ministry and institution made some tweaks in their strategies and presentation. Their arguments are framed around a marketing issue of supply and demand, where Thiessen claims that the decrease in church attendance is a demand or societal issue, while Bibby claims that the problem is largely a supply or church issue. Thus, the thesis question will be examined according to the same dichotomy.

Chapter Two will answer the following question: What are the methods proposed by Grandmaster Lu to answer the fundamental Buddhist problem of suffering or dissatisfactoriness

^{44a}) Joel Thiessen, "Marginal Religious Affiliates in Canada: Little Reason to Expect Increased Church Involvement," *Canadian Review of Sociology* 49 (February 2012): 69-90.

b) Reginald Bibby, "Why Bother with Organized Religion," *Canadian Review of Sociology* 49 (February 2013): 91-101.

(*dukkha*), the first Noble Truth taught in the historical Buddha's first sermon? The purpose of this chapter is to establish the core message of Grandmaster Lu's teachings and the organization's impetus regarding their global expansion.

In Chapter Three, the strategies of the True Buddha School are analyzed according to its methods of global and local management by the True Buddha Foundation, the organization's governing body. In particular, how has the True Buddha School amassed five million members and two hundred global chapters in a span of four decades? This chapter will discuss the highly-coordinated methods of how the organization relies on a vast network of volunteers to achieve its objectives and the adoption of strategic plans to administer the organization's development. The survey indicates that the current groundwork is in place to foster growth in the English-speaking community. However, it is asserted that the rate of growth will be at a slower level than the Chinese-speaking community because the current presentation of the organization is too specific in its orientation towards an ethnic audience.

In Chapter Four, the following questions will be answered: What does the current quantitative data reveal about the national patterns of religious attendance across Canada? The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on whether the lack of return visitors at the Pai Yuin Temple is an isolated phenomenon or whether the phenomenon reflects a larger national trend. This chapter will summarize the lack of consensus among sociologists about the decreasing or steady rates of attendance, and also elaborate on the known data about the varying attendance rates among Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelical groups, as well as immigrant sub-groups. Church-collected statistics about church-conducted baptisms and funerals will also be discussed, which reveal that the number of Canadians relying on churches for these rites of passage have fallen and thus, these trends contribute towards the argument for a secularization theory as the

cause for empty church seats. Afterwards, the main characteristics and key statistics about Buddhist groups in Canada, such as the most popular forms of Buddhism, the number of groups, and their preferred types of practices, will be summarized to provide a current snapshot of Buddhism in Canada. Next, national attendance patterns and characteristics will be compared with the statistics collected about the Pai Yuin Temple's rates of attendance based on field observations. Finally, the lack of statistically verifiable factors about the declines in national attendance patterns is discussed as the impetus for further qualitative research, which will comprise the remainder of the thesis.

The focus of Chapter Five is on my attempt to clarify the quantitative data collected about the Pai Yuin Temple in Chapter Four by investigating the demand-side or societal factors that affect attendance. The main research questions of Chapter Four are: What are the preferences and assumptions about the Pai Yuin Temple's visitors and participants, and how do these preferences pose a challenge to attendance and deeper participation? In this chapter, the likes, dislikes, and comments of visitors and participants will be summarized and presented in terms of the dichotomy between the Chinese and English-speaking audiences. Factors that affect attendance include the ambivalence towards organized religion, the varying perceptions about the roles of authority and the need to rely on a teacher, the importance of taking care of deceased ancestors, the preference for self-study, the search for energy-healing methods, the inclination towards iconoclastic forms of Buddhism, and the different views about temple wealth. Subsequently, the aim of this chapter is to clarify the driving forces or motivations behind the desires for practicing Buddhism in a formal community setting, in addition to analyzing the accompanying challenges. While both Chinese and English-speaking audiences do not fall within strict homogenous groups, field observations and in-depth interviews indicate that key

differences in the preferences and assumptions of participants can be discerned along cultural lines, though exceptions to the case will also be discussed. For example, English-speaking individuals preferred the practice of silent meditation and group study, as opposed to the Chinese-speaking members who placed important emphasis on chanting practices and volunteerism in the temple. Evidence for the discussion will rely on ethnography and other scholarly accounts about the practice of Buddhism in North America.

In Chapter Six, there is an investigation about the supply side or church factors that have contributed to the True Buddha School's success in the Chinese community, defined in terms of rising membership numbers and institutional growth. In particular, organizational success is analyzed according to the teacher's charisma in attracting followers. The following are the main research questions of the chapter: What features of Grandmaster Sheng-yen Lu's charisma and the organization's strategic plans have contributed to the organization's growth? This chapter will show that the same factors of success for the Chinese-speaking community inadvertently pose challenges to the English-speaking community.

The methodology adopted to analyze the charismatic features of Grandmaster Lu relies on the application of assessment techniques used for adult instruction from the discipline of Education. In the Religious Studies and Sociology discipline, charisma in a religious organization is commonly assessed according to Max Weber's notion of charismatic authority, which is concerned with the methods adopted by a leader to gain authority over his followers. Weber describes the necessary qualities of a charismatic leader,

The charismatic leader gains and maintains authority solely by proving his strength in life. If he wants to be a prophet, he must perform miracles; if he wants to be a warlord, he must perform heroic deeds. Above all, however, his divine mission must "prove" itself in that those who faithfully surrender to him must fare well. If they do not fare well, he is obviously not the master sent by the gods.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Max Weber, Hans Heinrich Gerth, and Bryan S. Turner, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*

Where Weber's theory pertains to a leader's amassment of power and authority, and the function of charisma in relation to society, this thesis will instead examine the pedagogical features of a leader in terms of their teaching qualities and characteristics to affect disciples. While the formal environment of a religious setting is different from that of a classroom, there are more parallels than differences when the relationship between guru and disciples is compared with the relationship of teachers and students in adult learning environments. Both relationships are forged on building mutual trust, inspiring students, encouraging student learning and inquiry, and passing on knowledge in novel and effective ways. The discipline of Education provides a lens to assess the effectiveness of pedagogical features, which include the use of humor to take away a learner's boredom, the use of storytelling to teach lessons about morality, the systematic breakdown of complex teachings to facilitate learning, the use of inquiry to empower students, and the use of emotion to evoke responses from an audience. At the same time, however, some members became disenchanted over time and thus the qualitative experiences of inactive members will also be examined.

Lastly, Chapter Seven will present a qualitative reflection of the answer to the thesis question by discussing the sources of attraction to the Pai Yuin Temple for both English and Chinese-speaking participants, in regards to individual and societal factors. Such factors include, for example, the attitudes influenced by a postmodern narrative and the appeal of new age religion. The discussion will also briefly examine the successful practices of other hybrid Buddhist communities, including Soka Gakkai, Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Temples of Canada and Shambala International, in addition to suggesting key strategies to Asian Buddhist groups for fostering a hybrid community.

Weaknesses and Personal Connection to the Study

The major weakness of the research lies in the fact that there were no formal in-depth interviews with first-time visitors for the following reasons: First, there was little opportunity to build enough rapport with visitors to engage in a one or two hour interview, since the average observed length of their visit was seven minutes. Second, by requesting visitors to participate in an in-depth interview on their first visit, there were concerns that it would interrupt the daily flow of the temple's activities and turn visitors away. Although the input of visitors would reveal critical data about their reasons for not returning, the extent to which the visitors could be considered as potential participants is ambiguous.⁴⁶

The second major weakness of the research lies in the small size of the sample group. It was difficult to enumerate qualitative accounts and isolate patterns with any statistical significance. Hence, more longitudinal data is required to verify the qualitative assertions made in this dissertation.

The third major weakness lies in the biases that challenge the objectivity and neutrality of the research, due to my status as an insider to the tradition. As a Calgary-born native, I took refuge in Grandmaster Lu and the True Buddha School at the age of fifteen through my mother's introduction to Grandmaster Lu's writings. I was a Christian prior to my conversion, though I did not attend church regularly. My encounter with Christianity began in elementary school when the Jehovah Witnesses came to my house and conducted bible studies with me. My mother had welcomed them into our home after they had agreed to teach me how to read and write Chinese, in exchange for my participation in the bible studies. Growing up in a predominantly White suburb in Calgary, I had no prior knowledge about Buddhism or Chinese popular religion until I had encountered Lu's works, although I had observed my paternal grandmother performing the

⁴⁶See Chapter Seven of this thesis for details about the ambiguity about visitors as potential participants.

Chinese customs of ancestor veneration regularly in her home.

Regarding my family's history in Canada, my maternal great great grandfather migrated to Canada in the early 1900s when he was recruited from Yin Ping, a small village in the Chinese Province of Guangdong, to work for the Canadian Pacific Railway. Eventually, he had saved enough money to bring my great grandfather to Canada, who eventually opened the Wing Gate Hotel in the Chinatown district of Vancouver, British Columbia. My great grandfather later paid for my grandmother and mother's travel expenses to Canada, after they were forced to flee from their village in China when Communist Revolutionists had forcibly seized their home and possessions. After living temporarily in Shanghai and Hong Kong, they immigrated to Vancouver where my mother met my father, who was a Hong Kong native.

My paternal grandmother lived in Xiao Lin, a village on the outskirts of Zhongshan, China and her life was spared when a bomb, which was dropped in her village by Japanese soldiers, failed to detonate after getting caught in the bamboo thatches of the farmer's fields during the Second World War. She subsequently moved to Hong Kong where my father was born. Though my father was baptized in Hong Kong in the Catholic tradition, he was not a practicing Catholic. My mother, on the other hand, was baptized as a Mormon and continued her regular attendance at the Mormon Church after immigrating to Canada. My mother became a Canadian citizen first and after their marriage, my father subsequently applied for immigration to Canada in the 1970s along with the rest of his family, including my paternal grandfather and grandmother. My mother later converted to Buddhism and joined the True Buddha School after living in Canada for more than twenty years. Despite my great grandfather's migration to Canada, whom I had never met, I consider myself to be a second generation Canadian Chinese since my parents were born in Asia and not Canada.

The early experiences in my life, along with the culture shock I encountered in Hong Kong, caused me to have an identity dilemma. Although I am a visible minority, I did not notice that I was different from the rest of my classmates as a child, in terms of my ethnicity, until my friends began to point out subtle differences between us such as the soy milk boxes with Chinese writing contained in my daily lunch box. During my junior high years, my father moved back to Hong Kong permanently to start a new business, in an attempt to capitalize on the budding cellular phone industry of the 1990s, while my mother and my two older brothers remained in Canada. Thus, I became a satellite child at the age of twelve, which required me to fly back and forth between Hong Kong and Canada frequently. These transitions influenced my curiosity for understanding the subtle nuances between different cultures, especially in regards to hybrid cultures.

It was not until my undergraduate studies that I formally studied Buddhism, Confucianism, and other religious traditions outside of Christianity, which allowed me to make sense of the different cultures as well as my own upbringing. According to my peers, I am known as a “banana,” in the sense that my preferences are rooted in Western cultural values (signified by the white flesh of the fruit) although I am visibly Chinese on the outside (signified by the yellow peel). In this way, I consider myself to be a Canadian Chinese and not a Chinese Canadian, which means that I see myself as a Canadian first and foremost before an ethnic identification. I still consider it to be a bizarre question when strangers ask me where I am from and they are not satisfied when I tell them I am from Calgary. I suspect that the constant curiosity of strangers asking about my ethnicity has unconsciously sparked an interest in my attempt to locate the importance of cultural and ethnic distinction in Canadian society.

My initial observation of the thesis problem arose from my casual volunteer work at the

Pai Yuin Temple as an undergraduate student at the University of Calgary, which were described in the introduction of the present chapter. My transition from a visitor to a member of the temple was strongly influenced through language immersion and acquisition. My main language preference is English though I speak Cantonese with some degree of proficiency. I learned about the True Buddha School through the translations of Grandmaster Lu's English books. Since the majority of the Pai Yuin Temple's members were Cantonese speaking, however, I was compelled to speak Cantonese to interact with them and to deepen my understanding of the tradition. As my understanding grew, I studied Mandarin in University due to an interest in hearing Grandmaster Lu's sermons in the original Mandarin and to communicate with the temple's Taiwanese members. Thus, language was an important factor in my immersion in the community, and the personal interviews of this study were conducted in both English and Chinese based on the interviewee's language of preference.

Due to my insider status and the nature of the research to investigate the challenges that hinder the temple's outreach, there appears to be an explicit bias in the aims of the research to favor the temple's congregation. However, it should be emphasized that the assumption underlying the research does not suggest that all non-Asian Buddhists *should* practice together with Asian Buddhist groups nor am I suggesting that there is a problem with non-Asian Buddhists who are not interested in Asian forms of Buddhism. The intent of the research is to explore the *possibility* of whether hybrid or multi-ethnic religious communities can thrive and whether mutually beneficial relationships can arise from the combined interests of pursuing the goals of the Buddhist tradition alongside one another. At the heart of the Buddhist tradition, the community or *sangha* is one of the three foundations or jewels that are necessary for the path to liberation or *nirvana*, regardless of the branch of Buddhism that one belongs to. The other two

foundations are to follow the examples of the historical Buddha's life and to verify his teachings through personal insight. Thus, the notion of disciples practicing together in a community is a fundamental criterion for liberation from *within* the tradition, as opposed to an externally imposed ideal. In Western forms of Buddhism, however, the study of Buddhism is largely a personal and private practice. Due to the lack of emphasis on community, Western forms have not typically enjoyed the same kind of institutional success in the form of formal membership numbers and the construction of Buddhist temples, which is discussed in Chapter Four. There are, however, exceptions to the case.

While I am sympathetic to the aims of the organization of achieving a hybrid congregation, the worst criticisms can often come from members of one's own family due to such sympathies. One of the main purposes of the research is to point out key problem areas that require attention or improvement by the organization and thus, it does not serve any benefit to gloss over such problems in the observations due to an insider sentiment. According to Robert Hinde, a sociologist, individuals often negotiate between multiple selves or identities that are defined by roles such as "a work-self and a home-self."⁴⁷ Likewise, in my roles as an academic and a university instructor, I believe that the thesis problem does not solely pertain to the benefit of the True Buddha School but it serves the lofty goal of potentially benefitting Buddhist organizations that have the same endeavor and goal of bringing Asian and non-Asian Buddhist communities together.

Additionally, some of the popular criticisms towards Asian forms of Buddhism have been based on a misunderstanding of the latter, which have at times led to the judgment that Western interpretations of Buddhism are true, while the latter form is not. It is thus crucial to include the

⁴⁷Robert Hinde, *Why Gods Persist: A Scientific Approach to Religion*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2010), 31.

voices of Asian Buddhists with regards to the practice of Buddhism in North America, since the numbers represent a greater majority of practicing Buddhists.⁴⁸ This research also represents the attempt to align the interests of both the scholarly and religious communities. Due to these multiple roles, it is recognized that I may not always be conscious of an insider bias. As a result, I apologize for unintended biases that have presented itself in the research data, which are discussed below.

Research Difficulties

Multiple difficulties arose in the research process due to my position as a member of the organization. First, the new experiences and perceptions of first time visitors to the temple and the resulting anxieties, which were based on either the lack of familiarity towards the Buddhist tradition, the organization, or the temple's members, were not prominent to me. Thus, I relied heavily on in-depth responses from participants to shed light on the discussions of participants as opposed to relying on visual observations. While I was aware that some participants felt uncomfortable with being a visible minority in the congregation, the extent of those emotions was unbeknownst to be until they were revealed during interviews.

Second, there were concerns about whether participants and members would feel comfortable with sharing their criticisms and objections towards the temple or the organization with me, due to my membership status and the tendency to exhibit politeness in Canadian culture. In order to minimize these concerns, participants and members were approached to participate in the interviews after a rapport had been established over several weeks. Contrary to my concerns, however, the participants and members often shared intimate thoughts and emotional experiences with me, perhaps due to the fact that I could potentially identify with their feelings or due to the perception that I could act as a middle person in voicing their concerns to

⁴⁸See Chapter Four of this paper for a discussion of statistics about the Buddhist population in Canada.

those in charge. Subsequently, an unexpected concern arose about whether these discussions were intended as private and personal conversation between individuals, or whether they were intended for audience purposes. Thus, it was very crucial to continually rely on follow-up communication to attain the interviewee's permission in disclosing their opinions. In fact, three extensions were obtained from the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) during the writing stages of the dissertation. Follow-up conversations resembled the following form: "I have recorded you saying the following [insert written quote]. Is this what you meant to say? Can you please clarify what you meant?" The follow-up questions served as a safeguard to minimize the misapprehension or ambiguity of the participant's responses. In the case of some participants, multiple follow-up sessions took place.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees, their concerns were not voiced to temple administrators. However, interviewees were advised to place their concerns in anonymous writing in the temple's suggestion and feedback box, which are addressed during board meetings.

Third, there was an unintended assumption by initially suggesting that the answer to the thesis problem could be found by focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the organization's orientation and method of propagation. However, it later became evident that societal characteristics, with regards to postmodern values and preferences about religiosity and institutional involvement, played a key factor in influencing the attendance patterns of participants.

Fourth, it was challenging to balance the academic need to be critical, while at the same time being empathetic to the sentiments of the members. Due to the distressing memories held by the first generation members regarding the criticisms towards the True Buddha School in the

Taiwanese public in the 1990s, which is discussed in Chapter Six, it was important to maintain sensitivity to the feelings of the members during the interview process. As a second generation member, I was not privy to the extent of these experiences and on occasion, my questions triggered uncomfortable sentiments and emotions among the clergy. Despite all cautious efforts to remain neutral and objective, it was inevitable that unintended biases would arise. Thus, it was crucial to rely on my supervisor, Dr. Ian Winchester, to assess the methodologies and the language of work, to maintain a neutral perspective.

Reflections about Insider Status

There were, however, benefits to being an insider of the tradition. Due to my earlier experiences of growing up amongst different cultural groups, I was able to be perceptive of the social cues of both Chinese and Canadian culture, and the culture of the organization. This became handy in sorting out the different perceptions towards authority, definitions of individuality, problem solving, and other social behaviors, for example, amongst the various groups. Most importantly, the ability to communicate in English and Chinese with the participants and members helped me to gain clarity about their perceptions and ideas. My knowledge of the terminology specific to the organization also helped to sort out a member's personal opinions from the organization's party line, which enabled me to better understand their qualitative experience as a member or participant. Additionally, the previously established rapport with some of the members was conducive to collecting an honest response from interview questions whereby members felt comfortable with expressing their personal opinions, despite the fact that such opinions may cast the organization in a negative light. Thus, the established rapport placed less tension on members to recall the organization's party line and it also eased the pressure to project an appearance of uniformity.

Research Assumptions and the Value of Community

As a member of the temple, my experiences and observations have led me to experience the advantages and positive affects in the emotional wellbeing of the temple's members, due to the support system provided by the congregation. Multiple generations of members have met lifelong friends through their participation in the temple's activities. In urban cities where it may be challenging for neighbors to build rapport with each other, the temple has served as a meeting place for bringing people together and connecting people from all parts of the city that share similar values and beliefs. The temple has played a vital role in easing the loneliness as well as mobility challenges experienced by elderly members. Especially in the case of senior members suffering from dementia, the temple has played a large role in their care by offering, for example, transportation and translation assistance, and regular hospital and senior's home visitations.

Administrators and clergy have also acted as a crucial and continual source of emotional counselling for members affected by job loss, the death of loved ones, family problems, depression, personal issues and so forth. Thus, the temple's congregation fosters a sense of community in which members receive help and additional support outside of family members and friends.

The community further partakes in the mutual celebration of life's transitions such as the birth of children or wedding nuptials. It is asserted that this sense of community, whereby individuals create close bonds and relationships with one another, has the ability to enhance the members' quality of life.

Given the importance of social bonding cited above, the aims of the community go beyond the exclusive practice of religion. Although the formal orientation of the True Buddha School is a Buddhist institution founded on specific forms of meditation as taught by

Grandmaster Lu, it is suggested that all organized Buddhist groups are established on the moral foundation of taking away the suffering of humanity through the fostering of close knit communities. Thus, the Buddhist community is envisioned as a large spiritual family. This understanding is based on the historical Buddha Sakyamuni's instruction to his disciples on his death bed, to rely on the community or *sangha* for protection from "the dissatisfactory human condition of life" following his passing.⁴⁹ Therefore, the research endeavor is built on the assumption that organized religious communities are beneficial because they have the potential to enhance the quality of life of its members by providing an avenue to develop intimate networks among people and by offering a source of moral and emotional support through life's transitions. Furthermore, the cosmologies of the Buddhist teachings offer a potential lens for the meaningful interpretation of adversities and suffering in life, in addition to promoting practices that aim to increase wellbeing and happiness.

In May of 2014, the findings of the dissertation research were presented at the Humanities Department Colloquium at Mount Royal University, where I teach as a sessional instructor. After the presentation, two of my fellow colleagues in Philosophy commented, "So what? Why not just let them practice separately?" and "I have a problem with the way that you're posing the question. You need to rework your approach." The first colleague felt that the topic had no relevance, while the second colleague insisted that my entire research approach was biased due to the fact that I was an insider. Their responses perplexed me for several months after the colloquium because their assumptions were not accurate, yet I did not know how to dispel their assumptions. I thought to myself, "There are a lot of easier ways to promote an organization than writing a dissertation. There is a genuine academic need for this research." I

⁴⁹Donald Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*, 3rd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 19.

suffered from having self-doubt.

Almost a year after the colloquium, I came across Richard Nisbett's *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently . . . and Why?*, which explained the root cause of the confusion with my colleagues. Both of their criticisms and my subsequent confusion stemmed from a misunderstanding between Asian and Western assumptions about the self and the relationship of the self to the world.⁵⁰ Nisbett explains the view of self in Confucian thought,

The goal for the self in relation to society is not so much to establish superiority or uniqueness, but to achieve harmony within a network of supportive social relationships and to play one's part in achieving collective ends. These goals require a certain amount of self-criticism – the opposite of tooting one's own horn.⁵¹

Though I viewed the dissertation research as a means of achieving collective harmony in the world, my fellow colleagues misinterpreted my approach as an insider bias for “tooting one's own horn.”⁵² In both cases, our collective assumptions were taken for granted. Nisbett contrasts Confucian thought with Greek thought,

One definition for happiness for the Greeks was that it consisted of being able to exercise their powers in pursuit of excellence in a life free from constraints. A strong sense of individual identity accompanied the Greek sense of personal agency.⁵³

Due to Greek influences, Western thought places value on the “insistence on freedom of the individual vs. a preference for collective action [in Asian thought],” and the “desire for distinctiveness vs. a preference for blending harmoniously with the group.”⁵⁴ Owing to Nisbett's explanation, it was not a mere coincidence that my colleagues in the Philosophy department had a problem with my research! In light of the colloquium experience, the dissertation research served as a learning experience for me towards further understanding the nuances between

⁵⁰See Richard Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently . . . and Why?* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 55.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³*Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 61.

Western and East Asian cultural assumptions.

Stages of Field Research

The field research took place from September 1st, 2012 to January 31st, 2014. The field research involved five major stages. In the first stage, I observed the daily activities and operations of the temple during their hours of operation. The first stage served to gather data about the number of visitors to the temple and the purpose of their visits.⁵⁵ As well, I observed the interaction between the temple's members, general visitors from the public, and the monks and nuns. All of the observations were recorded by hand in a journal. I also captured pictures of the activities and interactions of members with a digital camera for personal references, after obtaining their permission to do so.

The first stage of research took place from September 1st, 2012 to December 30th, 2012. Beginning in January 2013, the second, third, and fourth stage commenced simultaneously.

The second stage involved visiting local health and wellness gatherings, alternative healing conventions, and other Buddhist temples in Calgary.⁵⁶ The purpose of the second stage was to observe the promotion activities of other groups that promoted Eastern holistic practices and Buddhist forms of meditation to the public.⁵⁷ The second stage was completed by the end of April in 2013.

The third stage involved observations and group interviews with the temple's English meditation group from March 2013 to January 2014. Whereas the first stage focused on the daily

⁵⁵During the first stage, I approached all of the English-speaking visitors about their reasons for visiting the temple by initiating casual conversations. The daytime visitors (non-participants) were not approached for an in depth interview due to concerns by the temple that the request would interrupt their daily operations and deter visitors from returning.

⁵⁶The events that I attended included the *Calgary Festival of Health and Wellness* and the *Body, Soul and Spirit Expo* held on March 9th, and April 5th to 7th of 2013, respectively.

⁵⁷This part of the research involved conversing with the volunteers and business owners of the booths about their activities and perceived responses from the public. I also attended seminars conducted by guest speakers about meditation and holistic forms of healing at the conventions.

operations of the temple, the third stage involved the observation of formal gatherings, sermons, and group discussions. The purpose of the third stage was to examine the behaviors and perspectives of English-speaking participants in a group setting.

The fourth stage involved formal interviews to examine the unique views and experiences of individuals. In total, twenty-three formal interviews were conducted in addition to the weekly group discussions.⁵⁸ These interviews were qualitative based and the questions were open-ended.⁵⁹ Before the interviews commenced, permission was obtained from the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board to conduct research on human subjects.⁶⁰ All participants were provided with a copy of an interview consent form and the interviews proceeded after obtaining consent. Interviewees were also provided with an option to use a pseudonym in place of their real name to protect their identity, which was chosen by some individuals.⁶¹ Interview responses were captured by a voice recorder and transcribed into Microsoft Word.⁶²

Lastly, stage five of the research took place between May 26th, 2013 and January of 2014 where I attended four board meetings with the monks, nuns, and the temple's directors to discuss ongoing strategies to achieve their objectives, based on my initial observations and suggestions.⁶³ From January 2014 to May 31st, 2014, follow-up interviews were conducted with participants to gain clarification about their responses.

⁵⁸Two follow-up interviews were also conducted to seek clarification on interviewee responses. Follow-up interviews were conducted on a case by case basis as the need arose. Individual interviews were recorded on a digital sound recording device, and group discussions were recorded in a note book.

⁵⁹Aside from basic queries about individual conversion experiences and perceptions about the thesis problem, there were no pre-established questions. The purpose of this strategy was to encourage candid and fluid responses that resembled natural conversations as opposed to the mechanical approach of using structured interviews.

⁶⁰See Appendix 1 of this thesis for a sample of the certificate of approval.

⁶¹See Appendix 2 of this thesis for a sample of the interview consent form.

⁶²See Appendix 3 of this thesis for a sample transcript of an interview.

⁶³The meetings consisted of scheduled board meetings, which were not dedicated solely to discussing my research. Rather, I expressed my input and received feedback from the directors when the topic of membership and attendance arose on the meeting's agenda.

Buddhism in Canada versus Canadian Buddhism

While discussions about the national community are included in this thesis, it should be clarified that there is no consensus among scholars about a distinct form of Canadian Buddhism. Buddhism in Canada is unique in terms of its history, “the impact of national and provincial laws and policies,” its “social and cultural characteristics,” the landscape, and its “relationship with Buddhism in other countries.”⁶⁴ For example, the legal structure of Buddhist temples follows the corporate model in which temples are required to establish a board of directors with a president and shareholders. However, according to Jeff Wilson, “there is little shared religious culture or identity among Buddhists in Canada today, both as Canadian Buddhists specifically and even simply as Buddhists in the abstract.”⁶⁵ There has been little collective discussion about who Canadian Buddhists are because the Buddhist communities in Canada are so diverse and the contact between them is minimal. Wilson, however, comments on one common characteristic and states, “Canadians are used to defining themselves by who they are not – mainly, not Americans.”⁶⁶ He further clarifies that the distinctions of “Canadian Buddhism – meaning Buddhism that takes place in Canada – is perhaps more like a local idiom or accent than a whole different language.”⁶⁷ Consequently, the research will shed light on the perspectives of Canadians, both immigrants and native born participants, practicing in the Pai Yuin Temple and the True Buddha School, as opposed to defining the characteristics of a wholly distinct form of Canadian Buddhism.

⁶⁴Jeff Wilson, “What is Canadian about Canadian Buddhism?,” *Religion Compass* 5 (2011): 536.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 543.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 544.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 538.

Goals and Aims

The end goal of the research is to suggest specific strategies to the Pai Yui Temple's members to achieve their endeavor of fostering a hybrid community, which could also be adapted by other religious groups who are confronted with similar issues in Canada. The aims of this thesis are 1) to contribute to our growing knowledge about church attendance in Canada, in respects to one Buddhist group; 2) to shed light on the reasons why Asian Buddhist communities have been characterized as insular, and 3) to investigate the manners in which diverse cultural-language groups can become synchronized in formal religious institutions.

Chapter Two – Grandmaster Lu and the True Buddha School’s Cosmology

The impetus behind the True Buddha School’s expansion into the global community and beyond the Chinese diaspora lies in their belief that daily Vajrayana meditation can progressively lead to the long-term freedom from suffering, worries, and unhappiness, and create a deepened awareness of oneself and compassion for others. In turn, this freedom leads to the betterment of society by improving people’s mental and emotional wellbeing, and by cutting off hatred, selfishness, and ignorance, which are viewed as the roots of suffering in society. According to Grandmaster Lu, without the guidance of an adept teacher and a supportive community, however, this goal is very difficult to achieve. Thus, dedicated individuals who have felt a connection to Grandmaster Lu’s teachings and the organization’s aims, and who have personally experienced the benefits of his approach, have taken it upon themselves to establish branches globally and in some cases, have taken the ordination vows to achieve and promote these aims on a life-long basis.⁶⁸

In light of the organization’s aims, however, Grandmaster Lu claims that his views and approach are not the only methods of achieving freedom from suffering.⁶⁹ According to him, all religious traditions and spiritual methods “are of the same excellence” and “are equal and unexcelled.”⁷⁰ Grandmaster Lu’s suggested method, which he calls the True Buddha Tantra, represents the path that has yielded results for him, based on his experience of studying from multiple teachers and the teachings of a variety of religious traditions. Grandmaster Lu shares, “This complete liturgy is the fruit of more than twenty years of painstaking labor. I am sharing with everyone the keys of what I have learned in my own practices.”⁷¹ Through the True Buddha

⁶⁸*The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 51.

⁶⁹Sheng-yen Lu, *The Inner World of the Lake* (San Bruno: Amitabha Enterprises, 1992), 105.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 105-106.

⁷¹Sheng-yen Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition on the True Buddha Tantric Dharma* (San Bruno:

School's propagation efforts, the organization seeks to increase the connection of people to the True Buddha Tantra. However, Grandmaster Lu claims that this affinity should develop naturally and on people's own accord, as opposed to forcing a connection.⁷² He writes, "I seldom put any limitations on students, and they can come and go as they wish."⁷³ Grandmaster Lu continues,

So, being a naturalist, my final conclusion is that those who have an affinity with the Dharma [teachings] will come to hear the teaching, while those who lack such affinity will not.⁷⁴

In this way, the True Buddha School's propagation efforts can be characterized as active yet passive.

According to Grandmaster Lu, the Buddhist goal of enlightenment or liberation is summed by two words: No worries. In his perspective, Buddhahood is not a lofty and unattainable goal that is achieved in future lifetimes.⁷⁵ Rather, he maintains that the ability to be free from worries and anxieties is possible "through a complete reliance on one's self-power developed in spiritual practice."⁷⁶ In Buddhism, it is established that all individuals have the potential to live a happy life that is free from suffering, but that potential is covered and veiled by an individual's lack of awareness of themselves and the lack of knowledge about the wholesome methods of dealing with life's adversities.⁷⁷

Purpose of Vajrayana Meditation

Grandmaster Lu claims that the main purpose of meditation is to generate inner stability or *samadhi*, both mentally and emotionally, and to bring forth the innate wisdom that resides in

Purple Lotus Society, 1995), 144.

⁷²Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 98.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., 26.

⁷⁶Ibid., 95 and 104.

⁷⁷Lu, *The Inner World of the Lake*, 61.

all individuals.⁷⁸ Grandmaster Lu writes,

When one is psychologically disoriented, emotionally unbalanced, and physically tense, the innate wisdom is temporarily dispersed and lost. . . . In moments of confusion, one will commit all kinds of outrages. A person who abides in an inner stability handles every single matter with the supreme wisdom that is generated from this inner stability. There is no problem that cannot be solved when one approaches it with wisdom.⁷⁹

In Grandmaster Lu's view, inner stability is generated from investigating the depths of one's mind and abiding in an internal stillness or quietude that is free from the disruptions caused by an individual's emotions, wandering thoughts, and the distractions of daily life, for instance.⁸⁰

When the internal stillness is lost, inner stability is affected, which causes individuals to be entrapped by their emotions, attachments, and sensory perceptions of the world, thereby perpetuating a cycle of happiness and unhappiness, and highs and lows.⁸¹ Thus, meditation serves to guide an individual into a silent space, in which all disruptions and worries are shut out.⁸² Gradually, the ability to be mentally unaffected by life's adversities becomes a permanent disposition even outside of meditation, known as the attainment of Buddhahood.⁸³

The True Buddha School emphasizes that the key to freedom from suffering and a better society lies in the personal responsibilities and efforts of individuals, who apply the wisdom and compassion from their introspection and meditative practices, in the world. Although the True Buddha School encourages the practice of charity and performing good deeds, emancipation from suffering can *only* come from a place of inner seeing. Hence, the organization has placed the most emphasis on promoting its unique form of meditation, known as the True Buddha Tantra, above all other causes such as social action, humanitarian aid, or disaster and relief

⁷⁸Lu, *The Inner World of the Lake*, 109-110.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 110.

⁸⁰Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 109-110.

⁸¹Sheng-yen Lu, *Highest Yoga Tantra and Mahamudra* (Oakland: US Daden Culture, 2012), 103.

⁸²*A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 113-114.

⁸³Sheng-yen Lu, *Pages of Enlightenment* (Oakland: US Daden, 2012), 156.

efforts. Though such causes are seen as a peripheral practice to the more critical cultivation of the True Buddha Tantra, the organization has a subsidiary charitable branch known as the Sheng-yen Lu Foundation, formed in 2008, which is overseen by Grandmaster Lu's daughter Fo-Ching Lu, who serves as the foundation's president.⁸⁴ The Sheng-yen Lu Foundation, which is based in Redmond, Washington, gives health and education grants to local non-profit organizations and has distributed \$1.5 million US in funding since its establishment.⁸⁵

True Buddha Tantra

Due to the difficulties of entering into silent meditation, Grandmaster Lu's main methodology has focused on the pragmatic aspects and techniques of Vajrayana meditation in order to quiet the mind and to deal with distractions.⁸⁶ Grandmaster Lu advocates the daily practice of True Buddha Tantra, in which a basic session can be completed in thirty to forty minutes.⁸⁷ He believes that the True Buddha Tantra can lead to the gradual improvement of one's happiness, and physical and mental health. Without daily practice and diligent efforts, Grandmaster Lu claims that this goal is difficult to achieve.⁸⁸ Thus, the motto of the organization is reflected by the words, "Honor the guru, cherish the dharma, and practice diligently," which are attributed to Padmasambhava, the teacher known for transmitting Vajrayana Buddhism from India to Tibet.⁸⁹

The True Buddha Tantra is an amalgamation of the essential components of Vajrayana

⁸⁴Sheng-yen Lu Foundation, "SYL Foundation 2014 Grant Presentation Video," [online video] available at <http://www.sylfoundation.org/whats-new-en/> (updated on September 4th, 2014).

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶In his *A Complete and Detailed Exposition of the True Buddha Tantric Dharma*, Lu provides a step by step account and analysis about the significance of each meditation procedure.

⁸⁷An individual may choose to incorporate more chants and abide in silent meditation longer if he or she chooses to. Sheng-yen Lu, *A Plethora of Scenic Splendours* (Taipei: Lian Kuei Publishing, 1995), 170.

⁸⁸Lu, *The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 59.

⁸⁹Ibid., 49.

meditation.⁹⁰ It represents Grandmaster Lu's endeavor to increase the accessibility and potential appeal of Vajrayana meditation to a contemporary audience, which may be disinterested by the lengthy requirements of Vajrayana meditation in its traditional form.⁹¹ Grandmaster Lu remarks,

If I had not begun with a streamlined version, many people would have found the practice too long to attempt. Even though they might be attracted to it, they would be reluctant to spend time doing it and would have given up.⁹²

Thus, the True Buddha Tantra is not “exclusively unique” or new in terms of its contents.⁹³

However, it represents an abbreviated and simplified form of Vajrayana meditation that also maintains the central tenets of the tradition.

Differences Between Vajrayana Meditation and Other Forms

The three main differences between Vajrayana meditation and other Buddhist forms of meditation lie in the fact that the former includes 1) *mudras* or hand gestures, 2) the chanting of *mantras* or strings of sacred syllables, and 3) the reliance on the visualization of Buddhist luminaries.⁹⁴ These three components serve to improve the ability to concentrate, reduce mundane distractions, and increase an individual's stability. Grandmaster Lu refers to this process as “the purification of the body, speech, and mind.”⁹⁵ He explains their practical functions,

To concentrate the mind on virtuous archetypes is to purify the mind. When one forms the mudras, one's body cannot engage in non-virtuous deeds, hence one is purifying one's body karma. When one chants the mantra, one cannot also scold, slander, lie, flirt, gossip, or engage in double-talk, so one is purifying one's speech. Thus, during ritual practice the practitioner effectively purifies and transforms the faculties of action, expression, and intuition!⁹⁶

These techniques function as a form of substitution for distracting thoughts, as Lu states, “When

⁹⁰Lu, *The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 28.

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 15.

⁹³*The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 29.

⁹⁴*A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 57.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁶Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 122.

one is able to concentrate the mind on a visualized image, distracting thoughts will automatically subside.”⁹⁷

In regards to the aspect of visualization, Vajrayana meditation relies on the meditation of three roots, which include the teacher, a personal deity or *yidam*, and a personal protector deity or *dharmapala*, in successive stages.⁹⁸ The deities represent powerful archetypes that serve the function of unveiling mental hindrances that are believed to reside in an individual’s subconscious, in addition to increasing an individual’s resolve and commitment to the goal of being free from mental hindrances.⁹⁹ Mental hindrances may include self-doubt, fears, harmful emotions such as anger or covetousness, and so forth. As the cultivator progresses to higher stages of meditation, for example, Grandmaster Lu claims, “If a practitioner holds any slightest fear, that fear will magnify into a monster born from his own fear during the supreme stage.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, the cultivator must learn to maintain a “state of immovability” and “meditative absorption” as desires, fears, and other mental projections arise.¹⁰¹

The aim of meditating on deities in the Vajrayana tradition serves to eliminate self-doubt through a gradual process of displacing mental hindrances, whereby the visual and mental forms of the deities represent the personification of perfection or ultimate happiness. By meditating on their forms, the level of self-doubt decreases as the cultivator identifies closer and closer with the perfect qualities of the deity, as opposed to dwelling on his or her own imperfections and self-criticisms, for instance.¹⁰² In the supreme or completion stages, the perfect deity and the cultivator merge into one, an experience known as *yoga* or union and one realizes the inherent

⁹⁷Lu, *The Inner World of the Lake*, 170.

⁹⁸See *The True Buddha School’s Introductory Handbook* 60 and 62-63 for a discussion of the sequence and details of the meditations.

⁹⁹See Lu’s *Highest Yoga Tantra and Mahamudra*, 95-105 for a detailed discussion about mental hindrances arising from the subconscious.

¹⁰⁰*Highest Yoga Tantra and Mahamudra*, 98.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 95 and 98.

¹⁰²Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 129.

perfection of their own nature and that of other beings.¹⁰³ Grandmaster Lu writes, “. . . through the ‘merging of self and Personal Deity’ visualization, one recognizes the indivisibility of oneself and Personal Deity.”¹⁰⁴ This perfection is not to be mistaken as the selfish ego, but it represents the non-discriminatory compassion for oneself and all beings.¹⁰⁵ According to Grandmaster Lu, this awareness leads to the experience of bliss and as an individual dwells in this blissful awareness, he or she is unaffected by life’s adversities.¹⁰⁶ Subsequently, the individuals then course through the natural progression of life without clinging to positive or negative outcomes, or fears of loss.¹⁰⁷ The individual is no longer “bound by the disciplines” and conducts his or her life spontaneously and naturally.¹⁰⁸ Harvey Aronson, a psychologist, explains the transformation,

Buddhist masters live within the precepts of their practice. For example, Tibetan practitioners usually do a large number of recitations each morning and evening. Those who are realized continue to do recitations. Spontaneity here does not mean arbitrary rule breaking. . . . The spontaneous energy, clarity, and engaging presence of the realized shine forth through the repetitive ordinary activities of their lives, just as the meticulously arranged patterns of stained glass take on a new cast when the sun shines through them.¹⁰⁹

Due to the non-discriminatory awareness, the individual experiences happiness and joy on a moment to moment basis without being emotionally affected by external adversities or internal self-criticisms, known as *Mara* in the Buddhist tradition.

Initially, the process of Vajrayana meditation is perceived as being entirely artificial.¹¹⁰ The visualized images are fabricated, the mudras are performed perfunctory, and the sacred verses are merely verbal utterances.¹¹¹ Vajrayana meditation involves the intentional

¹⁰³*The Inner World of the Lake*, 175.

¹⁰⁴Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 125.

¹⁰⁵Lu, *Pages of Enlightenment*, 156.

¹⁰⁶Lu, *Highest Yoga Tantra and Mahamudra*, 94.

¹⁰⁷*A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 134-135.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰⁹Harvey Aronson, *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2004), 201.

¹¹⁰Sheng-yen Lu, *The Aura of Wisdom* (Oakland: US Daden Culture, 2010), 43-44.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*

manufacturing of a simulated environment replete with rich imagery, solemn sounds, and artificial hand poses. Grandmaster Lu discusses an example,

When one takes time and mentally paints the eyes, eyebrows, nose, ears, face, crown protrusion, arms, legs, robes, skirts, and majestic adornments [of Amitabha], then, over time, the image will be impressed upon one's mind.¹¹²

This process is described by Grandmaster Lu as “painting with consciousness,”¹¹³ “painting one's mind,”¹¹⁴ and “ending illusion with illusion.”¹¹⁵ Although the individual initially sees the central deity of the meditation as separate from him or herself, through intense repetition and simulation, the synthesized reality gradually becomes actual reality. Hence, Grandmaster Lu emphasizes that “spiritual cultivation is a process that requires repeated tempering.”¹¹⁶ For instance, the serenity and stillness of the mind is visualized as a moon disc at the heart that radiates light.¹¹⁷ In the final stages of Vajrayana meditation, known as Highest Yoga Tantra and Mahamudra, the perfect qualities and the reality of the personified image become those of the cultivator, who realizes his or her own perfection.¹¹⁸ The individual no longer sees him or herself as separate from the teacher, the central deity, and the protector deity, and he or she becomes a Buddha.¹¹⁹

Function of Rituals

Rituals and methods serve the pragmatic function of channeling a cultivator's intentions and mind power, and are believed to aid in increasing the duration of concentration, which in turn enhances mental stability. An example of this function can be seen with the Vajrayana method of Great Homage, which involves a physical prostration on the floor along with the

¹¹²Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 85.

¹¹³*Ibid.*

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹¹⁵Lu, *The Aura of Wisdom*, 44.

¹¹⁶*A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 94.

¹¹⁷*The Aura of Wisdom*, 88.

¹¹⁸Lu, *Highest Yoga Tantra and Mahamudra*, 3-4.

¹¹⁹*A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 125.

accompanying visualization of lights and *mudras* or hand gestures.¹²⁰ In another ritual known as Mandala Offering, participants also visualize the transformation of food into numerous quantities that fill the space prior to taking each meal.¹²¹ This ritual is intended as an offering to all beings, which is accompanied by a dedication verse and mantra.¹²² Rituals such as these are performed repeatedly until an individual reaches the inward realization of detachment from the ego by “paying universal homage to all beings.”¹²³ Grandmaster Lu believes that the value of rituals are often underestimated and misunderstood based on superficial observations.¹²⁴ Instead, he claims that their deeper significance lies in their ability “to subjugate both one’s ego and pride.”¹²⁵

The Guru’s Role

Within the Vajrayana tradition, each stage of practice requires the verification of an adept teacher or *guru*, who has also progressed on the same path, has achieved attainments in his or her practice, and has relied on the guidance of an unbroken line of teachers.¹²⁶ Grandmaster Lu claims that at the age of twenty-six in 1969, he had a profound spiritual experience in which his identity as the reincarnation of Padmakumara or “lotus born child,” an emanation of Amitabha Buddha, was revealed to him in a vision by a Daoist deity known as the Golden Mother of the Primordial Pond, during a visit to the Jade Emperor Temple in Taiwan.¹²⁷ Regarding the impact of this experience, he writes, “This true experience later became a kind of spiritual backup force,

¹²⁰Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 18-19.

¹²¹Ibid., 35.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid., 24.

¹²⁴Ibid., 27.

¹²⁵Ibid.

^{126a)} Ibid., 44.

b) Also see Ibid., 142-143 and 148-150 for a detailed explanation of the successive stages of Vajrayana meditation.

^{127a)} Ibid., 64.

b) The original story of his vision can be found in Sheng-Yen Lu’s *Encounters with the World of Spirits* (San Bruno: Purple Lotus Society, 1995), 7-10.

sustaining me in my pursuit of Taoism and Buddhism.”¹²⁸ According to Gordon Melton, a religious studies scholar, Grandmaster Lu gradually established his charismatic authority among his disciples through two means, which include:

. . . (1) by reasserting his basic credentials to his members and his potential followers in his books, and (2) by engaging in an on-going process of procuring public acknowledgments of his status from a spectrum of Vajrayana leaders—most notably from Tibetan leaders who also claim his title as a ‘Living Buddha.’¹²⁹

In Vajrayana Buddhism, the living teacher is held with a higher importance than the historical Buddha within the teacher-disciple relationship, due to the immediacy of the connection shared between the two. Subsequently, the disciple relies on the direct guidance and wisdom of the teacher to attain Buddhahood, and the teacher is regarded as a Buddha, the source of the individual’s enlightenment. Although the teacher is held in a position of high authority, the teacher’s wisdom is ultimately viewed as being equivalent to the innate wisdom present in the student, as Grandmaster Lu clarifies to his disciples that “the light of one’s heart is the manifestation of the guru, when the guru is not physically around.”¹³⁰ However, the student’s innate wisdom is covered due to ignorance and negative karma, necessitating the need to rely on the teacher’s wisdom, observation and experience. In the final stages of liberation, the realization of one’s innate wisdom renders the individual and guru to be on the same level, as Grandmaster Lu adds, “You must treat the brilliance of your heart as your own guru.”¹³¹ Grandmaster Lu elaborates on the relationship, “One’s gurus include the past lineage holders, the living guru, and one’s own heart. These three merge into one and become indivisible.”¹³²

¹²⁸A *Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 64.

¹²⁹Gordon J. Melton, "The Affirmation of Charismatic Authority: The Case of the True Buddha School," *Australian Religion Studies Review* 20, no. 3 (2007): 298.

¹³⁰Lu, *Highest Yoga Tantra and Mahamudra*, 167.

¹³¹*Ibid.*

¹³²*Ibid.*, 168.

Treatment of Desires in Vajrayana

According to the Four Noble Truths taught by the historical Buddha Sakyamuni, the cessation of craving or desires (*tr̥sna*) leads to the cessation of suffering (*duhkha*).¹³³ However, the three branches of Buddhism advocate different methods for dealing with desires. Theravada Buddhism advocates the approach of avoiding desires at the onset, while Mahayana Buddhism adopts the method of contemplating on emptiness in order to dissolve the illusion of desires. Vajrayana Buddhism, on the other hand, uses desires to trump desires.¹³⁴ A.W. Barber, a Buddhologist, shares the following popular Tibetan analogy,

A Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana Buddhist come across a poisonous fruit tree. The Theravadin says, 'Stay away from that tree. It's poisonous,' while the Mahayana Buddhist says, 'That tree is not a tree. It's empty.' Meanwhile, the Vajrayana Buddhist walks by, takes the fruit, eats it and says, 'Yummy!'¹³⁵

To clarify this analogy, the treatment of desires in Vajrayana is aimed at developing the cultivator's immunity through the skillful channeling of desires.¹³⁶ A similar analogy can be seen with the function of medical vaccines, which rely on trace amounts of often weakened microbes to strengthen the human immune system. In this way, desires are not seen as a bad thing in Vajrayana and they are viewed as a natural part of human nature. To cite an example, the True Buddha School's practices also include meditations on wealth, for instance, that serve the purpose of channeling desires into formal practice, known as the Jambhala Practice.¹³⁷ In the Red Jambhala practice, for example, devotees enshrine a statue or image of Ganesh, set up offerings of carrots before the shrine, and chant the mantra associated with Ganesh. Then the trunk of Ganesh, who has an elephant's head, is envisioned as wrapping around the items that the

¹³³Suffering is alternately translated as unsatisfactoriness.

¹³⁴Lu, *The Aura of Wisdom*, 77.

¹³⁵Based on personal communication with Dr. Barber, Calgary, AB, December 10, 2013.

¹³⁶See John Welwood, *Toward a Psychology of Awakening: Buddhism, Psychotherapy, and the Path of Personal and Spiritual Transformation* (Boston: Shambala Publications, 2000), 16 for a more detailed discussion about the Vajrayana approach to desires.

¹³⁷The Jambhala is the God of Wealth. *The Aura of Wisdom*, 77.

individual wishes to attain. Finally, the practitioner enters into meditative absorption with Ganesh by visualizing the inseparability of him or herself with Ganesh. Though outwardly the individuals appear to be praying to a God or deity for wealth in a superstitious manner, the practice has an esoteric meaning. Through such practices, it is maintained that an individual courses through a process of meditative development, wherein the energy or appetite behind an individual's desires is expended, and individuals gradually feel the motivation to conduct "acts of generosity," due to the transformation of their "greed into the purity of compassion."¹³⁸ Therefore, such practices serve a deeper significance towards the development of internal qualities such as the reduction of greed and encouraging generosity. For example, the lavish images, ritual implements, and adornments associated with Vajrayana Buddhism represent the natural desire for beautiful images, sights, and smells. In turn, these desires serve as the mental objects of visualization during meditation, which functions to enhance concentration and mental stability. In the depths of meditation, the desires are transformed into the stillness of the mind.

While this summary has focused on the cognitive and functional aspects of Grandmaster Lu's and the True Buddha School's cosmology, it does not account for the vast variety of topics and subjects that have been covered in Grandmaster Lu's collection of writings and talks. Grandmaster Lu has also contextualized the Vajrayana teachings for a Chinese audience to broaden its appeal, and the challenges and successes of the narratives among the Chinese and English-speaking audiences will be discussed in Chapter Six.

¹³⁸Lu, *The Aura of Wisdom*, 78.

Chapter Three: Organizational Factors of Success

Without organizational strategies and a team of dedicated volunteers, the charisma of a leader is limited in affecting the growth of an organization. This chapter will examine the management strategies of the True Buddha School and its propagation activities to explain the reasons for the organization's rapid expansion and international growth in terms of its membership and branch numbers. The investigation of these factors show that the apparent lack of success in retaining non-Chinese participants is overstated because the rate of growth in the global ethnic community is occurring at such a large scale that the retention of members in the English-speaking community only *appears* to be unsuccessful in comparison. Finally, predictions about the future growth of True Buddha School based on an assessment of the current management strategies and growth will be discussed.

The development and expansion of the True Buddha School has been made possible due to three main factors: 1) there is a central administrative body that coordinates the organization's goals with global chapters, 2) there are various opportunities for active membership roles, both formally and informally; and 3) there is a large marketing and distribution network for promoting the organization.

- **True Buddha Foundation**

In November 1997, Grandmaster Lu established the True Buddha Foundation “to establish a strong and structured organization to administer True Buddha School.”¹³⁹ This central body serves as a focal point for carrying out the organization's objectives, which are to “propagate the True Buddha Tantra and widely disseminate the school's teachings to sentient beings.”¹⁴⁰ The True Buddha Foundation is crucial due to its establishment of a clearly defined

¹³⁹*The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 48.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*

operational structure for all “temples, chapters, cultivation groups, authorized organizations, and dharma propagators” within the organization.¹⁴¹ According to *The Economist*, the rapid growth of mega churches forces such organizations to adopt a business-like model in order to manage their size.¹⁴² Likewise, the True Buddha Foundation has adopted a similar strategy to manage the organization. For instance, the members of the True Buddha Foundation consist of all masters in the True Buddha School who elect 21 masters to serve on a central committee.¹⁴³ The 7 individuals with the highest votes form the core committee, which is “the decision making center of the organization.”¹⁴⁴ Together with Master Lotus Xiang, the permanent consultant and the former wife of Grandmaster Lu before he became a monk, the True Buddha Foundation helps to manage the administrative affairs of the True Buddha School.¹⁴⁵ The core committee makes decisions based on democratic means and through consultation with Grandmaster Lu.¹⁴⁶

The True Buddha Foundation is crucial in overseeing the growth of True Buddha School because it enforces uniformity of the organization’s appearance, values and practices throughout its international chapters. One of the key rules emphasized by the True Buddha Foundation pertains to the collection of donations. The organization forbids fixed prices to be set for any services, activities, and ceremonies offered, and the amount for donations received must be voluntary.¹⁴⁷ If a disciple, for instance, invited a member of the clergy to consecrate a home shrine, the clergy is prohibited from charging a fixed fee in order to ensure that all individuals have equal opportunities to the services offered by the organization. The True Buddha Foundation also grants approvals for the establishment of new temples, though the foundation is

¹⁴¹*The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 48.

¹⁴²“Jesus, CEO; Churches as Businesses,” *The Economist* 377 (2005): 62.

¹⁴³True Buddha Foundation, “Fourth Dharma Assistant Examination Manual” (Redmond: True Buddha Foundation, 2009), 98.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 123.

not responsible for overseeing their construction.¹⁴⁸ For example, motivated volunteers who want to form a True Buddha School's branch in their city must apply to the foundation for official sanctioning, including the rights to fundraise for the project.¹⁴⁹ If the branches violate the rules of the True Buddha Foundation, then the branch's affiliation to the True Buddha School may be revoked. This also applies to individual clergy, whose status may also be annulled. To cite an example, if a master conducted fundraising activities under the guise of building a new temple and used the funds for his personal use, then the True Buddha Foundation has the right to sever the master's status with the True Buddha School.¹⁵⁰ Announcements such as these are publicized on the True Buddha School's official website. In 2006, for instance, the status of the Hai Tien Buddhist Society in Indonesia was revoked when the branch was charged with abandoning the practice of True Buddha Tantra taught by Grandmaster Lu.¹⁵¹

The True Buddha Foundation's rules are also concerned with the preservation of the lineage hierarchy and the conferment of empowerments. For example, masters may conduct initiation empowerments on behalf of Grandmaster Lu but they are prohibited from accepting disciples of their own.¹⁵² By adopting the techniques of the corporate world through a central board of directors and a hierarchical network of authority that trickles down to local branches, the True Buddha School is able to facilitate and manage its growth towards a uniform direction. Due to the fact that local branches must seek official sanctioning from the True Buddha Foundation, they share a closer connection with the central governing body of the organization

¹⁴⁸True Buddha Foundation, "Fourth Dharma Assistant Examination Manual," 104

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰The revocations depend on the severity and frequency of the infraction.

¹⁵¹True Buddha Foundation, "True Buddha Foundation Announcement," True Buddha School Net [Official Website], December 1, 2006, available at <http://www.tbsn.org/english2/news.php?classid=1&id=37> (accessed February 23, 2014).

¹⁵²"Fourth Dharma Assistant Examination Manual," 104.

than the other branches in Canada or their country.¹⁵³ Since the rules and laws vary among other countries, however, the True Buddha Foundation does not manage the legal structure or administrative process of each branch and chapter.

- **Administrative Hierarchy**

Aside from establishing and implementing rules and regulations, the True Buddha Foundation is also responsible for the centralized training of clergy and lay teachers. By clearly defining the roles of individuals and allocating specific tasks according to the skills and abilities of individuals, the True Buddha School is able to streamline the efficiency of administering the organization. Furthermore, the roles of individuals are clearly visible due to the True Buddha Foundation's implementation of a dress code and adoption of uniforms. In fact, the titles of the roles are similar to those in a university institution. The administrative hierarchy and their corresponding uniforms is delineated as follows (from top to bottom): Grandmaster Lu (maroon robes with dragon vest), masters (maroon robes with yellow collar), dharma professors (maroon robes with green collar), reverends (maroon robes with maroon collar), dharma instructors (maroon robes with blue collar), dharma assistants (maroon robes with white collars), disciples who have adopted the bodhisattva precepts (orange robes with brown outer robe), and all other disciples (orange robes).¹⁵⁴ Their respective roles are outlined as follows:

- **Roles of Masters (*Acharyas*)**

Masters consist of male and female reverends, and are personally appointed by Grandmaster Lu. They are held responsible for conferring the ritual empowerments, conducting the dharma activities, and disseminating Lu's teachings globally on his behalf. This group, which

¹⁵³There is minimal contact between the Canadian branches of TBS. Instead, they operate independently with their own system of management. For example, the authoritative structures in some branches may be determined solely by a board of directors, a board that consults with a master, or a master that advises the board.

¹⁵⁴See illustration 1.6 for a photograph of the various uniforms.

is similar to the bishops of the Catholic Church, is comprised of an estimated 100 ordained and non-ordained members.¹⁵⁵ The masters represent the lineage of the True Buddha School and their mission is to “propagate the True Buddha Tantric Dharma” globally.¹⁵⁶ For instance, a master may spend six months out of the year conducting activities in his or her resident temple, and spend the remainder traveling abroad to other branches and chapters that do not have a resident master. Masters are typically appointed based on their spiritual merit and exemplary character traits, demonstrating that priority is placed on individual spiritual attainments, as opposed to seniority based on the length of time that a reverend has become ordained.¹⁵⁷

- **Roles of Dharma Professors**

The role of dharma professors was created by True Buddha Foundation as an interim position for individuals that would eventually be promoted to the master level. Dharma professors have the same responsibilities as the masters.¹⁵⁸

- **Roles of Reverends**

Reverends, male and female, are the major workforce and front line of local branches and chapters, and they handle the day to day affairs and concerns associated with operating the temples, in addition to upholding their personal spiritual practices. Along with the masters, reverends are the most dedicated volunteers of the organization due to their vows of leaving the

¹⁵⁵During the early formation of the True Buddha School, Grandmaster Lu selected both ordained and non-ordained members to serve as *acharyas*. However, in the late 2000s, he no longer conferred *acharya* status to lay members, due to concerns that negative publicity would be drawn to the organization at the sight of the ordained prostrating to lay people.

¹⁵⁶True Buddha Foundation, “Fourth Dharma Assistant Examination Manual,” 102.

¹⁵⁷a) Spiritual merit refers to their accomplishments in practicing the True Buddha Tantric Dharma. An example would be an individual that has achieved spiritual union (*yoga*) with their personal deity (*yidam*). Model traits include selfless service, performance of charitable acts, and a humble and patient character. Some masters may also be known for their divination abilities, psychic gifts, or connection to Lu in past lives.

b) During the time of the historical Buddha Sakyamuni, however, the seniority of monks was based on the number of years that the individual had become ordained.

¹⁵⁸With the exception that they have not received the corresponding ritual empowerments from Grandmaster Lu, since he was not present to conduct them during his spiritual retreat in 1999. After Lu finished his spiritual retreat in 2006, the dharma professors were promoted to the ranks of the master. Master Lotus Wen, Dharma talk at the Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, November 3, 2013.

householder life to serve the community on a full time basis and there are approximately five hundred reverends in True Buddha School.¹⁵⁹

The masters and reverends of the True Buddha School are ordained formally by Grandmaster Lu under the *Mulasarvastivada vinaya*, the ordination lineage of Vajrayana Buddhism. Ordinations generally take place once or twice a year during global conferences, which typically take place in the Seattle area or in Taizhong, Taiwan, which are the two places of residence of Grandmaster Lu. The ordinations take place publically wherein Grandmaster Lu shaves the hair of the renunciates, and the congregation, consisting of both lay members and reverends, chant the name of Sakyamuni Buddha. At the time of their ordination, reverends are issued an ordination certificate and are given a precept manual that is printed by the True Buddha School. Female reverends are fully ordained and, based on Grandmaster Lu's instruction, are considered to be equal to male reverends within the True Buddha School, with some exceptions. For example, female reverends may be promoted to an *acharya* or Master and thus, will have a higher status than male reverends. As well, female reverends are not required to walk behind male reverends nor are they required to make special concessions to male reverends. However, where the ordination process is concerned, there are the following restrictions between male and female reverends:

Ordained male acharyas can ordain male or female students. Ordained female acharyas can only ordain female students. Both male senior reverends and male reverends of ten years can ordain male or female students. Both female senior reverends and female reverends of ten years can only ordain female students.¹⁶⁰

These exceptions follow the vinaya precepts established by the historical Sakyamuni. Despite the

¹⁵⁹This statistic was provided by Reverend Lotus Ze, Calgary, AB, March 12, 2014. The estimate does not include the masters who are also ordained.

¹⁶⁰Furthermore, male reverends may leave the order, return to lay life, and revert back to becoming a reverend up to seven times. However, if female reverends leave the order, they may not become a reverend again. True Buddha Foundation, "Fourth Dharma Assistant Examination Manual," 101.

inequities between the male and female ordination process, the inequities only exist in the formal documents of the True Buddha School, and have not been implemented because the ordination of all reverends have been exclusively conducted by Grandmaster Lu.

Though the reverends of the True Buddha School are formally ordained under the *Mulasarvastivada vinaya*, in practice, the adoption of the seven precepts of Antarika-Karma, the Thirty Three Rules of True Buddha School's Reverends, which include the bodhisattva vows, the Fifty Stanzas of Guru Devotion, the Fourteen Root Tantric Vows, and the True Buddha Foundation Regulations take precedence in the day to day behaviors and interactions of the reverends.¹⁶¹ The precedence of the latter rules and precepts represent the pursuit to streamline outdated guidelines, to update the regulations, and to emphasize the most important aspects such as the need to respect the lineage transmission of teachings by the organization.

The departure of reverends from the lay life is symbolized by the adoption of a new name beginning with the title "Lotus" or *Lian* in Chinese to signify their spiritual rebirth in the Lotus Family of Amitabha Buddha. Reverends are also required to leave their former jobs, to survive on stipends provided by the temple and alms received from laypersons, and to become celibate. The lengthy list of their responsibilities attests to their importance in the organization and the reverends are the fabric that binds the community of followers together. Their duties include the following: cleaning the temple, managing the altar, cooking meals for ritual offerings, performing the daily ritual offerings, presiding over funeral rites, visiting the sick in hospitals, installing the ancestor plaques, selecting dates for religious rituals based on the lunar calendar, managing registrations for ceremonies, leading group meditations, giving dharma talks, and expounding on the teachings of Sheng-yen Lu. They may also act as personal counsellors to

¹⁶¹The True Buddha Foundation Regulations consist of 67 rules that protect the uses of Grandmaster Lu's images and writings, and serves to maintain the unity and presentation of the True Buddha School. True Buddha Foundation, "Fourth Dharma Assistant Examination Manual," 98.

laypeople, consecrate the home altars of lay members, and offer geomancy or *feng shui* consultations, if he or she is trained in the discipline.

The adoption of the business model in administering the True Buddha School also trickles down to the organization of monks and nuns. In the Pai Yuin Temple, for instance, there are two types of employment statuses for monks and nuns, which include permanent residence and temporary residence status. The permanent residence status refers to monks and nuns that live in Calgary and choose to work full-time at the temple.¹⁶² They receive a nominal monthly stipend, and dental and health coverage provided by the temple, and they are commissioned to work a certain number of hours and days that are decided by the board.¹⁶³ Monks and nuns may also receive alms from laypeople, which allow them to pay for traveling expenses to attend the organization's global conferences in different cities. For example, each year the True Buddha School conducts a global ceremony in August in Redmond, Washington, which is presided by Grandmaster Lu, and all clergy are expected to attend. The status of monks and nuns is also decided by the board, and the approval of permanent status is based on the monk's ability to perform his duties and build rapport with the public.¹⁶⁴ Like any secular occupation, they are also required to sign an employment contract.¹⁶⁵ These examples further emphasize the highly organized nature of the True Buddha School's administrative strategies at the local level, though

¹⁶²Monks and nuns do not live in the temple. Instead, they live in a nearby dormitory. During their days off, monks and nuns might leave the dorm to buy groceries, run errands, and perform rituals such as ritual cleansing or consult with lay members on the layout of a shrine, for instance. However, monks and nuns generally have minimum social engagements aside from temple-based activities. The ordained are not required to live in the dormitory, and may seek out their own dwelling quarters.

¹⁶³Temporary residents, on the other hand, do not receive these benefits. However, they may receive *dana* from the members and visitors.

¹⁶⁴Reverends must "attend to the public" in a "warm, patient, and passionate manner." See "Contract for Permanent and Temporary Reverends (Monks)" (Calgary: True Buddha Pai Yuin Temple, 2009), 3.

¹⁶⁵a) Temporary status contracts are three months or less, after which monks can apply for permanent status, which are tri-annual. Ibid., 2.

b) In the past, monks and nuns were not required to sign employment contracts. However, contracts were later implemented due to the fact that some of them were taking a leave of absence without prior notice, leaving no one to watch over the temple. Employment contracts may not be used by all of the True Buddha School's branches.

each branch will have its own method of managing and overseeing its budget.

Roles of Dharma Instructors and Dharma Assistants

In contrast to masters who are personally appointed by Grandmaster Lu, dharma instructors and dharma assistants are selected through an examination system coordinated by the True Buddha Foundation. Dharma instructors and dharma assistants consist of dedicated lay members whose duties serve to support the reverends and masters in their local chapters. They are an extra set of hands and they are distinguished from regular volunteers based on their ability to conduct many of the same rituals as the reverends such as consecrating home shrines, performing the noon and evening services, and conducting group meditations. While both positions are expected to have an in-depth and wide breadth of theoretical knowledge regarding Grandmaster Lu's works, dharma instructors are distinguished by the fact that they have more experience in the field. For instance, after practicing as a dharma assistant for three to four years, individuals may apply to take the test for the dharma instructor.

Both dharma instructors and assistants are essential because they are the people's persons of the organization. They serve as guest liaisons between the organization and the public, including visitors to the local temples and outreach to other groups.¹⁶⁶ Dharma Instructor Robert Rosinski of Edmonton states, "Our job is to serve as the public relations for the organization."¹⁶⁷ In fact, he gives 40 talks a year at hospitals, schools, universities, senior homes, library groups, and interfaith meetings in Edmonton, AB.¹⁶⁸ Dharma instructors and assistants also help to foster harmony within their congregations by maintaining rapport with the members. Due to the non-confrontational nature of Asian Buddhist communities, which is discussed in Chapter Six, members often feel uncomfortable sharing their complaints or grievances with the reverends,

¹⁶⁶Robert Rosinski, Interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 23, 2013.

¹⁶⁷Ibid.

¹⁶⁸Ibid.

who are regarded with high respect. Because of their knowledge of the inner workings and behavioral culture within the temples, dharma instructors and assistants help to alleviate interpersonal conflicts between members by communicating those concerns to the board of directors and serving as middle persons. Reverend Lotus Ze, formerly known as Daisy, was the Pai Yuin Temple's dharma assistant prior to becoming ordained and she expressed that many members felt comfortable sharing personal details about their lives and grievances with her because of her lay status. Subsequently, the board of directors was able to brainstorm solutions to remedy the members concerns such as sending a director to contact disgruntled members.

- **Roles of Lay Volunteers**

Aside from the formal roles delineated by the True Buddha Foundation, there are also informal volunteers who help to fulfill the tasks of local branches and chapters. In fact, the coordination of lay volunteers is also highly organized. At the Pai Yuin Temple, for instance, monthly volunteer schedules are posted on the back wall delineating the duties for each volunteer according to specific dates and times.¹⁶⁹ Volunteer duties include some of the following: cooking meals for public lunches, setting up and taking down altars, greeting guests, translating sermons into English and Mandarin, offering technical support for audio-visual equipment, photography, receiving registration forms, offering child care, and maintaining the flower stand, for example. During a monthly service, which is typically attended by 120 members, as much as 30% of the attendees are assigned with volunteer work. The collaboration of the volunteers with various tasks contributes to the harmony of the congregation, in which members work side by side. In fact, when visitors were asked to comment about their experiences at the Pai Yuin Temple, the common theme in their responses was the perception of a “sense of community” in the

¹⁶⁹Those who have not been formally assigned with duties may also be recruited to help upon their arrival at the temple.

congregation and the perception of the temple as “one big family” where each member was perceived as playing a critical part in carrying out the temple’s activities.¹⁷⁰

Incentives for Volunteering

Together, the volunteers in the administrative hierarchy of True Buddha School help to form a cohesive community with clearly defined roles for each participant. Volunteerism in the temple serves as a powerful tool for fostering self-empowerment and gaining intangible emotional rewards, which merges the ideal of community service with the Buddhist belief that such service ultimately plants seeds of blessings in an individual’s present life. Ky Ly, the president of the Pai Yuin Temple’s board, expands on the motivation of volunteers, “Because they feel that the True Buddha Tantra has helped them, they want to give back.”¹⁷¹ The work of the volunteers, however, is not taken for granted. For instance, during church sermons, the clergy repeatedly acknowledged and praised the volunteers and all attendees for their attendance, which comprised a lengthy component at the beginning and end of all sermons. In addition to general praises, the names of donors and sponsors are announced on the microphone after each service. Participants are continually acknowledged for their financial and volunteer contributions, and emotional support. There is a common motivational idiom in the congregation, “If you can afford it, then donate. If you can’t, then volunteer.” The adoption of uniforms in the organization also serves as an empowering tool of recognition for the service of volunteers, in addition to acting as a visual reminder of the duties and roles of individuals in the collective.

Both the verbal and visible forms of recognition act as a form of validation, self-empowerment, and peer encouragement. Jing Qi shares,

When people hear their names [being read aloud] or see their names on the bulletin board, this generates a sense of joy and inner pride in their contribution. This encourages

¹⁷⁰Based on communication with visitors at the Pai Yuin Temple, November 3, 2013.

¹⁷¹Ky Ly, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 26, 2013.

people to continue their hard work because they know that their contribution does not go unnoticed.¹⁷²

In this way, a reciprocal relationship continues in which the temple gives back to the community. Volunteering further emphasizes the virtue of equanimity because the rich and the poor work together side by side, and all members and participants can potentially benefit from the collective efforts. Many visitors and convert members claimed to be touched by the fact that regardless of whether they were strangers or not, or whether they made donations or not, they were treated with equality. Sheba Rahim, a University instructor, noted her surprise during her second visit to the Pai Yuin Temple when she was given a box of chocolate truffles along with all other members during the temple's annual Christmas party.¹⁷³ Although she did not speak the language, she claimed that through the gesture of receiving the chocolates, she felt welcomed by the congregation and treated as an equal member.¹⁷⁴ She claims, "Love is a universal language. Even though I did not speak the language, I could feel the love and acceptance by the members there."¹⁷⁵

Diverging Views About Identity and its Effect on Growth

Based on an analysis of the subtle nuances regarding the incentives for volunteering in the True Buddha School, it is speculated that the English-speaking audience may feel ambivalence towards deeper participation based on the different cultural views about identity. To explain, Aronson noted two distinctions regarding the perceptions of the self in Buddhist communities. Those in Asian communities tended to emphasize the importance of duty and roles, as opposed to the emphasis on rights and individuality in Western groups.¹⁷⁶ He expands,

¹⁷²Based on member feedback at the Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, November 30, 2013.

¹⁷³Based on feedback received from Sheba Rahim, Calgary, AB, December 15, 2013.

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵Ibid.

¹⁷⁶Aronson, *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground*, 17.

In contrast to societies in which togetherness rests on extended family, stable identifiable roles, rules of behavior, shared myths and rituals, and some degree of nonverbal emotional attunement, we [in the West] create relationships through establishing ourselves as individuals and verbally sharing our separate feelings and exploring our free choices with each other.¹⁷⁷

Aronson's assertions are supported by my observations of the Pai Yuin Temple's group dynamics. There was a strong difference between the teaching styles of both groups. The dharma talks that were given by the clergy after the Chinese group meditations had an authoritative tone. For example, the clergy shared personal stories about their journey in curbing unhealthy habits such as impatience and laziness, and then imparted this wisdom to the congregation as an idealistic model about what one should and shouldn't do. Afterwards, the clergy queried their audiences as to whether or not they had questions about the teachings but rarely did any individuals ever ask questions. This style is analogous to wise elders that pass on wisdom to novices, which is characteristic of Confucian values of filial piety. In Chinese-Confucian society, "a high value is placed on teaching, strict discipline, and acceptance of social obligations."¹⁷⁸ Members of the clergy are regarded with respect based on their spiritual and teaching roles, and thus the reluctance in asking questions is seen as a way of honoring and respecting their higher wisdom and authority.

In contrast to the Chinese group meditation, the dharma talks following the English group meditation were more relaxed and casual. Dicky, the Pai Yuin Temple's teaching assistant, has led the meditation for over ten years. After each weekly session, a chapter is read aloud from Grandmaster Lu's book on Buddhist philosophy *The Aura of Wisdom*, and each participant chimes in about the important lesson that they gleaned from the readings. Participants often shared personal stories about their struggles and experiences, and expressed their own insights

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 24.

¹⁷⁸Peggy Miller et al., "Personal Storytelling as a Medium of Socialization," 557.

and wisdom with the others. Importance was placed on expressing emotions, sharing knowledge, and recognizing the equality of all perspectives, as opposed to emphasizing the roles of authority. Participants saw themselves as whole individuals that came together in the middle, as opposed to making up the various limbs of one unit.¹⁷⁹ Aronson elaborates,

Buddhism was traditionally taught in cultures where practitioners were linked with the larger society through an understanding of mutual relatedness. Many North American practitioners are embedded in their sense that it is good and right to realize and express individual selfhood. They often use Buddhism . . . to heighten awareness of their own feelings, and to allow for more successful individual engagement.¹⁸⁰

This observation highlights the importance of individuality and personal expression amongst Canadians. Though it is suggested that Buddhism does not need to become a distinctively new form to be accepted by Canadian participants, it is important for participants to place their own stamp or Canadian flavor on the interpretations and practices.

Aside from language barriers and the anxieties of being a visible minority in the congregation, English-speaking participants may also feel a sense of fear or ambivalence in losing their individuality in the midst of a tightly knit community. The congregation's continual affirmation of acknowledging the volunteer work of members suggested that the Chinese-speaking members tended to value the need to be recognized for doing their job properly, either through acknowledgment by the clergy and their peers or through personal satisfaction. On the other hand, English-speaking participants tended to value the need to be heard and seen as independent beings. Thus, it is suggested that potential visitors may feel that the social environment of the congregation is not conducive to those needs with its visible hierarchical structure. An individual may feel intimidation or fear that his or her voice and individuality is lost, or perceive that there is a lack of personal space and privacy in the collective.

¹⁷⁹Group interview by author, Calgary, AB, November 2, 2013.

¹⁸⁰Aronson, *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground*, 29.

In regards to strategic plans, it is recommended that the local branches continue to support the growth of separate English and Chinese meditation groups. When the size of the English group grows to the extent that members can establish their identity and voice, and feel comfortable in the greater collective, the True Buddha School could then allocate resources to blend the groups together by combining the separate services into one.

Publications & Technology

The True Buddha School has a vast media network, which is largely run by volunteers to promote its teachings and activities to the public.¹⁸¹ In particular, there are seven main methods that enable the public and members around the world to stay updated with current news, which are detailed as follows: 1) The True Buddha School publishes a bi-weekly Chinese newspaper, the *True Buddha News*, which is distributed as free literature at local Asian grocery stores and supermarkets globally. The unique feature about the True Buddha News is its division into two sections, whereby the front section features entertainment and secular world news to entice passer byers. The content includes the latest discussions about celebrities, both in Asia and in Hollywood, upcoming Hollywood films, American sports leagues, fashion, travel, scientific research, health, and music. For instance, the front page of the December 26th, 2013 issue featured an article about Martin Scorsese's film *The Wolf of Wall Street*.¹⁸² The back page of the same issue featured the latest iTunes releases for the pop singer Beyonce.¹⁸³ The second section offers the latest news about Grandmaster Lu and the True Buddha School, including all of Lu's sermons, poems and articles from his books, articles published by other members, and the activities of global branches and volunteers. This strategy is similar to the one adopted by the Jehovah's Witnesses, who draw public interest through the *Awake!* magazine, which highlights

¹⁸¹With the exception of key technical advisors, all others are volunteers.

¹⁸²Editorial, *True Buddha News Weekly*, December 26, 2013.

¹⁸³*Ibid.*

secular news and articles that cope with day-to-day issues such as managing stress.¹⁸⁴ In the same way that the *Watchtower* is also distributed with the *Awake!* to attract potential converts by providing a biblical lens to world events, the second section of the True Buddha News provides a Buddhist lens to world news. In this way, the True Buddha News highlights the importance within the True Buddha School of staying relevant with the current interests of the general public.

According to *The Economist*, church growth is based on the ability to “exploit every available channel to get their message across.”¹⁸⁵ Other channels adopted by the True Buddha School include 2) the monthly publication of the *Enlightenment (Randeng) Magazine*, which is a 100-pg Chinese magazine featuring similar content to the True Buddha News, 3) the establishment of the True Buddha School’s website, www.tbsn.org, in five languages including Chinese, English, Indonesian, French, and Brazilian, 4) the True Buddha School television network in Taiwan, and 5) the use of social media outlets and video sharing websites such as Facebook, Youtube, and Vimeo, to release video updates of Grandmaster Lu’s most recent sermons.¹⁸⁶ The most important channel is 6) US Daden Culture, the organization’s in-house publisher that is responsible for printing, promoting, and distributing Grandmaster Lu’s books globally. US Daden Culture collaborates with the organization’s translation branch, the True Buddha Translation Teams, to release books in multiple languages.¹⁸⁷ The success of the in-house publisher lies in its ability to release books frequently and quickly, and to offer them at a nominal cost to readers. Additionally, the publisher organizes book signing events with Grandmaster Lu to promote his works, which are attended by 500 and 2000 people respectively

¹⁸⁴For example, the May 2014 issue of the *Awake!* was entirely dedicated to managing stress. See “Stress – Keys to Managing it,” *Awake!*, May 2014.

¹⁸⁵“Jesus, CEO; Churches as Businesses.” *The Economist* 377 (2005): 62.

¹⁸⁶*The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 46.

¹⁸⁷The Translation Team are also volunteers.

in Redmond and Asia.¹⁸⁸ Lastly, 7) the True Buddha Foundation has immobilized global audiences by spending considerable resources on keeping up to date with technology.

Ceremonies and sermons conducted by Grandmaster Lu are streamed live over the internet to members around the world. During global conferences, multiple cameras and projectors display the ceremony's events onto large movie screens, and wireless headsets are provided for those who need translation. The wireless headsets have also been adopted by the Pai Yuin Temple to translate sermons into English, Mandarin, and Vietnamese, when the need arises. The majority of the publication and media network is run by dedicated volunteers, with the exception of specialized help such as the crew required to run the global video network.

Challenges and Developments in the English-Speaking Community

Master Lotus Ling claims that part of the problem in the slow growth of the English community lies in the True Buddha School's administrative challenges of finding qualified translators to perform work on behalf of the True Buddha Foundation.¹⁸⁹ The foundation was forced to hire people because there were not enough clergy and volunteers to assist in the amount of work needed.¹⁹⁰ For instance, while Grandmaster Lu's teaching span over thirty years, only 10% of his written works are available in English translation, which do not include his dharma talks.¹⁹¹ Where the US Daden Culture has been able to release Chinese books concurrently with Grandmaster Lu's writing schedule, only approximately 20 of the 241 books penned by Lu have been translated into English.¹⁹² Master Lotus Ling, Grandmaster Lu's chosen successor, remarks, "We've tried posting ads in the newspapers [to hire translators]. The response was not

¹⁸⁸The estimate of attendees in Redmond was based on the assigned numbers that were given to those who had purchased books on August 24, 2013. Also see the announcement "More than 2000 readers attended the book signing event held at the Singapore Expo," *True Buddha School Net* [Official Website], March 10, 2009, available at <http://tbsn.org/english2/news.php?classid=4&id=113> (accessed March 12, 2014).

¹⁸⁹Master Lotus Ling, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 22, 2013.

¹⁹⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁹¹*Ibid.*

¹⁹²*Ibid.*

good.”¹⁹³ Master Lotus Ling attributes the low response rate to the demanding theoretical and experiential knowledge that are required to transcribe Grandmaster Lu’s teachings.¹⁹⁴ He claims that because the clergy also have other teaching duties and time needed for personal cultivation, limited time is devoted to translation endeavors.¹⁹⁵ He expresses, “Our school emphasizes the practice of one *sadhana* [meditation] per day, so our time commitment is limited.”¹⁹⁶

Master Lotus Ling further claims that the rate of growth in the Chinese community has occurred at such a quick rate that the organization lacks the proper resources to meet the demand.¹⁹⁷ This, however, does not mean that the expansion of English propagation practices has not grown. Rather, the level of development only *appears* to be unsuccessful in comparison to the Chinese community but there has, in fact, been steady growth in the English-speaking community as a global whole, as indicated by two main factors.

First, the True Buddha Foundation has organized an English program for the central training of leaders. In November of 2013, the True Buddha Foundation conducted its 5th assembly of training and examining dharma assistants and instructors in Taichung, Taiwan, where interviews for this study also took place.¹⁹⁸ This assembly constituted the second time in which training in English was offered. Though the English program is still in its infancy, the number of teachers increased from three graduates in the previous cohort to nine graduates,

¹⁹³Master Lotus Ling, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 22, 2013.

¹⁹⁴Lotus Ling believes that valid experience in Vajrayana meditation is needed to translate Lu’s teachings such as the Nine Stages of Meditation to select the most suitable language, since the majority of readers need to apply the techniques in their personal practice. Master Lotus Ling, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 22, 2013.

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

¹⁹⁶Ibid.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

¹⁹⁸True Buddha Foundation, “True Buddha Foundation Announcement for All Prospective Dharma Instructors and Dharma Assistants,” *True Buddha School Net* [Official Website], October 5, 2013, available at <http://tbsn.org/english2/news.php?classid=1&id=378> (accessed March 12, 2014).

which indicates an increase of three times.¹⁹⁹ While these numbers appear to be nominal in comparison to the size of the organization, the previous graduates of the program played a large role in expanding and increasing the availability of Grandmaster Lu's teachings in English. For instance, Renee Cordsen of Oakland, CA, serves a key role in US Daden Culture by organizing translators and proofreading English works, and Robert Rosinski of Edmonton, AB, was the first to translate and conduct the True Buddha School's funeral liturgy into English.²⁰⁰ Thus, the first wave of graduates helped to pave the way in smoothing out the language barriers for later members through their translation endeavors.²⁰¹ In this way, the work of volunteers at the central level has a widespread influence that trickles down to local branches. These volunteers, who have aided in the propagation activities of the True Buddha School, have helped to relieve the duties of the clergy.

The second indicator of growth in the True Buddha School's propagation activities lies in the True Buddha Foundation's move to take charge of the English promotion practices, as opposed to relying on the proactive efforts of individual branches. In the early 1990s, for example, the Purple Lotus Chapter in San Bruno, CA and the Yuan Zheng Tang of Singapore took on the initiative of translating and publishing Grandmaster Lu's works in English.²⁰² The formation of the True Buddha Translation Teams and cooperation with the Chinese publisher US Daden Culture in 2010, however, streamlined the translation process by contributing financial

¹⁹⁹Potential teachers are nominated and sponsored by their respective branches and in addition to English, the program was also offered in Chinese and Indonesian, which were attended by 71 and 25 people respectively. Among the English class, one third consisted of Caucasians, while the remaining two thirds consisted of second-generation Chinese.

²⁰⁰a) Renee Cordsen, interview by author. Redmond, WA. August 22, 2013.

b) Robert Rosinski, interview by author. Redmond, WA. August 23, 2013.

²⁰¹The volunteers' translation style varies according to the individual, though a basic standard for translation, including a central glossary, has been established by the True Buddha Translation Team.

²⁰²Based on a survey of the earliest works translated into English.

support and human resources towards the endeavor.²⁰³ For example, English books are released and promoted along with the Chinese books. This has led to a boost in the sales of English books, since the Chinese readers purchase the English books for their children, relatives, and acquaintances, who otherwise would not be inclined to purchase them.²⁰⁴ In addition, the True Buddha Foundation has also worked to ensure that oral translations are available in English during live web broadcasts.

Adjustments at the Branch Level

Local branches such as the Pai Yuin Temple have also made adjustments to their services to appeal to the needs and preferences of the non-Chinese participants. Adjustments include the simplification of rituals and practices, and the adoption of round table discussions during weekly services, as opposed to the formal lecture style adopted in Chinese sermons. For instance, the length of weekly services was reduced from 60 minutes to 40 minutes, with less emphasis on chanting in the English services. Together with the centralization strategies of the True Buddha Foundation, these trends show that the organization is headed in the direction of change and acculturation. Furthermore, the general reception and feedback of visitors to the Pai Yuin Temple was positive, demonstrating the organization's efforts for welcoming the public. Visitors and participants liked the "friendliness" of the congregation, the organization's "openness to other traditions," and the lack of pressure to convert. However, more time is needed for the volunteers and local leaders to figure out the subtle nuances of their target audience's likes, dislikes, and predispositions, which are discussed in Chapter Five, and to administer the

²⁰³a) *The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 77.

b) See also *US Daden Book Charity* [Official Website], available at <http://www.dadencharity.org/> [accessed June 2, 2014].

²⁰⁴a) This observation is based on personal communication with purchasers at the English book signing event in August 25, 2013 in Redmond, WA.

b) See Illustration 1.5 for a photograph of Grandmaster Lu at a book signing event.

corresponding changes as a result.

Predictions About Future Growth

Since the propagation of True Buddha School in English is a fairly recent phenomenon that began in the early 1990s, more time and patience is required to build the necessary resources through the central foundation.²⁰⁵ When the suitable resources of the organization are firmly established, it is predicted that the growth of non-Chinese speaking participants will rise respectively. However, it is argued that this rate of growth will occur at a much slower rate than the Chinese-speaking community because the growth of the latter is largely based on Grandmaster Lu's personal charisma and pedagogy, which is discussed in Chapter Six, in speaking to the needs of a culturally specific audience. Furthermore, the direct effect of Grandmaster Lu's charisma in the English-speaking community is mitigated by language barriers. This does not mean that Grandmaster Lu's teachings are not applicable to a wider audience but the administrators and volunteers have the onus of emphasizing and promoting the attractive features of Grandmaster Lu's teachings that they feel will enhance the receptivity of the organization's messages to non-Chinese speaking groups. This task, however, is challenging because it requires a sensitive awareness of the cultural biases, attitudes and preferences outside of the majority ethnic group. Nonetheless, based on an analysis of the factors of growth in the Chinese community, it is predicted that the growth of the English-speaking community will grow from within the ranks of the existing members taking on leadership roles and initiatives, as opposed to the recruitment of new members. As the number of volunteers within the organization grows, this will translate into higher retention rates in the English-speaking community due to the collective efforts of a strong united front. Ethnic-majority Buddhist groups

²⁰⁵*The Inner World of the Lake* was among the first publications to be translated into English in 1992 by the Purple Lotus Society, the San Bruno branch of the True Buddha School.

certainly have more initial challenges than non-denominational groups in determining the preferences of the wider community due to cultural differences and language barriers, which is discussed in Chapter Five. Nonetheless, the current trends of growth indicate that the initial foundations are in place in the True Buddha School to foster the growth of non-Chinese speaking participants.

Chapter Four: Patterns and Trends of Religious Attendance in Canada

This chapter will provide an updated summary of the patterns of general religious attendance and the trends surrounding the evolution of Buddhist communities in Canada. In particular, statistical data from census data, national surveys, and quantitative results from sociological studies and field observations will be highlighted.

There is no consensus among sociologists about whether national attendance levels are rising or decreasing. David Eagle concludes that religious attendance has decreased across Canada. He reports, “On the aggregate level, weekly and monthly religious attendance decreased by about 20-percentage points from 1986 to 2008 in Canada.”²⁰⁶ Eagle shares statistics about the changing norms,

Canada has transitioned from a country where less than one-fifth of the population would not set foot in the door of a church or other religious venue in a given year to one where this is the norm for *almost half of the population*. This change occurred over a mere 22 years [1985-2008].²⁰⁷

Ronald Bibby, on the other hand, who headed the studies in Eagle’s analysis, disagrees about the decrease and claims that religious attendance is, instead, on the rise. He asserts that the downward slope in attendance has abated, and maintains that “things have not changed much in the last decade or so.”²⁰⁸ Bibby clarifies, “There has been about a 15 percentage point drop in monthly-plus attendance in Canada since the mid-1980s. But, much of this decline occurred by the end of the 1990s.”²⁰⁹ The decline has, since then, tapered off. Furthermore, Bibby claims that although there is a decline in the total gross attendance, a closer analysis reveals that the

²⁰⁶David E. Eagle, “Changing Patterns of Attendance at Religious Services in Canada, 1986-2008,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50 (2011): 198.

²⁰⁷Eagle continues, “nearly one-quarter of Canadians claim no religious affiliation.” See David E. Eagle’s “The Loosening Bond of Religion on Canadian Society: Reply to Bibby,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50 (2011): 838.

²⁰⁸Ronald Bibby, “Continuing the Conversation on Canada: Changing Patterns of Attendance at Religious Services in Canada, 1986-2008,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50 (2011): 834.

²⁰⁹*Ibid.*

population is headed towards polar opposite ends of the spectrum of either embracing or rejecting religion.²¹⁰ Bibby claims that the “ambivalent middle” consists of “40% of the national population.”²¹¹ He also adds that this undecided group would “consider the possibility of being more involved in a religious group” under the condition that they found it “worthwhile” for themselves or their family.²¹² Among sociologists, however, Bibby stands alone in his “renaissance thesis.”²¹³ Others are doubtful about Bibby’s claims, in respects to the growth of church attendance.

Secularization as Cause for Decline?

Despite extensive longitudinal studies, the results are inconclusive about the specific reasons for the decline in church attendance, and Phillip Connor adds that the studies do not show factors that are “statistically significant.”²¹⁴ However, the predominant consensus among sociologists point to a secularization theory as one of the likely causes for the change in attendance patterns. The secularization theory is “a historically and contextually conditioned process by which religion begins to loosen its grip on the social world.”²¹⁵ According to this theory, “Modernization necessarily leads to a decline in religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals.”²¹⁶ An example of secularization includes the opinion that attendance at church is not a prerequisite to express faith and devotion. Another illustration involves the changing definition of “what is considered regular attendance?” According to Eagle, weekly church attendance, which has long been emphasized in the Christian tradition, has been replaced with

²¹⁰Bibby, “Continuing the Conversation,” 837.

²¹¹Bibby, “Why Bother with Organized Religion?,” 98.

²¹²Ibid.

²¹³“Continuing the Conversation,” 837.

²¹⁴Phillip Connor, “Increase or Decrease? The Impact of the International Migratory Event on Immigrant Religious Participation.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47 (2008): 254.

²¹⁵Eagle, “The Loosening Bond,” 838.

²¹⁶Peter Berger, “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview,” *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. George Weigl et al. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 2.

monthly attendance as the current norm for regular attendance.²¹⁷ David Eagle attributes the decline to natural reasons such as the decrease in fertility rates, “increased social isolation and a greater time squeeze felt by individuals and families,” as well as an aging population.²¹⁸ In Joel Thiessen’s study, half of the respondents “stopped attending regularly because they were too busy or too lazy.”²¹⁹ He explains that “the hectic pace of life between work and parental responsibilities,” such as running errands and performing chores, leaves individuals “with little time for themselves.”²²⁰ Thiessen adds, “Such people value their Sunday as a day of rest where they do not need to get up early, dress up, and rush out of the house.”²²¹ Not only do individuals feel that they have less time to participate in church activities, but they are also choosing to do other activities with their spare time.²²²

Decline in Child Baptisms and Church-Conducted Funerals

Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme’s analysis of forty years of church collected statistics from the mainline Protestant group, the United Church of Canada, also appears to support the secularization thesis and the pattern of decline in national attendance.²²³ Laflamme indicates that the United Church population is experiencing an aging population with “fewer and fewer births coming from within the church’s ranks.”²²⁴ Furthermore, the rate at which the church retains young families is also on the decline.²²⁵ The United Church is not an isolated phenomenon, however. Bibby points out that mainline Protestant churches have especially been affected by the

²¹⁷Eagle, “The Loosening Bond,” 838.

²¹⁸*Ibid.*

²¹⁹Joel Thiessen, “Marginal Religious Affiliates in Canada,” 75.

²²⁰*Ibid.*

²²¹*Ibid.*, 76.

²²²Temple gatherings such as picnics, barbecues, and holiday parties, however, yield higher rates of participation.

²²³Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, “Normalizing Denominational Statistics with Demographic Data: The Case of the United Church of Canada,” *Canadian Review of Sociology* 49 (2012): 173.

²²⁴*Ibid.*, 181.

²²⁵*Ibid.*

aging population.²²⁶ Wilkins-Laflamme notes that there are also fewer child baptisms and a significant decrease in the church's involvement in conducting funerals for the public.²²⁷ In some regions, there was a major decline within the United Church of up to 78.9% and 76.5% in child baptisms and funerals, respectively, in relation to the growth of Canadian society.²²⁸ Wilkins-Laflamme comments, "United Church funerals are becoming more and more a practice *within* the membership of the church, rather than by that of larger Canadian society."²²⁹ Although more statistics from other Christian groups need to be collected, Wilkins-Laflamme's research appears to indicate a general trend in Canadian society towards the decreasing retention of young families and reliance on religious institutions to perform key rites of passages.

Patterns Among Christian Denominations

In respects to the breakdown of patterns among Christian denominations, there is a consensus among sociologists that the number of Catholics attending services has decreased. Eagle writes, "Catholics are the main group to see major declines in weekly attendance, particularly among older adults."²³⁰ Attendance at Protestant services, however, according to Eagle "is one of stability and even increase."²³¹ Eagle writes, "Across age groups, Protestants in Canada are now more likely to attend religious services."²³² However, it is not known "whether the stability in attendance among Protestants is because of stability across Protestant denominations, or if evangelical groups have compensated for declining rates of attendance in mainline groups."²³³ Consequently, the secularization thesis has been challenged by some

²²⁶See Reginald Bibby, *Beyond the Gods & Back: Religions Demise and Rise and Why It Matters* (Lethbridge: Project Canada Books, 2011).

²²⁷Wilkins-Laflamme, "Normalizing Denominational Statistics," 183.

²²⁸For a detailed breakdown of percentages and calculations, see *ibid.*, 179 and 182.

²²⁹*Ibid.*, 183.

²³⁰Eagle, "Changing Patterns," 199.

²³¹*Ibid.*

²³²*Ibid.*

²³³a) *Ibid.*

scholars due to the rising attendance rates of Protestant groups.

Actual attendance rates in Canada, however, are not consistent with census and national survey data. In fact, actual attendance rates are even lower than the purported results. Philip Brenner's study shows that Canadians overreport their attendance in government surveys by an alarming rate of 50%.²³⁴ Individuals who attach high importance to religious identity are more likely to overreport their attendance.²³⁵ There is a gap, however, in the data available about non-Christian groups in Canada. For instance, while Bibby claims that those in his sample study were "highly representative, socially and demographically, of the national population," the research was primarily centered on Catholic and Protestant attendance patterns.²³⁶ Furthermore, as the questionnaire was completed only in English or French, immigrants who are not comfortable speaking the national languages were, naturally, excluded in the study. Therefore, the available data is not entirely representative of Eastern religious groups such as Buddhists and Hindus, which are the fourth and fifth largest religious traditions in Canada respectively. Bibby, however, claims that among "other major world faiths," attendance patterns are stable.²³⁷

Patterns Among Immigrants

Qualitative studies have maintained the importance of religious activity to the settling experience of immigrants. For instance, in her survey of the Tzu Chi Foundation, a Chinese Buddhist organization, Gloria Denoon concluded that the organization "provides a supportive framework for Taiwanese and Chinese immigrants to adjust to their new living circumstances

b) Bibby clarifies that Mainline Protestants refer to the United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran denominations, while Conservative Protestants refer to the Baptist, Pentecostal, and Other Protestant denominations. See Table 2 in Bibby, "Continuing the Conversation," 835.

²³⁴a) Brenner continues, "Survey research has described Canada as a middle ground of sorts with rates of attendance in between Europe and the United States." Phillip Brenner, "Identity as a Determinant of the Overreporting of Church Attendance in Canada," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51 (2012): 377.

²³⁵*Ibid.*, 383.

²³⁶"Continuing the Conversation," 832.

²³⁷*Ibid.*, 835.

and strengthens their ties to their home country and cultural tradition.”²³⁸ Examples include gaining “good friends” and finding “a network of mutual help” through their participation.²³⁹ Connor also suggests that “religious organizations become the vehicle by which both religious and ethnic values can be reproduced.”²⁴⁰ To cite an example, he suggests that the dominant Christian tradition in Canada is a driving force that encourages immigrants to interact with religious communities, as a way to create greater self-awareness of their faith and increase their ability to explain their faith to outsiders.²⁴¹ Connor also adds that participation in religious organizations help to stabilize anxieties and uncertainties during “the unstable months of the migratory event and resettlement.”²⁴² However, field observations indicate that only 0.6% of all visitors came to the PYT for the sole purpose of socializing or networking with others. This inference is based on observing the behaviors, conversation topics, and length of stay of visitors.

The main purpose of visits involved the veneration of ancestors, making supplications to the shrine, registering for upcoming ceremonies, and touring the temple. The visits were often short and the typical length of stay ranged from five to twenty minutes, while the norm was less than ten minutes. Visitors did not stay for extended periods to engage in lengthy conversation. These observations suggest that the phenomenon of relying on networking with other temple members, as a way to ease the anxieties of the immigration experience, is not as common as other scholars have suggested. The attendance of temple activities for the purpose of networking is a by-product of participation in ethnic groups, as opposed to the motivation for joining. It is further asserted that these forms of networking are better served by local cultural associations

²³⁸Gloria Denoon, “Tzu Chi: The Practice of Non-self and its Unintended Consequences” (PhD diss, New York University, 2006), vi.

²³⁹Ibid., 150 and 154.

²⁴⁰In his summary of Ebaugh and Chafetz’s study. Connor, “Increase or Decrease?,” 245.

²⁴¹Ibid.

²⁴²Ibid., 243.

and dedicated immigrant support groups.

In his longitudinal study of immigrant religious participation in Canada, Connor concluded that among immigrants that attended religious services regularly, approximately half of his sample became religiously inactive within a one year span.²⁴³ This rate drops by an additional 40% in frequency just three years after the migration.²⁴⁴ He also found that immigrant participation especially decreases among non-Christian immigrants.²⁴⁵ Connor's study, however, does not indicate why participation among Christian immigrants is higher in the long run, than those who belong to other faiths. However, it is conjectured that participation in church is an expression of the need to fit in with the dominant religious tradition.

Immigrant religious participation is lower than qualitative studies suggest, due to the fact that immigrant men make up a larger portion of the total group, and "the nature of their job" requires "them to migrate frequently within a country, providing them with little stability or time for religious activity."²⁴⁶ Despite the migratory nature of their jobs, "immigrant men have higher religious participation levels than immigrant women," while "married immigrants have higher religious participation levels than those who are unmarried."²⁴⁷ While the reasons for these differences are unclear, participation levels are the highest among immigrant families.²⁴⁸ One of the reasons cited include the use of "religion as the medium to transfer particular moral values to their children."²⁴⁹ For example, in conversations with members of the Pai Yuin Temple, parents brought their children to attend services in the hopes that they would learn about karma and perform good deeds. Connor is optimistic that participation levels may increase with age and

²⁴³Connor, "Increase or Decrease?," 249.

²⁴⁴Ibid.

²⁴⁵Ibid., 251.

²⁴⁶In his summary of Finke and Stark's research on immigrants in America. Connor, "Increase or Decrease?," 245.

²⁴⁷Ibid., 246.

²⁴⁸Ibid., 245.

²⁴⁹Ibid.

writes, “Many stated they will become more religiously active at a later age once they are less occupied with the employment stresses of immigrant life.”²⁵⁰ More longitudinal data is needed to verify these claims.

Characteristics Among Canadian Buddhist Groups

There is no national data available about attendance patterns among Buddhist groups in Canada. However, John Negru’s “Highlights from the Survey of Canadian Buddhist Organizations,” which is the first national survey of Buddhist groups, provides essential characteristics about their structures, demographics, and practices across Canada.²⁵¹ Negru summarizes the development of Buddhism in Canada,

There are currently 483 Buddhist organizations operating in Canada in 2012. This represents tremendous growth over the past fifty years, since in 1960 there were fewer than twenty-five Buddhist organizations operating here.²⁵²

Though Buddhism was first an exclusive tradition among Asian immigrants during its arrival in the Canadian West coast during the late 1800s, every major sect and school of Buddhism is represented in Canada today, highlighting the breadth and variety of groups that have arisen. The distribution of branches are divided as follows: Mahayana comprises the largest number of organizations (186), followed by Vajrayana (137), new movements and blended traditions (115), Theravada (84), and non-denomination and other associations (26).²⁵³ In Calgary, there are 19 Buddhist organizations.²⁵⁴ Though the precise distribution of ethnicity among the groups is not indicated, Negru maintains that “citizens from many heritages have taken to Buddhism in Canada,” and establishes that “Buddhist practice in Canada is not solely to be found in

²⁵⁰Connor, “Increase or Decrease,” 246.

²⁵¹See John H. Negru’s “Highlights from the Survey of Canadian Buddhist Organizations,” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 14 (2013):1-18.

²⁵²Ibid., 1.

²⁵³The total number is greater than 483 due to the fact that some groups fall into multiple categories, since survey respondents selected more than one category. Other associations include blogs, charity societies, and social action groups. Ibid., 12.

²⁵⁴See Table 3; Ibid., 13.

communities of recent Asian immigrants.”²⁵⁵ In addition to “Western” congregations, which comprise a blended mix of Caucasians and other second or third generation immigrants, ethnic Buddhist groups include the Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, Vietnamese, Sri Lankan, Laos, Thai and Cambodian communities.²⁵⁶ Within those ethnic groups, Negru claims that the Vietnamese and Chinese organizations are characterized by their “tightly knit” congregations.²⁵⁷ It is suggested that the tight knit nature of the communities acts as a barrier in attracting a wider audience as opposed to a deliberate attempt to exclude other ethnic groups, which will be discussed throughout the paper.

In comparison to national statistics, wherein immigrant men outnumber women in religious participation, female members account for more than half of Buddhist congregations in Canada, although almost two-thirds of all teachers, including ordained and non-ordained members, are male.²⁵⁸ Negru comments that “there is still a gender bias in choosing community leaders,” although the reasons for the bias are undocumented.²⁵⁹

The most popular form of authority structure is one where the teacher directs the board of directors, as opposed to the board directing or advising the teacher.²⁶⁰ Negru, however, notes that “there still seems to be a significant portion of centres that have no formalized leadership structure to articulate clear expectations for teachers.”²⁶¹ The majority of organizations operate independently, as opposed to receiving authority from another branch or international organization.²⁶²

²⁵⁵Negru, “Highlights,” 7.

²⁵⁶See “Table 16,” in Ibid., 17.

²⁵⁷Ibid., 6.

²⁵⁸a) Ibid., 8.

b) See also “Table 8: Status of Teachers,” Ibid., 15.

²⁵⁹Ibid., 5.

²⁶⁰See “Table 10: Authority Structure in Organizations”; Ibid., 16.

²⁶¹Ibid., 6.

²⁶²Ibid., 16.

There are “enormous disparities” among Buddhist groups concerning their financial resources.²⁶³ Negru observes that “Buddhist temples are either very well off or marginal.”²⁶⁴ For example, one indicator of “financial strength” is the purchase or building of “dedicated-use buildings,” compared with rental spaces or homes that function as meeting centres.²⁶⁵ Due to the lack of financial support, twenty one groups outside of the 483 organizations were forced to dissolve, which highlights the importance of current groups to strategize their future survival and maintain a steady growth in their congregation.²⁶⁶

A large factor for the disparity of wealth lies in the emphasis that the congregation places on supporting the institution and ordained monks and nuns, or whether they emphasize personal development solely.²⁶⁷ Ethnic Buddhist communities place strong focus on the tradition of *dana* or giving in the form of financial support, and thus their congregations typically have more financial resources than “Western” groups. One example of the priority placed on institutional support and *dana*, is demonstrated by the expansion projects of the Avatamsaka Monastery in Calgary, a branch of the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association founded by the Venerable Hsuan Hua. The congregation, which consists primarily of Chinese members, originally purchased a 3000 sq. ft. space in Chinatown during the mid-1980s.²⁶⁸ In 1996, the group acquired the former Mountain Equipment Co-op store along the Bow River, consisting of 21,000 sq. ft.²⁶⁹ By 2007, however, the monastery was expanded to include a second and third level consisting of an additional 10,000 sq. ft. per floor.²⁷⁰ In May of 2014, the monastery will commence the

²⁶³Negru, “Highlights,” 6.

²⁶⁴*Ibid.*

²⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 6.

²⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 2.

²⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 6.

²⁶⁸Avatamsaka Monastery, “History,” *Dharma Realm Buddhist Association*, <http://www.avatamsaka.ca/> (accessed January 10, 2014).

²⁶⁹*Ibid.*

²⁷⁰Avatamsaka Monastery, *Avatamsaka Monastery Celebrates Our Ultimate Return Home* (Calgary:

construction of a fourth floor, costing an estimated \$5.6 million dollars.²⁷¹ The organization has also acquired 100 acres in Golden, BC and plans to build the largest Buddhist temple in Canada.²⁷²

In contrast, the Calgary Soto Zen focuses on offering free meditation classes and delivering dharma lectures as its main priority. The values that they place on education are reflected in their choice of meeting spaces, which include the use of the Multifaith Prayer Room and Chapel at the University of Calgary and a residence in the Sunnyside area of Calgary, referred to as the Little Tea Temple.²⁷³ This dichotomy raises the characteristic that Western groups are less concerned with creating an institutional presence, and are instead, focused on fostering learning and creating a comfortable and down-to-earth learning environment for visitors, in addition to their emphasis on meditation. Alternately, it may also reflect the frugality of Western groups and signify the lack of resources needed to build dedicated spaces.

The main types of practices adopted by Canadian Buddhist organizations are “meditation, retreats, discussion groups, chanting sutras and sutra study.”²⁷⁴ Among the varieties of meditations, 1) observing one’s breath, 2) Calming Meditation (*samatha*), 3) Insight Meditation (*vipassana*), and 4) Loving-Kindness Meditation are the most common Buddhist practice in Canada, according to Negru’s survey.²⁷⁵

There are two main weaknesses in the Canadian Buddhist community with respects to expanding into the greater community. First, “formal networking between different traditions

Avatasmaka Monastery, 2007), 49.

²⁷¹Tina Ho, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 6, 2014.

²⁷²Ibid.

²⁷³“How to Find Us,” Calgary Soto Zen, available at <http://www.calgarysotozen.org/findus.html> (accessed June 20, 2014).

²⁷⁴Negru, “Highlights,” 6.

²⁷⁵See “Table 15: Meditation,” Ibid., 17.

(and the larger world through inter-faith dialogue) has been underdeveloped.”²⁷⁶ Though the Buddhist tradition generally advocates the inclusion of other branches and faiths, the communities practice separately with minimal contact with other Buddhist groups or those outside their faith. Second, Buddhist groups have minimal initiatives towards social action and engaged activity in the wider community such as providing hospice care, interacting with community groups, supporting environmental causes or participating in civic improvement initiatives.²⁷⁷ Negru comments, “individual communities have a very poor track record of working in any larger context.”²⁷⁸

Threatened Survival of Ethnic Buddhism

According to Mark Mullin’s pioneering research of the Buddhist Churches of Canada (BCC), a True Pure Land (*Jodo Shinshu*) Buddhist school of the Mahayana branch, he documented the gradual decline of membership within the church, since its establishment in 1905 up until the late 1980s. Due to the long presence of the Buddhist Churches of Canada, being the first Buddhist organization established in the country, Mullins was able to observe the long term evolution of the rise and fall of an ethnic religious group. He concluded that the eventual breakdown and disappearance of the group was not an exclusive threat to the Buddhist Churches of Canada, but it was an indicator of the future path of other groups that could not acculturate and gain members outside of their ethnic community. He referred to this strategy as “de-ethnicization” and warns,

If Buddhist churches continue to base their relevance upon ‘ethnic enclosure and support,’ their future is likely to be one of eventual disappearance as structural assimilation continues to take its toll In other words, if Buddhist churches de-ethnicize their religious tradition and broaden their base of relevance, organizational

²⁷⁶Negru, “Highlights,” 9.

²⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷⁸*Ibid.*

survival is a possibility.²⁷⁹

Mullins further establishes the correlation between immigration patterns and the longevity of the church,

In the case of the BCC, it is almost certain that without significant replenishment by new immigrants, Japanese Buddhist churches face a loss of their identity either through de-ethnicization or eventual disbandment.²⁸⁰

The decline of ethnic organizations can be attributed to five main reasons, as follows: 1) an aging congregation in which the first generation members pass away, 2) the relocation of members from smaller rural communities to larger cities, 3) the “loss of ethnic language ability” among second and third generation members, and their lack of interest in church activities, 4) “the unusually high rates of intermarriage,” in which Japanese members converted to the faiths of their partner, mainly Christianity, and 5) the sole dependence on an overseas administrative body in Japan to provide trained leaders, as opposed to training clergy locally in North America.²⁸¹

Though Mullin’s work was published in 1988, his predictions about the future of ethnic churches were confirmed by John Harding’s observations in 2010. Harding cites the following example, “The sale of old churches and establishment of the new amalgamated BTSA [Buddhist Temple of Southern Alberta] temple demonstrates change is underway to address the reality of declining membership in small towns.”²⁸² The opening of the Buddhist Temple of Southern Alberta temple in Lethbridge in 2006 illustrates the organization’s move to downsize, by amalgamating the Coaldale, Picture Butte, Rosemary, Taber, and Lethbridge congregations into

²⁷⁹Mullins, “The Organizational Dilemmas,” 229.

²⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 231.

²⁸¹*Ibid.*

²⁸²John Harding, “Jodo Shinshu in Southern Alberta,” in *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 157.

one temple.²⁸³ Since Mullins's observations, centralized clerical training has been established in North America, and graduates such as the Albertan-born Reverend Christina Yanko, have been leading a revitalization movement in the organization.²⁸⁴ However, the success of these initiatives requires further investigation.

Attendance Patterns within the True Buddha School

In my interviews with the True Buddha School's clergy and members across North America, including those from Redmond, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Guam, Oakland, New York and Edmonton, it can be confirmed that *at least* seven branches within the organization encounter the same dilemma as the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple, regarding their long-term lack of success in *retaining* members from outside of the Chinese community. Their collective experiences point to the fact that despite years of effort in attracting a wider audience, only a handful of members have been retained. Master Lotus Zhe, a male monastic that oversees the New York chapter, comments,

I started a weekly English group meditation from 1997 to 2002, but no one came. Only two to three people have stayed committed since then. I would say seven to eight people come quite often.²⁸⁵

Robert Rosinski of Edmonton gives an estimated forty talks a year to surrounding schools, libraries, hospitals, universities, senior homes, First Nations' groups, prisons, and interfaith conferences, and despite his efforts at promoting the organization, he similarly remarks, "Five to seven people regularly join our group meditation. At maximum, fifteen people have attended."²⁸⁶

Molly Muh of the E-Rooh Society in Los Angeles reveals, "We held a [weekly] English group

²⁸³Buddhist Temple of Southern Alberta, "History," *Buddhist Temple of Southern Alberta*, <http://thebtsa.com/about> (accessed January 10, 2014).

²⁸⁴Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Temples of Canada, "Ministerial Movement," *Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Temples of Canada* [Official Website], http://www.bcc.ca/ldc/ldcatwork_files/7c002f23e92cead500e5eb749d59120d-39.html (accessed January 7, 2014).

²⁸⁵Master Lotus Zhe, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 23, 2013.

²⁸⁶Robert Rosinski, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 24, 2013.

cultivation for a year but we had to close it. There were no visitors. At maximum, five people showed up.”²⁸⁷ Henry Wolf of Las Vegas took his efforts to the local annual Asian Cultural Fair in which a booth was set up to promote the organization.²⁸⁸ Despite two consecutive years of promotion at the fair and the weekly conducting of English group meditations, the results were the same as the above-mentioned experiences.²⁸⁹ Master Lotus Ling of Redmond recalls,

Many years ago, from 1983-1984 [during the early years of the organization’s founding], there were lots of Caucasians but they’re all gone. It isn’t easy to sit there and learn if you are non-Chinese speaking. Translation does not capture 100% of the intended meaning.²⁹⁰

The situation has not changed much in Redmond since Lotus Ling’s early experience. A glance at the audience during the annual ceremony in Redmond in August 2013, an international gathering of global members, reveals that the number of visible non-Chinese attendees did not exceed more than twenty people among the two thousand participants. Among those attendees, approximately a quarter of them attended with their Chinese spouses and a handful was comprised of volunteers and dharma propagators.

It is argued that the lack of success in retaining non-Chinese members represents a widespread norm within the organization and it is not solely exclusive to the branches mentioned above, for two reasons. First, the interviewed members were all high-ranking clergy or officially sanctioned teaching assistants in the organization. Their seniority and position in the organization provides them with the vantage point of observing trends first hand, spanning several decades in some cases, since they have been dedicated participants over an extended period. In particular, Master Lotus Ling is the closest confidant of the organization’s founder, Grandmaster Lu, and he is also Grandmaster Lu’s appointed successor. Additionally, Master

²⁸⁷Molly Muh, interview by author, Taichung, Taiwan, November 19, 2013.

²⁸⁸Henry Wolf, interview by author, Taichung, Taiwan, November 19, 2013.

²⁸⁹Ibid.

²⁹⁰Master Lotus Ling, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 22, 2013.

Lotus Zhe is one of the seven core members of the True Buddha Foundation, the international governing body of the organization. Molly Muh is the co-abbot of the Los Angeles chapter, and the remaining interviewees were all official teaching assistants or instructors. Thus, the opinions and experiences of these individuals are representative of members that have been committed to the efforts of propagation, whom are knowledgeable about the organization's successful and failed strategies, and attend services on a regular and consistent basis.

The second point that suggests that the phenomenon is widespread among the other North American branches is the fact that *all* of the interviewees claimed to have the same experiences regarding low retention numbers. Although the sample size is not an accurate representation of the organization by statistical means, they represent 100% of the sample size. It is, thus, hypothesized that more international chapters experience a similar phenomenon in their local branches. There may, however, be exceptions to the case.

More importantly, however, the acknowledgment of the deficiencies in the organization by the clergy and members point to the organization's disposition and inclination towards the goal of a hybrid ethnic community. This inclination is demonstrated by Master Lotus Ling's response to the following question: "How important is it for the True Buddha School to expand into the English speaking community?" Lotus Ning responded, "It is very important. We are trying to expand into other non-Chinese speaking communities."²⁹¹ His opinion, along with other senior clergy and teaching assistants, match the aims of the Pai Yuin Temple's board of directors, indicating that the goal of achieving a hybrid congregation is not just a localized aim but it is a broad organizational objective.

The general outlook of the Buddhist tradition and the True Buddha School is that they are not an overtly proselytizing faith. As well, the organization does not specify a number or ratio of

²⁹¹Master Lotus Ling, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 22, 2013.

non-Chinese members as a target goal, as Lotus Ling comments, “Our goal is to follow karma. Let it flow like a river.”²⁹² Mike Rainey’s views speak to the Buddhist notion of affinity or personal connection, “You either identify with it or you don’t.”²⁹³ However, the fact that the organization has attracted a steady flow of visitors and curious participants that have not returned, the organization’s members insist that there is something *more* that they could have done to retain participants. Thus, the low ratio of visitors compared to returning participants, is partly seen as a controllable variable by the organization. Bibby advocates that the onus for increasing attendance is dependent on organizational adjustments and states, “The trick is for religious organizations to provide the things that the less involved and non-involved define as worthwhile.”²⁹⁴

Patterns within the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple

i) Visitor Statistics

According to local field observations in a four month period, 6% of the total amount of temple visitors consisted of people who had visited the temple for the first time. The length of the observation period was dependent on attaining data saturation with regards to visitor patterns. Based on an average total of 1870 daytime visitors annually, approximately 116 of the visitors were non-Chinese, signifying the presence of a continuous and steady stream of visitors.²⁹⁵ These visitors represent the potential converts that the temple aspires to retain, as opposed to the proactive recruitment of members through methods such as distributing flyers in the community, placing ads in local newspapers, or organizing community publicized events. While the temple’s

²⁹²Master Lotus Ling, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 22, 2013.

²⁹³Mike Rainey, interview by author, Calgary, AB, February 20, 2013.

²⁹⁴Bibby, “Why Bother with Organized Religion,” 93.

²⁹⁵On average, there are 18 visitors per day based on an observation of 2 visitors per hour. The observation period took place during the temple’s formal open hours, between 11:00am and 5:00pm daily. These figures do not include visitors on Chinese New Year’s Day, which is the temple’s busiest day of the year.

administration has plans to engage in future proactive strategies, they currently lack the necessary resources.²⁹⁶

None of the observed non-Chinese visitors returned after their first visit within a three month observation span, which highlights the low retention rates of the Pai Yuin Temple. This group is not only comprised of European descendants, but also includes Indian and Sri Lankan visitors. Based on this calculation, one in every sixteen visitors to the temple could be considered as a potential convert to the organization. Longitudinal observations of the weekly English group meditations spanning a year reveal that among the new visitors that had participated, only five people returned on a sporadic basis.²⁹⁷ Among the five participants, one participant attended regularly on a weekly basis. Thus, statistically speaking, the temple was only able to sustain a returning visit from 4% of its visitors. Among those participants, however, only one participant had formally become a member by undergoing the refuge initiation, which equates to an annual “success” rate of less than 1%. These statistics confirm the perceptions of the temple’s board of directors, regarding their lack of fruition in gaining adherents.

ii) Ratio of Female to Men

In line with Negru’s observations, there is a much higher participation among women in the Pai Yuin Temple’s community, including both lay members and clergy. Among daytime visitors, roughly three quarters of the visitors were female. This may be due to the fact that women commonly fulfill the roles of housewives in Asian families, since many female visitors remarked that their husbands were at work when asked. The response was the same among female visitors who were employed, pointing to the pattern that men had longer working hours. However, these observations are tentative as more data is needed to support the claims. Though

²⁹⁶Master Lotus Wen, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 11, 2014.

²⁹⁷Approximately once every five weeks.

the attendance among men increased on weekends, especially during formal services, men were still substantially outnumbered, wherein the ratio of men to women was 1 to 15.

The clergy is also predominantly female, as 8 out of the 10 ordained clergy are female.²⁹⁸ With the exception of three reverends, the Pai Yuin Temple's clergy consist of semi-retired and retired members, demonstrating that aging was a factor in their decision to become ordained. In fact, 4 of the 10 clergy were married to each other and had adult children, prior to ordination. Regarding her decision to become a nun, Reverend Lotus Yu shares, "I saw ordination as a natural phase in my life. My kids had all gotten older and I was getting ready to retire. My priorities in life had changed."²⁹⁹ During wedding ceremonies, Grandmaster Lu has repeatedly expressed his desire for couples to transform their love for each other into the love for all beings.³⁰⁰ Therefore, couples from within the ranks of the congregation are encouraged to enter monasticism and to help the organization's aims, as they transition from one stage of life to another. Indeed, two married couples from within the Pai Yuin Temple's congregation followed Grandmaster Lu's direction and became ordained separately within years of the other spouse's ordination. While this type of transition would not be readily accepted or adopted by the majority of members, it is commonplace for married couples to join the administrative ranks of the temple as laypersons.

iii) Buddhist Women

Karma Lekshe Tsomo identified the main characteristics among three different groups of Buddhist Women,

Most generally, Asian Buddhists are concerned with subsistence, education, healthcare, and preserving their Buddhist heritage; Asian American Buddhist women are concerned

²⁹⁸ Among the clergy, three of them are semi-retired and they are not regularly active in the temple.

²⁹⁹ Reverend Lotus Yu, Lecture at the Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, March 10, 2013.

³⁰⁰ Sheng yen Lu, "Amitabha Buddha's Blessing Ceremony on September 4, 2010," Uploaded Vimeo video file [see 20:00 mark], <http://vimeo.com/14706070> (accessed January 12, 2014).

with juggling their careers, families, and cultural values; and non-Asian Buddhist women are concerned with meditation, gender issues, and social justice.³⁰¹

She continues, “As in Asia, Buddhist women have worked ceaselessly for the Dharma and the welfare of others, often behind the scenes.”³⁰² My observations support Tsomo’s assertions, as women in the Pai Yuin Temple account for the bulk of volunteer labor. In fact, over ¾ of the volunteers are female. Volunteer duties include cooking, cleaning, charity work, administrative duties, ritual preparation, and general organizational jobs. An elderly volunteer named Gui Yi, has been volunteering weekly at the Pai Yuin Temple for more than a decade, folding origami in the form of paper lotuses, which are then sold through the temple as offerings for the deceased. It is a time consuming process, as each lotus consists of eight individual pieces of paper. During Chinese New Year’s, the temple sells hundreds of lotuses to visitors but when the senior members pass away, rituals such as these may be lost with them, as the popularity of burning objects for the deceased decreases among later generations.

iv) Aging Congregation Results in Lower Attendance

An aging congregation has also resulted in a slight drop in attendance compared to previous years, based on Master Lotus Wen’s observation. Although three of the temple’s members died in 2013, among the temple’s 120 regular participants, the largest factors for the decrease in attendance are attributed to conditions related to aging, such as decreased mobility. Many of the original members who joined during the temple’s establishment are now in their 70s and prefer to stay home, especially in the evenings or during the winter season.³⁰³ While the temple originally conducted weekly group meditations every Saturday evening at 7:45pm to

³⁰¹Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Global Exchange: Women in the Transmission and Transformation of Buddhism,” in *TransBuddhism: Transmission, Translation, Transformation*, ed. by Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield, and Abraham Zablocki (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 152.

³⁰²*Ibid.*, 153.

³⁰³Master Lotus Wen, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 11, 2014.

accommodate the work schedules of its members, Master Lotus Wen contemplates future plans to transition towards an afternoon service in order to accommodate the senior members.³⁰⁴ This adjustment highlights a transitioning phase within the Pai Yuin Temple's congregation due to aging.

v) Families, Seniors, Children, and Volunteers

Attendance among married couples and families was higher than single attendees, supporting the national patterns cited earlier. It is also a dominant preference that people prefer to visit the temple in groups. To explain, 44% of all visitors to the Pai Yuin Temple arrived as families. Among them, 9.7% consisted of families spanning three generations and 1 in every 10 visitors was a senior. Non-adult children accounted for 9% of all daytime visitors or 1 in every 10 visitors. Based on these figures, adults account for the overwhelming majority of the congregation.

When attendees did not come with a spouse, they were often accompanied by a sibling, a child, a family member or a friend. Three main reasons are suggested for this pattern: 1) Among elder members, adult children were typically held responsible for driving their parents to the temple. In fact, some of the adult children revealed that they were Christians and did not follow their parent's faith. 2) From an emotional standpoint, anxiety and uneasiness is reduced with the accompaniment of a chaperone, who acts as a source of support. 3) Among Chinese members, a visit to the temple is considered a family outing, highlighting the importance placed on Confucian values such as filial piety and ritual propriety, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

³⁰⁴Master Lotus Wen, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 11, 2014.

vi) Importance of Ancestor Veneration in Chinese Community

Ancestor Veneration was the most common ritual observed among daytime visitors. In the ancestral hall of the Pai Yuin Temple, loved ones are represented by their name on a plaque, and family members offer incense, fruit and food items, along with bowing three times before the plaque, which is presided over by Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, a being known for his vow of rescuing those in the hell realm. In fact, 44% or slightly under half of all people that enter the temple's doors are daytime visitors that do not attend the temple's formal activities, while the remaining 56% consist of regular members who are active participants.³⁰⁵ While non-Chinese members surveyed the temple out of curiosity, the remaining visitors practiced the Chinese tradition of paying respects to deceased family members and ancestors. Although families also visit the actual gravesite of the deceased, visits to the cemetery generally occur twice a year during the Tomb Sweeping Festival and Ancestor's Day. Otherwise, visits to the temple for veneration are more frequent. Reverend Lotus Fong sheds light on the reasons for the popularity of temple visits compared to gravesites,

The temple is representative of a larger family for the ancestors. This is my personal opinion. Every day we make offerings to the ancestors. We conduct group practice here every week, as well as conduct bardo deliverance, evening service and every year, we perform four great ceremonies. Then we dedicate the merit from these practices to the ancestors so that they can receive the blessings of light; but at the cemetery the ancestors don't have this opportunity. We can say prayers for them every day here [at the temple].³⁰⁶

These visitation patterns highlight the important role that Buddhist temples serve to the wider ethnic group as a community ancestral hall.

It is difficult, however, to establish whether or not the non-member visitors are Buddhist. Non-members were rarely observed venerating the main Buddhist shrine, compared with formal

³⁰⁵The main method of distinguishing members and non-members relied on the recollection of clergy and volunteers.

³⁰⁶Reverend Lotus Fong, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 8, 2013.

members who could be distinguished by their performance of the Great Homage, a ritualized bow.³⁰⁷ Upon entering the temple, the non-members bypassed the main shrine and immediately proceeded to the ancestral hall. While they often brought bags of fruit and cooked food into the temple, the majority were not interested in placing them on the main altar with Buddhist statues. During funerals, however, non-members participated in singing Buddhist scriptures and circumambulating the deceased while chanting the Buddha's name. This reveals that the lines between cultural rites and religious identity are blurred, since the sole concern of non-members during daytime visits involved the performance of Chinese ancestral rites and not Buddhist rites.

The wider Chinese community also continues to turn to the temple for funeral services. Among the twenty funerals that were conducted by the temple in 2013, Reverend Lotus Fong estimates that roughly half of them were conducted for non-members.³⁰⁸

Based on the continued reliance of the wider ethnic community on the temple to perform services, it is conjectured that the secularization theory, believed to be affecting the attendance rates in Western-based traditions, have had less impact on Eastern-based traditions. In the case of Hinduism, for instance, rites of passage are even more closely tied with religious rituals than the Buddhist case. For example, the Indian community relies on Hindu priests or *pandits* to perform life-cycle rites for an infant's transition from milk to solid foods or *annaprashana*, weddings, house warming rites, and astrological checks, in addition to funerals.

vii) Unrealistic Expectations and Cultural Differences

The frequent regular visits by the wider Chinese community has, however, led to

³⁰⁷Formal members of Pai Yuen Temple typically perform a ritualized bow, known as Great Homage, which consists of a series of different *mudras* or hand gestures placed at the brow point, throat, and heart area, and accompanied with kneeling. This ritual is performed by members upon entering and exiting the temple. Non-member visitors, on the other hand, adopt the Chinese tradition of bowing their head three times without the physical prostration.

³⁰⁸Reverend Lotus Fong, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 8, 2014.

unrealistic expectations among the temple's members that non-Chinese visitors will also return after their first visit with little advertising or outreach efforts. The Chinese custom of honoring ancestors at the local temple compels those in the wider community to return, regardless of whether they pay homage to the Buddhist shrine. Non-Chinese visitors, however, have no need to return, no deity to propitiate, and no custom of offering incense to ancestors. After participating in their tour of the temple, there is little need for them to return unless they are actively pursuing an interest in Buddhist teachings. Furthermore, in the wider Canadian society, loved ones are most commonly remembered through direct visits to the cemetery, sponsorship of memorial objects, or by donations to charitable causes. Craig Mowat, a regular English-speaking member of the Pai Yuin Temple and a native Calgarian, shares a unique story about how his desire to honor his deceased Asian friend according to her culture's funerary rites, led him to take refuge in Buddhism. He recalls the events,

My close friend passed away six years ago. At that time, I wanted to bring some flowers for her, so I went to the Vietnamese Buddhist temple [Vietnamese Buddhist Culture Centre, which had also conducted his friend's funeral] where her family goes. There was a really nice monk who was the head monk there. He told me that I was more than welcome to come back but I would be very confused because everything was in Vietnamese. He directed me to go to the Pai Yuin Temple because the people there catered to English speakers. That was when I met Daisy [who is now called Reverend Lotus Zhe], who spent a lot of time teaching me about Buddhism one on one. I met with her every week for one or two hours. It was her who taught me how to do the rituals.³⁰⁹

Craig's story represents a rare occasion in which a non-Chinese participant was influenced by Asian funerary customs in his conversion.

The frequency of temple visits is also affected by the fact that it is not common knowledge in the non-Chinese community that Buddhist temples are open to the public during the day, since people typically go to church during Sunday services or for scheduled activities.

³⁰⁹a) Craig Mowat, interview by author, Calgary, AB, September, 12, 2013.

b) The Vietnamese Buddhist Culture Centre is located at 1720 36th Street SE, Calgary, AB.

Master Lotus Wen, the head master of the Pai Yuin Temple, shares her experience,

I once spent two hours explaining Buddhism to a visitor but that person never came back. You have to explain a lot of reasons and prove to them that it makes sense. You do a lot of work just to gain two members, but with the Chinese members, you get better results. Even if the Chinese visitors do not come to our group practice, they come back for other reasons such as offering incense, honoring their ancestors, and making donations.³¹⁰

Wen explains that it is both a “cultural issue” and a “cost benefit issue.”³¹¹ The amount of resources required to gain non-Chinese members far exceeds the resources of gaining members from within the ethnic community. These barriers, however, have not led the temple’s administration to abandon their efforts. In early 2014, Wen plans to introduce a new strategy to expand into the community through the avenue of the Lotus Light Charity Society, the charitable branch of the temple, by working closely with local seniors’ homes, women’s shelters, and “Kids Cancer” foundations.³¹² Though the society hosts regular fundraising activities for local welfare groups and free tax preparation clinics for individuals with low-incomes, Wen hopes that the new strategy will enable the surrounding neighborhoods to be aware of the congregations’ concern for the wider community beyond mere financial support.

viii) Other Factors Affecting Attendance

In regards to the attendance patterns among active members at formal activities, there were two distinct preferences between the non-Chinese and Chinese attendees, which highlight the differences in cultural values. Among the non-Chinese members, there was a direct correlation between weather patterns and long weekends or civic holidays. During the winter months, snowy conditions affected the entire congregation’s attendance. However, during the summer months, attendance numbers among the non-Chinese members were lower than the Chinese members on sunny and warm days. When asked, the non-Chinese members claimed to

³¹⁰Master Lotus Wen, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 11, 2014.

³¹¹Ibid.

³¹²Ibid.

value leisurely activities on these days, and the same is true for long weekends and civic holidays. In fact, the English meditation group collectively discussed plans to move the weekly meditation to a nearby park in order to encourage attendance.

The Chinese members, on the other hand, valued specific days on the lunar calendar such as the 1st and 15th of the moon cycle, and religious holidays such as the birthdays of various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.³¹³ Participants believe that the beneficial effects of prayer and supplication are magnified during these times, and thus attendance is higher on these days. Furthermore, the popularity of specific deities affects attendance. The highest recorded daytime attendance occurred on the birthday of Padmakumara Buddha, who is believed to be the celestial body of Sheng-yen Lu, the True Buddha School's founder. The English-speaking group, however, did not place special significance on these factors as a reason for visiting the temple.

Conclusion: Supply vs. Demand Factors

Sociologists are divided on the issue of whether religious organizations have any control over attendance levels. Reginald Bibby and Joel Thiessen refer to these factors as supply and demand factors. Where supply factors expect attendance levels to change based on adjustments made by churches, such as the change of direction in sermons or change of music, demand factors claim that attendance levels are determined by external factors such as societal conditions, work obligations and personal factors, for instance.

Bibby is an advocate of the supply model and claims that “many Canadians who are not actively involved in religious groups have not closed the door on potential involvement.”³¹⁴ He shares the following statistics,

A core of about one in three Canadians continue to value faith, while approximately one

³¹³The PYT distributes calendars each year that detail the various moon cycles, along with the important birthday celebrations for the Buddhist deities.

³¹⁴Bibby, “Why Bother with Organized Religion,” 94.

in three do not. The remaining one-third or so comprise ‘the ambivalent middle’ – people who continue to identify with a religion group but are not actively involved.³¹⁵

In order to increase membership and attendance, church suppliers must “do everything they can to touch the lives of marginals and others.”³¹⁶ More specifically, Bibby identified three factors that would boost participation as follows: 1) adjustments made by the ministry, whereby ministry are “in touch” with the needs and interests of their congregation, targeting “children, young adults, and seniors,” in particular; 2) organizational “changes in style and outlook,” including “the need for groups to be more contemporary and inclusive” and the emphasis on “greater equality toward people generally, starting with women,” and 3) emphasis on qualities that the congregations value, such as “ministries that could speak directly to life and to their lives.”³¹⁷

In respects to demand side factors, churches have no control over participation levels because the levels are determined by societal changes. Thiessen points to the following four factors that are outside of the churches’ control: 1) Busy schedules, wherein people stopped participating because they were either “too busy or too lazy;”³¹⁸ 2) Seeking independence from the church by not wanting “to submit to the church’s rules and authority;”³¹⁹ 3) Social factors, wherein people were discouraged by their spouses or children’s lack of interest,³²⁰ and 4) “personal experiences that caused them to question their faith in God, and consequently their perceived need for the church.”³²¹ In summary, Thiessen claims that “there is little that religious groups can do to change their situation.”³²²

Despite their disagreements, sociologists are unified in maintaining that there are no

³¹⁵Bibby, “Why Bother with Organized Religion,” 91.

³¹⁶*Ibid.*, 94.

³¹⁷*Ibid.*, 99.

³¹⁸Thiessen, “Marginal Religious Affiliates,” 75.

³¹⁹*Ibid.*, 77.

³²⁰*Ibid.*, 76.

³²¹*Ibid.*

³²²*Ibid.*, 85.

factors that can be statistically isolated to explain the decreased level of church involvement, and they insist on a refinement of the findings. LaFlamme claims, “Although normalizing the denominational statistics with demographic data does help, it remains difficult to isolate factors that are responsible for causing the observed trends.”³²³ Thus, LaFlamme calls for “a different methodology, such as in-depth interviews or questionnaires.”³²⁴ Bibby comments, “Surveys, of course, never provide perfect readings of reality.”³²⁵ He continues, “survey conversations need to be corroborated both with other surveys as well as other data collection methods.”³²⁶ The remainder of the thesis will thus attempt to offer a qualitative analysis of the supply and demand factors related to hybrid Buddhist communities, focusing on the different preferences among Chinese and English-speaking visitors and members.

³²³LaFlamme, “Normalizing Denominational Statistics,” 184.

³²⁴Ibid.

³²⁵Bibby, “Changing Patterns,” 833.

³²⁶Ibid.

Chapter Five: Outreach Challenges Based on Outside Factors

This chapter will expand on the outside challenges of achieving a blended ethnic community by the True Buddha School, based on field observations, including feedback and in-depth interviews with visitors and members of the True Buddha School. Although demographic and time-commitment factors such as aging and lack of time play a major role in the fall of church attendance, as discussed in Chapter Four, this chapter will focus on the tacit barriers, and summarize the wide range of perceptions and comments of visitors collected over the course of a year and a half. The aim of this discussion is to shed light on the outside qualitative factors that affect attendance. Certainly, there are exceptions to the generalizations mentioned here and the comments collected may pertain to individual cases. Therefore, it is stressed that more quantitative research is required to statistically isolate the factors that affect participation.

Field research indicates that the factors inhibiting the organization's appeal to the greater community are primarily related to the differences between Eastern and Western perceptions of the Buddhist tradition. In particular, the differences between Chinese and North American perceptions will be the focal point of this chapter. The challenges faced by the organization can be summed into seven main barriers, as follows:

1) Like other religious institutions, the True Buddha School is faced with the popular antagonism towards organized religion.

2) Due to the different perceptions and attitudes towards authority between English and Chinese-speaking visitors, there is a greater resistance by English-speaking visitors to the Vajrayana concept of guru reliance. Where attitudes toward authority in North America are democratic in nature, attitudes of authority in East Asian culture are centered on the Confucian principles of duty, hierarchy, and filial piety.

3) While part of the impetus for pursuing Buddhist practice and attending temple services is centered on the concept of karma, rebirth, and maintaining ritual propriety to one's ancestors in the Asian community, these concepts possess little importance in the collective Western psyche. As a result, there are no cultural rituals or beliefs that necessitate return visits to the temple.

4) Those who expressed interest in learning about Buddhism do not feel that that knowledge needs to be obtained by attending temple services or conversing with clergy, since information is readily available on the internet, local book stores or by enrolling in post-secondary classes. Thus, the enthusiasm for active and collective participation in Buddhist activities is low. Furthermore, the primary motivations for gaining more knowledge about Buddhism stems from the incentives of gaining self-help advice, or fostering an ecumenical understanding of other world views, as opposed to the desire of practicing in a formal community setting. Many sympathizers prefer to practice in the private confines of their home. Furthermore, these seekers choose to remain independent and they are not interested in becoming regular members.

5) In contrast to the main assumptions of Buddhist scholars, who claim that the interest of Buddhism in the West is primarily centered on philosophy, a segment of the population actively seeks Buddhist forms of meditation to learn healing techniques aimed at curing physical illnesses and psycho-emotional pains.

6) The primary motivation of those who actively seek out and participate in local Buddhist groups is to learn meditation and meet other individuals with the same values. However, due to the romanticization of Zen Buddhism in popular culture, elaborate Buddhist practices and rituals, that are characteristic of the activities in the True Buddha School, may be

rejected in favor of groups with an iconoclastic or non-denominational orientation.

7) While the ornate style and architecture of Asian Buddhist Temples such as the Pai Yuin Temple attracts tourists and visitors, a portion of visitors consider such adornments to represent displays of wealth that contradict the ideals of the Buddhist tradition.

The seven factors that pose a challenge to the True Buddha School's growth are expanded on below.

1) Antagonism Towards Organized Religion and Authority

The antagonism towards organized religion is discussed as a mental or imagined construct within popular culture. This imagined construct deems organized religion as a malevolent entity with an unquestionable authority to exert power and control over others, which leads to the stigmatism of being affiliated with groups that have rigid authority structures. According to formal polls conducted by Project Canada, the confidence of Canadians in the leadership of religious groups fell from 51% in 1975 to 34% in 2005.³²⁷ It should be noted, however, that all religious traditions are by definition "organized" when more than one person gathers to practice their faith. The act of gathering requires organized effort, whether a group gathers in a church or in a field. According to the sociologist Lynn Clark, religion and morality are synonymous in American culture.³²⁸ In her interviews with 269 participants, Clark concluded that those who claim to be "spiritual but not religious" are, in fact, attempting to identify "themselves as moral and good people."³²⁹ Interviews with visitors and participants of the Pai Yuin Temple confirm Clark's research that the dissension towards organized religion is merely a statement of an individual's values. To illustrate, some English-speaking members claimed to

³²⁷Reginald Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back: Religion's Demise and Rise and Why It Matters* (Project Canada Books: Lethbridge, 2011), 24.

³²⁸Lynn S. Clark, *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, The Media, and the Supernatural* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2003), 230.

³²⁹*Ibid.*

reject organized religion despite their regular participation in the True Buddha School's activities. This indicates that a portion of those who oppose organized religions are, themselves, participants of organized groups. In addition to the connection with morality, the general disdain for organized groups encompass feelings of submission to a higher authority, relinquishment of individual rights, and the association with following a blind crowd. Alternately, the phrase "I'm spiritual but not religious" represents the support for values of equality and ecumenism. Clark's findings reveal that there is a value judgment towards organized groups, which supports Thiessen's notion that participation in church activities is outside of the immediate control of churches.

When the leaders or members of local branches are not aware of Western cultural assumptions and do not have the resources to explain the subtle nuances of basic Buddhist principles to the greater public, then visitors are naturally turned away by concepts that are deemed as too dogmatic or strict. For example, Henry Wolf of Las Vegas, a Caucasian teaching assistant in the True Buddha School, expands on American attitudes towards morality with the following anecdote,

Probably 98% of the Americans that I know follow moral laws but they don't like to be told that what they're doing is wrong, even though they will for the most part follow morality. Americans want to be free to do what they want without any obstacles and no one hindering them. They don't like being told that what they want to do is wrong in the moral sense.³³⁰

According to Wolf, a former law professor who taught in Taiwan and a fluent Chinese-speaker, these attitudes pose a challenge to Buddhist organizations in gaining adherents. Wolf believes that people "don't like church" because "it's a kind of judgment. It's distinguishing right and wrong."³³¹ For example, individuals who take refuge in Buddhism are encouraged to abide by

³³⁰Henry Wolf, interview by author, Taichung, Taiwan, November 19, 2013.

³³¹Ibid.

the five precepts, which are: i) to refrain from taking life, ii) to refrain from taking what is not given, iii) to refrain from sexual misconduct (generally explained as “not cheating on one’s partner or spouse” in the True Buddha School), iv) to refrain from telling untruths, and v) to refrain from taking intoxicants.³³²

In his experience, however, Wolf has observed that many potential converts are turned away from participating in organized groups due to their resistance towards such guidelines. He cites an example regarding the precept of sexual misconduct,

If I want to go out and have sex, that’s what I want to do and I don’t need anyone telling me that’s wrong. Of course, most people draw a line. There’s a line where most Americans won’t go, such as visiting prostitutes.³³³

Wolf’s observations highlight a conception about the rigid nature of precepts as a system of do’s and don’ts in North American society. These conceptions ignore the rich symbolism and context-dependent meaning behind such guidelines in the Buddhist tradition. For example, according to a Buddhist myth about Guan Yin Bodhisattva, commonly referred to as the Goddess of Compassion and Mercy, she reincarnated as an attractive prostitute after “seeing the excessive lust in the world.”³³⁴ Upon placing their gaze on her, the patrons’ lusts were “immediately swept away.”³³⁵ This myth reflects the flexible nature of Buddhist precepts in terms of their adjustment on a case by case basis, compared to a “one size fits all” guideline. The tradition claims that the aim of the precepts serves to foster mindfulness behind an individual’s actions. Because the basic principles of the tradition are viewed as being too stringent and even austere, visitors become disinterested in deeper participation. These views can be summarized by the following visitor’s

³³²In regards to the fifth precept, alcohol is permitted but intoxication is discouraged. The precept also discourages against drug use and smoking.

³³³Henry Wolf, interview by author, Taichung, Taiwan, November 19, 2013.

³³⁴Oki Yasushi and Paolo Santangelo, *Shan’ge The Mountain Songs: Love Songs in Ming China* (Leidan: Brill Publishing, 2011): 181.

³³⁵*Ibid.*

feedback, “I respect the nuns for giving up everything to serve the community, but I don’t think I could ever do that. I’m not ready to give up everything. I couldn’t become a Buddhist.”³³⁶ Upon further questioning, the visitor believed that he was required to relinquish all of his attachments to wealth and his career in order to be accepted by the tradition.³³⁷ The visitor’s comments reflect a misunderstanding about who can be a Buddhist and what being a Buddhist means to him. Consequently, the lack of awareness by clergy and members about the general attitudes towards organized religion, and the subsequent misunderstandings by visitors, play a role in turning potential participants away.

2) Contrasting Attitudes about Authority

In the context of democratic ideals, the notion of guru devotion poses another challenge to potential English-speaking converts, due to the high position and authority held by teachers in Vajrayana. In fact, the trust of Canadians in religious representatives has fallen. According to survey results gathered by Leger Marketing, trust in “church reps” fell from 73% in 2002 to 61% in 2007.³³⁸

While the Buddhist tradition advocates that all beings in the six realms of reincarnation are capable of spiritual awakening and are thus equal, the Vajrayana branch of Buddhism claims that spiritual awakening is not possible without the guidance of a skilled teacher. Furthermore, the teacher possesses the ability to withhold or impart esoteric teachings based on his observation of the disciple’s character and capacity. Subsequently, the teachings were historically held in secret, primarily due to the stigmatization of some sexual practices that claimed to enable an individual to reach Awakening, an approach that was not widely accepted.³³⁹ An example of the

³³⁶Based on visitor feedback at the Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, November 28, 2013.

³³⁷Ibid.

³³⁸Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 24.

³³⁹David W. Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford

esoteric nature of Vajrayana can be seen with the Tantric scriptures, which were written in a twilight language or coded form, known only to the initiated, that needed decoding by an experienced teacher.³⁴⁰ The tradition claims that there are harmful psychological effects associated with the transmission of the Tantras to a poorly trained individual.³⁴¹ Thus, the Tantric practices necessitate the guidance of a teacher. Furthermore, the Tantric practices are deemed as powerful methods to release fears and deep-rooted pains from a practitioner's subconscious. When an individual has not achieved an adequate level of emotional stability through the preliminary practices, then h/she has the potential to be swept up by fears and attachments, as opposed to conquering them. A crude analogy can be seen from the popular A&E television show, *Hoarders*, wherein psychologists work with cleaning crews to assist in people's addiction to compulsive hoarding. The removal of refuse does not take place without the presence of psychologists, for fear that the experience would trigger emotional trauma and lead to permanent emotional damage.³⁴² In the same way, the guru guides the student through the emotional transitions of the Tantric practices.

Interviews with visitors and participants reveal that there are five critical issues or factors that affect the reception of the need for an authoritative figure, such as a teacher or *guru*, among those interested in Buddhist practice. The responses ranged from complete rejection of the need for a teacher to complete acceptance of the teacher's role in Vajrayana. First, while some visitors claimed to respect the choice of others to take refuge in a guru, they expressed the preference for practicing alone. These individuals were not opposed to participating in various meditation

University Press, 2008), 157.

³⁴⁰Though Vajrayana Buddhism is also known as esoteric, the secrets of the practices were not necessarily well kept, due to their widespread adoption and popularity amongst Buddhist communities.

³⁴¹Ibid.

³⁴²For a detailed discussion about the psychological distresses with the treatment of hoarding, see Gail Steketee and Randy Frost, "Compulsive Hoarding: Current Status of the Research," *Clinical Psychology Review* 23 (2003): 905-927.

groups, and in fact, actively pursued new activities locally. For instance, Marty Hansen who is a fitness trainer in Calgary explains, “I’ve tried many groups. . . various groups [25 in the last year], and I’ve taken something away from every one of them.”³⁴³ While Hansen explained that he felt welcomed by the Pai Yuin Temple’s members, he preferred the challenge of finding his “own way,” as opposed to relying on a teacher or tradition with a prescribed path, which is too “easy.”³⁴⁴ His response suggests that a spiritual journey should be shrouded in mystery and obscurity. Hansen’s comments further point to the characteristic of some visitors to dabble and experiment with multiple religious groups, while not committing to any one of them. Lynn Clark expands on the nature of individualism and religious identity,

Fifty years ago, religious identity was something a young person was born into. It was taken for granted, like racial/ethnic identity, closely related to one’s geographic home and shared by people who went to the same schools and participated in many of the same social activities. Over the past few decades, we have come to see religious identity as something we choose for ourselves. . . .³⁴⁵

These observations confirm Thiessen’s assertion, discussed in Chapter Four, that one of the main factors of decline in national church attendance is based on “some form of individualism.”³⁴⁶

Canadians value their religious freedom and do not like to be told what to do or believe.

Furthermore, due to the nature of some spiritual seekers to maintain independence from organized groups, it has been difficult for scholars to identify “Who is a Buddhist?”³⁴⁷ In his field study of “Western” pilgrims in Tibet, François Thibeault observed an apprehension amongst non-Asian pilgrims, who declined to identify themselves as Buddhist, despite the fact that they had been participating in Buddhist activities such as chanting the mantras of Buddhist

³⁴³Marty Hansen, interview by author, Calgary, AB, March 26, 2013.

³⁴⁴*Ibid.*

³⁴⁵Clark, *From Angels to Aliens*, 8.

³⁴⁶Thiessen, “Marginal Religious Affiliates in Canada,” 76.

³⁴⁷Thomas 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.

deities or performing the prostrations, some for as long as a decade.³⁴⁸ In the same way that the statement “I’m spiritual but not religious” is an affirmation of an individual’s values rather than an indicator of organized participation, it is asserted that the statement “I’m not a Buddhist” is also a value statement about an individual’s ecumenism towards other religious traditions, rather than an outright rejection of their participation in Buddhist activities. This statement also accompanies the assumption, at least for some individuals, that one’s beliefs and practices are open to change and transformation. This observed trend points to a Judeo-Christian assumption that an individual should only belong to one faith or tradition. It is, thus, a challenge for religious groups to gain adherents, given the nature of some individuals to participate in formal activities while not choosing to commit in the long term.

Second, in regards to factors that affect the reception of a guru’s role, the idea of withholding teachings and selecting the ideal student appears to be antithetical to the Buddhist teaching of compassion and equanimity of all beings. While those in the wider Asian community are also prone to rejecting the idea of relying on an authoritatively prescribed path, there is less resistance due to cultural norms. Aronson explains,

In Asia teachers may be able to use their influence to effect change in ways that will not typically succeed in the West. For North Americans, with our democratic, anti-hierarchical values, sensibility to a teacher’s charisma may initially be less effective in altering our lives. This openness to the advice of a teacher then is a cultural resource available in Nepal or Tibet, but not immediately accessible to many here.³⁴⁹

Aronson further elaborates on the roles of teachers in Asian culture,

³⁴⁸François Thibeault, “Are You Buddhist?: ‘Westerners’ in India Travelling on the Path of the Buddha,” paper presented at the Buddhism in Canada Conference at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, October 16, 2010.

³⁴⁹Harvey Aronson, *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground* (Boston: Shambala Publications, 2004), 11.

Religious authority and acceptance in the society are often gained through the spiritual attainment of the group's founder as manifested by supernatural powers of blessing, healing, or protecting its members. Furthermore, the offering of social services or conversions of believers through the founder's charisma adds legitimacy.³⁵⁰

Due to the characteristic that teachers are often revered for their transcendental qualities, such as the ability to heal the sick, they are commonly revered as living deities by their followers.

Certainly, the Christian tradition has its fair share of saints or holy persons who are revered amongst their followers for their ability to heal and perform miracles such as John of God in Brazil and Joseph Smith of the Latter Day Saints. However, there is more resistance among English-speaking visitors towards authority figures with too much influence. A large segment of visitors that I spoke to were raised Catholic, and claimed that they left their childhood faith in search of other faiths that emphasized a more egalitarian outlook.

Third, the idea of following a guru's every command conjures fears of being taken advantage of. For example, the tradition holds that Guru Marpa tested the forbearance of his disciple Milarepa, the famed 11th century yogi, by instructing him to build and demolish the same tower three times, a feat that required many years of hardship.³⁵¹ Frustrated by his guru's trials, Milarepa left to study with another teacher, only to return later and concede to Marpa's highest authority.³⁵² Eventually, Milarepa was deemed as having achieved awakening through his guru's skillful guidance. Stories such as these, which were intended to strengthen a student's faith in their guru's instruction, may raise suspicion or cynicism to potential converts. Especially in regards to sexual relationships and the donation of alms, newcomers are cautious of the teacher's use of his/her authority to make exaggerated claims and false statements on their enlightened status or metaphysical abilities for the sake of fame, money, and ego. Coupled with

³⁵⁰Irene Lin, "Journey to the Far West: Chinese Buddhism in America," *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans*, ed. David K. Yoo (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 134.

³⁵¹Mitchell, *Buddhism*, 164.

³⁵²*Ibid.*

the fact that gurus in Asian culture are often raised on a pedestal and revered as celebrities among their followers, this raises suspicion in the more conservative Canadian environment. For instance, Grandmaster Lu's arrival at the Taipei airport on November 15, 2013, resembled a celebrity's entrance.³⁵³ In addition to the three hundred person welcoming party, there was a press conference and a group of paparazzi, and his arrival was broadcasted nationally on two news networks.³⁵⁴ In his hometown of Redmond, WA, it is also common to see lines of people with money-filled red envelopes or *hong bao* eagerly waiting to pass them to Grandmaster Lu. Although Grandmaster Lu has stated that he does not want or need the red packets, these scenes are daunting sights for a new visitor.³⁵⁵

Despite the claims of guru authority in the doctrines of Vajrayana Buddhism, it is suggested that the Chinese-speaking followers do not follow the teachings of Grandmaster Lu based on the initial intention of adhering to or maintaining Vajrayana precepts at the onset of their conversion. In actuality, the feelings of reverence towards Grandmaster Lu by many of his followers stem from their desires for obtaining healings and blessings from him. Renee Cordsen, a dharma instructor in the True Buddha School, shares her encounters with misunderstandings about the guru-disciple relationship. According to Renee, who is a key volunteer in the publication and distribution of Grandmaster Lu's English works, she expresses that the True Buddha School is sometimes "perceived as a cult to outsiders" regarding the frenzy surrounding Grandmaster Lu.³⁵⁶ During my field observations on the birthday of Grandmaster Lu in Redmond in 2012, numerous disciples were witnessed presenting luxurious gifts to Grandmaster Lu, which he refused. Grandmaster Lu responded, "It's not necessary. There's no need to buy

³⁵³Data collected from field observation in Taichung, Taiwan on November 15, 2013.

³⁵⁴Data collected from field observation in Taichung, Taiwan on November 19, 2013. During the celebratory dinner with Sheng-yen Lu, a video presentation with the news clips and press conference was shown.

³⁵⁵Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 35.

³⁵⁶Renee Cordsen, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 22, 2013.

anything for me,” as he proceeded to walk away. Subsequently, the disciples pursued Grandmaster Lu and proceeded to physically place money-filled red envelopes into his pockets against his wishes. After numerous refusals by Grandmaster Lu, the disciples persisted until he conceded to accepting their alms. Grandmaster Lu has also written about such experiences,

Sometimes I am uncomfortable when people come up, in the presence of many others, to offer me the red envelopes whether secretly or openly. Like yesterday, when I was sitting there, I waved my hands and told everyone that it was not necessary to make offerings to me. What I meant was that offerings are only required for empowerment.³⁵⁷

It later became apparent that some disciples had anticipated a blessing in return for their offering because they gestured Grandmaster Lu to touch an area of pain on their body. One elderly lady pointed to her back while disclosing her ailments. Through Grandmaster Lu’s acceptance of the gifts, it was believed that he would take on the negative karma and pain of the individual.

Grandmaster Lu gave the following response to these requests, “Everything depends on chance and opportunities. In some cases, destiny is fixed, and I cannot do anything about this.”³⁵⁸ Renee explains,

It [True Buddha School] appears as a cult if you don’t believe in the supernatural or miracles. People regard it as evil. A cult is when people ask you to do things that are abnormal. Our teacher is only asking us to purify ourselves.³⁵⁹

Renee clarifies that the criticisms towards the organization in the past have been targeted towards the superficial aspects such as the frenetic behaviors of some followers, rather than the actual teachings of Grandmaster Lu.³⁶⁰

Renee further cites the suspicion of outsiders due to the history of cults in America. For instance, since the 16th century, the memories of the sale of indulgences and the abuse of power

³⁵⁷Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 35-36.

³⁵⁸Sheng-yen Lu, *Stories of Supreme Spiritual Responses* (Oakland: US Daden Culture, 2013), 115.

³⁵⁹Renee Cordsen, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 22, 2013.

³⁶⁰*Ibid.*

by some members of the Catholic clergy have left an imprint in the Euro-American conscious.³⁶¹ The suspicion was further exacerbated by highly publicized cases of alleged sexual abuse within some Catholic ministries, followed by the fear of cults in the latter half of the 20th Century such as the Jonestown massacre, for example.³⁶²

Due to the conflation of cult behaviors with religious institutions, guru-based organizations may have more obstacles to overcome in comparison to groups with less authoritative structures. Ajahn Tiradhamma Tiradhamma advocates a democratic style of management, in which decisions are collectively made by both lay and ordained members,

In my experience and observations, I think the centralized leadership model does not work very well in the West. . . I think that a safer and saner approach in the West is to . . . establish a community or Sangha-based model of management.³⁶³

The suspicions amongst the public also extend to the family members and friends of participants. For example, upon returning from a trip to the annual True Buddha ceremony in Redmond, Washington, Craig Mowat claimed that his best friend was concerned about the amount of money that he had offered to Lu.³⁶⁴ Mowat's friend was worried that he was misled into giving large sums of money to the organization. As a result, Mowat reassured his friend that the giving of red envelopes was entirely voluntary and that the amount he donated was no more than what he would place in a collecting plate at church.³⁶⁵ According to Mowat, the idea of making regular donations was an important form of support regardless of whether the proceeds went to a Christian church or a Buddhist temple.³⁶⁶ Only the manner and ritual in which the donations

³⁶¹See Michael S. Carter's "A 'Traiterous Religion': Indulgences and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in the Eighteenth-Century New England," *The Catholic Historical Review* 99 (2013): 52-77.

³⁶²Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, "Cults, Brainwashing, and Counter-Subversion," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 446 (1979): 78-79.

³⁶³Ajahn Tiradhammo, "The Challenge of Community," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, ed. by Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 249.

³⁶⁴Craig Mowat, interview by author, Calgary, AB, September 12, 2013.

³⁶⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶⁶*Ibid.*

were offered were different.

Eastern-based religious groups have also had their fair share of scandals, most notably the San Francisco Zen Centre wherein the abbot of the centre, Richard Baker, was charged with having affairs with his married students.³⁶⁷ As well, the Tibetan teacher Chogyam Trungpa admitted to having sexual relations with his disciples, and his disciple, Osel Tendzin, was accused of knowingly transmitting the HIV virus to his disciples through sexual contact.³⁶⁸ In 2010, the Hindu Swami Nithyananda was arrested “after failing to answer bail for criminal charges.”³⁶⁹ He was accused “after a video was released allegedly showing him in a compromising situation with a woman.”³⁷⁰ Though “forensic tests later found the video to be morphed,” the incident caused significant distress for the disciples of the swami.³⁷¹ Kripalu Maharaj, the head of the Radha Madhav Society, was also charged with “rape and indecent assault of a 22-year-old Guyanese woman.”³⁷² These examples show that the behaviors of religious leaders are under heightened scrutiny, and they demonstrate the public demand for the greater accountability of guru figures.

Fourth, the metaphysical claims of a leader do not appeal to potential visitors who are more interested in pursuing the philosophical teachings of Buddhism as a way of life because such claims may either be rejected as superstitions or regarded as hallucinations. It is also difficult for individuals to identify with metaphysical events unless they have also claimed to

³⁶⁷Sandra Bell, “Scandals in Emerging Western Buddhism,” in *Westward Dharma*, ed. Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 235.

³⁶⁸Bell, “Scandals in Emerging Western Buddhism,” 233-234.

³⁶⁹“Swami Nityanand Dies of Cancer in Nadiad,” *Bilkul: E-Newspaper of Gujarat*, April 22, 2013, <http://bilkulonline.com/gujarat-news/general-news/2530-swami-nityanand-dies-of-cancer-in-nadiad> (accessed February 3, 2014).

³⁷⁰“Fraud Babas Masquerading as Gurus,” *The Sunday Indian*, date unavailable, <http://www.thesundayindian.com/en/photo-albums/387/offset/4/> (accessed February 3, 2014).

³⁷¹“Nithyananda Video: Ranjitha Dons Saffron, Now Ma Anandmayi,” *The Times of India*, December 28, 2013, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/topic/Swami-Nithyananda-Paramananda> (accessed February 3, 2014).

³⁷²“Another Godman Mired in Controversy,” *Hindustan Times*, March 5, 2010, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/another-godman-mired-in-controversy/article1-515288.aspx> (accessed February 3, 2014).

experience similar events. In order for individuals to relate to the teacher, their spiritual experiences must intersect. Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe refer to such events as “primal experiences,” which include “dreams, visions, voices, spiritual healings, a sense of presence, notions of destiny, sightings of ghosts, inexplicable spiritual phenomena, and other ‘occult’ events.”³⁷³ If the primal experiences do not intersect with the ideology of the organization, then such experiences are “simply unorganized material. . . . they do not lead to any specific destination.”³⁷⁴ Alternately, such experiences are regarded as abnormal by “medical and psychiatric establishments,” which “classify the people who have them as disturbed or mentally ill.”³⁷⁵ Due to this stigma, some members of the True Buddha Translation Team were apprehensive about publishing books concerning the spirit world and miraculous stories, which appealed to many Chinese members, for fear that this would turn readers who were seeking philosophical content away.³⁷⁶ As a result, *The Aura of Wisdom* and *Highest Yoga Tantra and Mahamudra* were published to appeal to the Western readers’ appetite, which present a systematic and philosophical presentation of the Tantric texts.

Fifth, among those who implicitly accepted the idea of the guru’s role, they claimed to share a personal connection with Grandmaster Lu. Mike Rainey, a Caucasian disciple who works in the information technology field shares, “I have a connection with Grandmaster Lu that’s in my heart and mind, and I don’t want to know about the other stuff [schools] because that clouds my thinking.”³⁷⁷ When respondents were asked to elaborate on their personal connection, they described a feeling of knowing and familiarity. Rainey responds,

³⁷³Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, *Understanding Cults and New Religions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 60.

³⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 72.

³⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 60.

³⁷⁶This observation is based on my volunteer work and communication with the members of the translation team.

³⁷⁷Mike Rainey, interview by author, Calgary, AB, February 20, 2013.

I ask myself that question and I don't know. All I know is that it feels right. I feel like I connect with Grandmaster with certain ways. Even though I've only met him on a couple of occasions, that doesn't matter. That spiritual connection is there so I trust that and I go with that.³⁷⁸

When Robert Rosinski of Edmonton was asked about his reasons for joining the True Buddha School, he responded,

I had a dream about a monk, and I went to every Buddhist temple in town searching for this monk. When I discovered the Chin Yin Temple [Edmonton branch of the True Buddha School], I found the monk [Grandmaster Lu] in my dream.³⁷⁹

Stories such as those recounted by Mike and Robert were a common theme among interview responses, including both Chinese and English-speaking regular participants.

In her interviews with members of the Toronto branch, Tannie Liu also had similar findings about the deep connection that members shared with Grandmaster Lu.³⁸⁰ She reports, "Most people who join the TBS [True Buddha School] reported a strong feeling of a past-life karma with Master Lu that led them to join the group."³⁸¹ Regarding confessions of "profound religious experiences," Liu argued that these experiences were a unique feature of the True Buddha School in comparison to other Chinese Buddhist groups in Toronto.³⁸² She provides the following anecdote,

Buddhist masters do not talk about other states of consciousness. . . . The common practice among Buddhist groups is to treat them as hallucinations. . . . Taking the lead from Master Lu, most of the TBS members do not find it a 'taboo' to talk about their own religious experience. Rather they are willing to share their experiences in order to facilitate the understanding of the Spirit World through their collective effort.³⁸³

According to Liu's observations, Grandmaster Lu's embracement of other-worldly experiences fostered an open environment for others to come forth with their encounters. In some cases, these

³⁷⁸Mike Rainey, interview by author, Calgary, AB, February 20, 2013.

³⁷⁹Robert Rosinski, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 23, 2013.

³⁸⁰Tannie Liu, "Globalization and Chinese Buddhism: The Canadian Experience" (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2005), 220.

³⁸¹Ibid.

³⁸²Ibid., 223.

³⁸³Liu, "Globalization and Chinese Buddhism," 223.

experiences allowed followers to “sustain them in their work, sometimes even in face of ridicule from other Buddhist schools.”³⁸⁴ Alternately, the members’ enthusiasm for sharing personal mystical encounters is also based on the desire to reinforce the validity and authenticity of the True Buddha School’s dharma power.

There are also regular participants who have not formally become members and who know very little about Grandmaster Lu and the organization. In these cases, the aversion to a guru’s authority had no effect on their participation. These individuals expressed that the main reason for their participation was the formation of connections with those who shared the same values for compassion and empathy, for instance. These individuals also enjoyed the social aspect of engaging in deeper dialogues about Buddhist issues.³⁸⁵

Due to the challenges posed by the notions of guru devotion in Vajrayana Buddhism, successful Vajrayana organizations that have large numbers of Western converts such as the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) founded by Kelsang Gyatso, adopt language that is sensitive to Western cultural assumptions. For instance, the word “spiritual guide” is used in place of the word “guru” in sermons, and the divine characteristics of Kelsang Gyatso are downplayed to public audiences, though members regard him as a living Buddha in private.³⁸⁶

3) Contrasting Notions of Karma and the Chinese Emphasis on Ritual Propriety

There is a large discrepancy between the notion of karma in popular culture and the understanding of karma in the True Buddha School’s community that are related to the perceived need for formal practice and attendance. Karma, which literally means “action,” is more than a system of rewards and punishments. It refers to both the healthy and unhealthy conditions that

³⁸⁴Liu, “Globalization and Chinese Buddhism,” 221.

³⁸⁵Based on responses collected from in-depth interviews.

³⁸⁶Based on observations and conversations with the members of the Calgary branch of the New Kadampa Tradition from April 17 to 19, 2015.

are ultimately conducive or non-conducive to the attainment of Nirvana.³⁸⁷ In other words, karma is “the resulting effect of one’s conscious character,” which is a reflection of “how one ultimately chooses to live.”³⁸⁸ While karma serves as an incentive for some Chinese-speaking members to attend services regularly, the concept has minimal influence on the decision of English-speaking visitors to participate. In addition, the importance of upholding ritual propriety in Chinese culture also serves as an impetus for those in the wider ethnic community to visit the temple regularly. Because the main incentives for engaging in deeper participation by the Pai Yuin Temple are not considered to be worthwhile factors for the English-speaking visitors, the incentives will not be a source of attraction to those outside the ethnic community.

Based on numerous dharma lectures given by the various masters and nuns of the Pai Yuin Temple, karma was repeatedly used as the motivation for the audience to reflect on their own actions, to take personal accountability for their attitudes and actions, and to serve as an impetus for changing an individual’s behavior. In turn, the resulting changes were believed to enable an individual to transform negative or unhappy situations in life into favorable situations. Temple participation was encouraged by the clergy as one of the main methods for learning healthy habits and for making positive changes in one’s life, which offered four main benefits.³⁸⁹ First, the collective chanting power of participants during ceremonies was believed to aid in increasing the focus and concentration of individuals. Through regular participation, the clergy claim that individuals were able to learn the proper procedures or *sadhanas* through the clergy and the other members, since they could hear the pronunciation of mantras and see the *mudras* or hand gestures. Grandmaster Lu comments that “it is so difficult for cultivators to achieve any

³⁸⁷Mitchell, *Buddhism*, 43.

³⁸⁸Ibid.

³⁸⁹Based on a summary of attended dharma lectures from January 2013 to January 2014.

response from their cultivation,” without the proper “pronunciation of mantras.”³⁹⁰ Thus, formal temple participation was perceived as a source for encouraging mutual learning through peer tutoring and observation.

Second, the monks and nuns serve as a source for the congregation to generate the habit of giving and receiving, referred to as a “field of merit.”³⁹¹ By giving *dana* in the form of food or money to the clergy and the congregation, individuals could regularly experience the joy of giving and thus, develop a routine of giving beyond the temple’s doors.

Third, by volunteering at the temple, an individual’s actions could benefit the entire congregation. In his talk, Master Lotus Ming shared the following joke,

Somebody once said that there is greater merit in washing dishes at the temple, as opposed to washing dishes at home. There is some truth in this statement. When you wash the dishes at home, you create a good connection with your husband or wife. But when you wash the dishes at the temple, you create a good connection with everyone here.³⁹²

Subsequently, volunteer work was believed to aid in fostering the mutual feelings of joy and gratitude between individuals, in addition to creating positive affinities with others.

Fourth, by registering one’s friends, family, and deceased ancestors in blessing ceremonies, the registrants believed that they could also receive the benefits or merits accrued from the collective force of the congregation. For instance, large ceremonies are conducted each month with the four primary purposes of 1) eradicating calamities and misfortunes, 2) fostering harmony in relationships, 3) increasing resources, and 4) praying for wish fulfillment. Prior to the ceremony, visitors and members fill out their names, addresses, birth dates, and wishes on a registration form, along with a voluntary donation. During the ceremony, the registration forms

³⁹⁰Lu, *Highest Yoga Tantra and Mahamudra*, 72.

³⁹¹In fact, the gold stripes on the clergy’s robes resemble the patches of paddy fields to symbolize their role as a field of merit.

³⁹²Based on a dharma lecture given by Master Lotus Ming at the Pai Yui Temple, Calgary, AB, September, 2013.

are then blessed with a vajra sceptre and bell, which are ritual instruments, by the clergy as well as through the combined chanting of the congregation. The forms are later burned. It is believed that the dead can achieve a better rebirth in the Pure Land and the prayers of the living can be fulfilled.³⁹³ While the notion of filling out a registration form along with an accompanying donation is common in Chinese temple ceremonies, this practice along with other ceremonial rites may appear to be strange and perhaps unnecessary to English-speaking participants. Such customs may be perceived as reinforcing hierarchy and the distance between lay followers and religious specialists. According to the sermons of the clergy, members were encouraged to participate regularly in the temple's activities because the temple served as the training grounds to foster healthy changes in an individual's life. Though the temple is not viewed as the exclusive place to express the virtues of compassion or loving-kindness, for instance, it was promoted as an ideal environment to initiate and carry out these expressions because the congregation could work collectively and apply these virtues towards the same goal of liberation.

In popular culture, however, karma is a passive notion. Karma is tacitly used to express a desire for retribution upon an individual's opponents as well as expressing an expectation of rewards for good deeds. While the tradition holds that karma is responsible for an individual's present conditions in life, the tradition is primarily concerned with karma in the form of mental states, because it is considered to be more beneficial to an individual and others to sever the unhealthy thought patterns before they manifest into negative actions such as stealing or killing, for example. However, it is suggested that the perception of karma in popular Western culture as an inactive system of external gains and losses, does not lend to the motivation or sense of urgency for individuals to create deeper changes in their life through formal practice or

³⁹³Based on field observations of blessing ceremonies conducted at the Pai Yuin Temple. At the end of each ceremony, the presiding reverend announces the collective wishes of the congregation aloud during a step known as the "Dedication of Merit."

community involvement.

There are also many rituals in the True Buddha School that incorporate the Chinese practice of ancestor veneration, which are not part of the cultural repertoire of the wider community. These rituals include: the registration of the deceased in dharma ceremonies, chanting at the True Buddha School's cemetery on Tomb Sweeping Day or *qing ming*, making regular food offerings and dedicating the merits to the deceased, and the burning of incense, afterlife money, paper lotuses, paper boats, and other usable objects for the ancestors. According to the Records of Ritual or *Liji*, a Confucian text compiled in 50 BCE, "ancestors were to be visualized, nourished, and thus made a living presence in the quotidian life of their families."³⁹⁴ Upon dying, individuals became a ghost in the netherworld, and if they had accumulated a large enough store of merit, they could become a local earth god (*tudi gong*) or a god in the heavenly realms.

The netherworld and heavens mirrored life in the human realm, where ancestors carried out their daily lives in the same fashion as their former lives.³⁹⁵ Ancestors also had occupations in which promotions and demotions could be dispensed based on job performances. They could also be "transferred to more attractive afterlife destinations" as a reward, and it was the responsibility of the living descendants to aid in this transition towards a better afterlife.³⁹⁶ In turn, the fortunes and blessings of the ancestors would be passed onto the living descendants.³⁹⁷ Examples of blessings include job promotions, conceiving a child, a greater lifespan, good health, and harmony in the family.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁴Stephen Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety: Daoism and the Birth of Rebirth in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 37.

³⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 36.

³⁹⁶*Ibid.*

³⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 44-45.

³⁹⁸Based on explanations provided by the clergy of the PYT.

When the ancestors were forgotten and the ritual observances were not carried out, then the grief and misfortune of the ancestors were believed to affect the lives of the descendants with the reverse affects, such as the occurrence of miscarriages, contracting illnesses, and discordance in the family. In this way, the living descendants carried the emotional parcels of anxiety and uneasiness in terms of upholding ritual propriety.³⁹⁹ The pressure to maintain good relations with the ancestors were not always based on fears of repercussions, however. By maintaining the memory of ascendants, the living could also honor and pay gratitude to them. Ancestors communicated with the living either through a medium or by appearing directly in dreams, to inform the living of their status quo and needs in the other realm.

A survey of Grandmaster Lu's works such as *Encounters with the World of Spirits* and *Stories of Supreme Spiritual Responses*, reveal that one of the themes of his writings involve his claimed ability to communicate messages to the spirit world on behalf of the living, and vice-versa. The communication involved matters such as incurable illnesses, grievances, mitigation of future misfortunes, and ancestors that were stuck in unfavorable realms.

With the arbitration of Grandmaster Lu, followers believed that order and harmony were restored among both the living and the deceased. For instance, in his *The Power of Mantra*, Grandmaster Lu passed on a message to a man from his departed mother about the latter's unfulfilled vow of constructing a roadway for pilgrimages.⁴⁰⁰ Due to dire financial circumstances, however, he was unable to fulfill his mother's vow. Subsequently, Grandmaster Lu taught him to chant the Mantra of the *Vasudhara Dharani*.⁴⁰¹ After chanting the mantra for a year, the departed mother appeared in her son's dream and instructed him to purchase a specific

³⁹⁹Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety*, 51.

⁴⁰⁰Sheng-yen Lu, *The Power of Mantra* (Oakland: US Daden Culture, 2010) 97-98.

⁴⁰¹*Ibid.*, 99.

parcel of land.⁴⁰² Shortly after, a friend offered to sell him a piece of land that was identical to the one seen in his dreams.⁴⁰³ It was discovered, soon after purchasing the land, that there was a mineral spring on the premise.⁴⁰⁴ Subsequently, he built a bottled water factory there and became very wealthy.⁴⁰⁵ As a result, he was able to complete his mother's vow.⁴⁰⁶ Stories such as these weave the themes of the spirit world, the concerns of the living, the need for formal practice, and the role of Grandmaster Lu's intervention together, which form the fabric of the True Buddha School's cosmology.

It is argued that a main factor of success of True Buddha School in gaining adherents in the Chinese community is based on its ability to provide an avenue for families to carry out the ancestral rites, where other Buddhist organizations might dismiss these practices as being superstitious components of Chinese popular religion. It is further asserted that Grandmaster Lu's ability to marry the concerns of a Chinese audience for propitiating the spirit world with the Buddhist promise of rebirth in the Pure Land has attracted a wide membership base. The influence of his writings is especially felt in Asian regions that are influenced by Confucian values and that have not been affected by the communist regulation on religious activities, based on the fact that regions such as Taiwan, Malaysia, and Hong Kong have the highest membership numbers within the True Buddha School.⁴⁰⁷

While the memories of deceased family members are certainly an inherent aspect of the secular mourning process in North America, there is no sense of fear or anxiety that the grief and misfortunes of the deceased in an afterlife are inherited by the living descendants. In contrast, the

⁴⁰²Lu, *The Power of Mantra*, 101.

⁴⁰³*Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁰⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷Membership data collected from an interview with Master Lotus Ning (the successor of Grandmaster Lu) in Redmond, WA, on August 22, 2013.

departed are memorialized and commemorated by showcasing material or intangible objects to the public such as plaques, park benches, monuments, charitable donations, and sponsorships, as mentioned in Chapter Four. The scholar Erika Doss further explains that the memories of the departed are maintained by interacting with these objects such as visiting a monument or sitting on a park bench.⁴⁰⁸ In turn, “these material fragments flood the memories of their visitors and trigger personal associations,” and the memory of the departed become alive again.⁴⁰⁹ There are, however, no suppositions that the deceased require continual nourishment and appeasement from their descendants in the form of food or other objects in secular notions of grieving in North America. Subsequently, the catalyst for the Chinese community to make return visits to the temple is wholly different than the catalyst for the English-speaking audience. The factors of success in the True Buddha School in the ethnic community are also its Achilles heel in the English-speaking community because some of their practices are oriented towards a single ethnic group. According to Master Lotus Wen’s experiences, Chinese-speaking visitors typically have pre-conceived beliefs about “the idea of blessings” and view the “Buddha as a higher being,” in addition to making donations regularly.⁴¹⁰ As a result, she was able to encourage a portion of the visitors from the Chinese community to participate regularly in formal activities, many of whom became formal members later.⁴¹¹ She claimed that the English-speaking visitors, however, were not as receptive to her encouragement.⁴¹²

It is suggested that the responsibility lies with the local clergy and members in recognizing the preferences and needs of their local English-speaking audiences, and to market

⁴⁰⁸Erika Doss, “Spontaneous Memorials and Contemporary Modes of Mourning in America,” *Material Religion* 2 (2006): 300.

⁴⁰⁹Doss, “Spontaneous Memorials,” 300.

⁴¹⁰Master Lotus Wen, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 11, 2014.

⁴¹¹Ibid.

⁴¹²Ibid.

those benefits in a way that is meaningful to those cosmologies. Grandmaster Lu has expressed, “Due to communication problems both in speech and in writing, I have not converted as many disciples as I had liked.”⁴¹³ Because Grandmaster Lu’s works and lectures cover a wide breadth of topics, including subjects such as philosophy, scriptural exposition, meditation techniques, inspirational or miracle stories, poetry, travel memoirs, folk tales, and autobiographies, there is a large pool of resources that members can draw from to emphasize other aspects of Grandmaster Lu’s teachings to a broader audience.

4) Reasons for Learning about Buddhism

Due to the fact that literature and information about Buddhism is widely accessible on the internet, at local bookstores, through film, or in University classes, it is suggested that the need for a deeper and more engaged understanding from Buddhist clergy and formal participation is not widely viewed as essential or necessary to popular audiences. The encounter with Buddhism in the West occurs widely through literature or popular culture. Moreover, the publications that are carried on the shelves of North American bookstores are primarily written by Western converts for American audiences or by famous figures such as the Dalai Lama or Thich Nhat Hanh who have adjusted their messages to the preferences of their audiences. Catchy titles include Robin Sharma’s *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* and Stephen Batchelor’s *Buddhism Without Beliefs*.⁴¹⁴ These sources of learning offer the convenient access to Buddhist philosophy without the need for translators or the added effort of making sense of the ethnic presentations of Buddhism.

Additionally, scholars such as Thomas Tweed have claimed that the incentives for reading Buddhist literature stem from a distant curiosity, in regards to the passive interest in the

⁴¹³Lu, *A Collection of Treasure Remarks*, 176.

⁴¹⁴See Robin Sharma, *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999) and Stephen Batchelor, *Buddhism Without Beliefs* (New York: Riverhead, 1997).

tradition. Tweed refers to these individuals as Buddhist sympathizers and night-stand Buddhists.

Sympathizers refer to “those who have some sympathy for a religion but do not embrace it exclusively or fully.”⁴¹⁵ He describes their characteristics,

They might practice *zazen* [seated meditation], subscribe to a Buddhist periodical, or read books about the tradition. They might attend lectures at the local university. They might visit a Buddhist center’s web page or participate in an online Buddhist discussion group. They might self-consciously decorate their homes with Buddhist artifacts.⁴¹⁶

Night-stand Buddhists are identified as

Those who might place a how-to book on Buddhist meditation on the night-stand . . . and read it before they fall to sleep, and then rise the next morning to practice, however imperfectly or ambivalently, what they learned the night before.⁴¹⁷

While Tweed offers insights into the inclinations of some individuals, the term sympathizer suggests a feeling of detached empathy, which does not represent the enthusiasm and zeal of some readers. Sympathy is the shared feeling for another person’s experience. Sympathy may arise upon reading a newspaper column about a natural disaster that affects the lives of thousands. Sympathy is passive. However, the act of going out to select, buy, and read through a copy requires both effort and some degree of inquisitiveness or yearning. Thus, it is suggested that the term ‘Buddhist Applauders’ may better reflect those who appreciate certain aspects of Buddhist teachings and who incorporate some form of those teachings in their worldviews or practices.

A survey of the current selection of Buddhist books on the market indicate that the Western appetite for Buddhist teachings stem from a desire for self-help advice. Such titles include Tai Sheridan’s *Zen Prayers for Repairing Your Life*, the Dalai Lama’s *Art of Happiness*, and Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s *The Door to Satisfaction: The Heart Advice of a Tibetan Buddhist*

⁴¹⁵Tweed, “Night-stand Buddhists,” 20.

⁴¹⁶*Ibid.*, 21.

⁴¹⁷*Ibid.*

Master, which offer to promote some of the following benefits:

. . . [achieve] intimacy with the ground of Being, making yourself whole through honest self-reflection, clarifying your deepest spiritual intentions, wishing for the welfare of the world, and affirming the essential goodness of people and life.⁴¹⁸

These books present the Buddhist tradition in a relatable language that appeal to the readers' desires for practical advice without the complication of technical Buddhist terms.

It is also reiterated, as discussed earlier, that the ambivalence of identifying as a Buddhist stems from the position of an individual's values for openness and ecumenity, as opposed to a radical departure of an individual's cosmology from Buddhism, at least for some individuals. Robert Rosinki of the True Buddha School states, "You don't need to be a Buddhist to be a Buddhist."⁴¹⁹ Due to these values for openness, it is suggested that participation in non-denominational groups may be more popular among Western audiences.⁴²⁰ Though non-denominational groups typically have fewer members than the Asian groups, James Coleman claims that such groups represent the fastest growing organizations within the Buddhist tradition.⁴²¹ Coleman maintains that an attractive feature about non-sectarian gatherings is "the idea of learning from all Buddhist (and even non-Buddhist) traditions," which is deemed "more attractive than following a single approach."⁴²²

The convenient methods of accessing the tradition through the internet and literature also point to the trend that Western audiences have been learning about the tradition and dabbling in meditation in the comforts of their own home. While interviews with visitors revealed that they practiced meditation occasionally at home, meditation was not part of a daily regime.

⁴¹⁸See back cover of Tai Sheridan, *Zen Prayers for Repairing Your Life* (Kentwood: Smashworks, 2012).

⁴¹⁹Robert Rosinski, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 23, 2013.

⁴²⁰James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (Berkeley: Oxford University Press, 2002), 114.

⁴²¹*Ibid.*

⁴²²*Ibid.*

Nonetheless, it is suggested that Buddhist practice in the West is largely a personal, private, and intimate experience. Jared Rowell claimed that prior to his visit to the Pai Yuin Temple, he studied the *Dhammapada* for many years and practiced meditation on his own.⁴²³ He comments,

I've always had philosophical questions about "what is enlightenment?" . . . By reading the *Dhammapada*, it helped me to understand the suffering that was going on around me. It allowed me to find myself, and be more comfortable with myself. I was really able to find happiness.⁴²⁴

Jared, who is currently an Education student at the University of Calgary, did not feel a compelling need to participate in formal Buddhist activities until circumstances in his life changed, which made him more open to participating in a group setting.

The popularity of Eastern religious studies courses in Universities also attests to the Western appetite for learning about Buddhism. For example, there are an estimated 320 and 815 students that are enrolled annually at Mount Royal University and the University of Calgary respectively, in Eastern religious studies courses involving the study of Buddhism.⁴²⁵ University classrooms allow for an exclusively intellectual and democratic discussion that is not typically found in Asian Buddhist temples, where the teaching style of clergy is typically more authoritative and based less on round table discussions. In an academic setting, however, students can engage in an open environment without worrying about offending clergy or members with the nature of their questions or comments.

From 2011 to 2013, over three hundred students from Mount Royal University toured the Pai Yuin Temple. Among them, three students or 1% returned on a second occasion to participate in the temple's group meditation. This statistic suggests that visitors are more

⁴²³a) The *Dhammapada* comprises a collection of the historical Buddha's sayings in the form of verses.

b) Jared Rowell, interview by Author, Calgary, AB, on April 6, 2013.

⁴²⁴Ibid.

⁴²⁵This estimate is based on the maximum enrolled capacity of eighteen total annual sections of introductory and senior level courses at each university. Introductory and senior courses have a maximum capacity of 40 and 30 students respectively at Mount Royal University, and a maximum capacity of 140 and 40 students at the University of Calgary.

interested in the theoretical aspects of Buddhism rather than the participation in the rituals. Among the three students, one of them formally became a member but the individual stopped attending services shortly after joining. Follow-up correspondence revealed that time commitment factors affected the individual's attendance. Subsequently, the individual had setup a personal shrine and practiced meditation at home. Despite the students' interest and curiosity, there also appeared to be an ambivalence and anxiety about being in the formal setting of the temple. A field trip participant commented about her feelings of intimidation, "Although I know that the temple is open to the public, I would not come here on my own. I would feel too nervous about doing something wrong or offending someone."⁴²⁶ Due to responses such as these, ethnic Buddhist temples need to strategize ways to reduce the anxieties and intimidation felt by visitors.

On the other hand, interest in the Buddhist tradition is not solely based on the rational and self-help aspects of the teachings. Clark discusses the following attributes of the new "spiritual but not religious" movement:

Their appeal is in their seeming practicality and accessibility, particularly in the therapeutic and commercial realms. Spirituality is often articulated as a lifestyle choice, adopted and signified through the purchase of such things as votive candles, weekend retreats, esoteric and self-help literature, and angel lapel pins.⁴²⁷

It is not uncommon to find statues of the Laughing Buddha, Buddha heads, singing bowls or other Buddhist-related items at local gifts shops or home decoration stores. Mowat comments about the charm of buying these objects, "When you purchase an item in the store, you own that object and you're not obligated to anyone. However, in a temple setting, there is a sense of obligation or attachment."⁴²⁸ The appeal for these curios highlight the feedback received from more than half of the non-Chinese visitors to the Pai Yuin Temple. These visitors went to the Pai

⁴²⁶Based on feedback received at the Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, November 28, 2013.

⁴²⁷Clark, *From Angels to Aliens*, 9.

⁴²⁸Craig Mowat, interview by author, Calgary, AB, September 12, 2013.

Yuin Temple simply because they liked and appreciated the images, statues, and architecture. They observed the prayers of the monks and burned incense because they had not seen or done those things before. In these cases, it would be optimistic to presume that these visitors were potential converts.

Henry Wolf, a Caucasian member and teaching assistant of the True Buddha School's Las Vegas branch, offers an alternate understanding for the lack of temple participation in the West. Based on his experiences of living and working in Asia, Henry believes that the lack of "cultural support for Buddhism" in North America affects the behaviors and perceptions of potential converts. He exclaims,

Everything is associated with Christianity [in America]. There's nothing to see. There's no physical representation anywhere. In Taiwan, everything you see supports Buddhism. It supports the existence of a spiritual world. You see statues everywhere. You see people burning money. It's an unconscious factor.⁴²⁹

Henry comments suggest that individuals are not *choosing* to practice at home by themselves. Rather, some are practicing independently because they are not aware of the options available, in terms of community involvement. Henry states, "They're not aware of it and they're not aware that they're making their choice [not to participate] based on what's visible."⁴³⁰ Henry's assertions are reflected in the comments of one visitor who confessed, "I've driven by this place many times before but I never knew it was a Buddhist temple. I thought it was a Chinese restaurant!"⁴³¹ Similarly, Mike a regular Caucasian member adds, "I think there are a lot of people that would really enjoy this practice but they just don't know about it."⁴³² According to Mike, who balances a busy schedule at work, making time for his grandchildren, and attending temple activities, believes that the key to raising attendance rates lies in getting "the word

⁴²⁹Henry Wolf, interview by author, Taichung, Taiwan, November 19, 2013.

⁴³⁰Ibid.

⁴³¹Based on visitor feedback at the Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, January 15, 2013.

⁴³²Mike Rainey, interview by author, Calgary, AB, February 20, 2013.

out.”⁴³³ In this regard, the lack of awareness based on visual perception is a pragmatic factor that affects temple participation.

5) Psycho-Therapeutic Healing

An unexpected finding in the research was the desire among some visitors and participants to turn to Buddhist techniques for attaining physical and psycho-emotional healing. These visitors were looking for methods that yielded quick and noticeable results. In particular, they were interested in the sensations yielded from Vajrayana meditation. While meditation is an important aspect of all branches of Buddhism, Vajrayana techniques focus on maintaining the health of the physical body through breathing and visualization techniques, in addition to yoga exercises and poses. Grandmaster Lu emphasizes,

If a practitioner of Mahamudra increases their spiritual strength, yet their physical body is weak, then this results in an imbalance. Exercising with these techniques contributes to the development of balance in the body, mind and spirit.⁴³⁴

Vajrayana adopts the view of a subtle body system, in which the energy harvested from meditation is believed to affect the functions of the physical body. According to this system, the body has seven major chakras or energy centers that are vertically aligned and connected by channels that run up and down the body. The relationship between the physical and subtle body is believed to be mutual, and hence blockages in the channels and chakras or energy centers lead to physical illnesses. At the same time, painful emotions or experiences are regarded as the cause of blockages, which are considered to lead to the lack of emotional stability. By concentrating the mind, performing deep breathing exercises, and adopting visualization techniques, practitioners believe that they can direct the life force inherent in their breath to other parts of the

⁴³³Mike Rainey, interview by author, Calgary, AB, February 20, 2013.

⁴³⁴Lu, *Highest Yoga Tantra and Mahamudra*, 77.

body to open up the psychic blockages.⁴³⁵ Through daily meditation, these practices are supposed to contribute to the positive mental and physical health of those who practice them, though the full effects of the practices may not be felt until several months later, depending on the efforts and proper techniques utilized by an individual.

An alternate form of healing known as Reiki, however, has become popular in recent times, which offers the direct treatment of the chakras without lengthy months or years of meditation. Though this form of healing is attributed to the Japanese Buddhist monk Kukai (774–835), Dr. Mikao Usui (1865–1926) is known for popularizing the practice in Japan in the early 20th Century.⁴³⁶ It was later introduced into the United States in 1937 through his disciples.⁴³⁷ In the last decade, the practice of Reiki or “life energy” healing has become more common and popular. This form of healing, which draws from Vajrayana Buddhist practices became secularized into a Western Reiki form that promises quick results by placing the hands above the chakra points of the body, and by drawing symbols in the palms to aim healing energy towards the affected areas of an individual’s body and mind.⁴³⁸ In fact, there are dozens of holistic therapy centres in Calgary that offer Reiki healing at an average rate of \$80/hour, in addition to workshops that enable one to become a Reiki master. Mount Royal University, for instance, offers certificates in Reiki and provides training from the beginner to the advanced stages of practice.⁴³⁹ There are also local branches of international-based groups such as the Universal Energy Movement, an organization that draws from the teachings of Luong Minh

⁴³⁵Lu, *Highest Yoga Tantra and Mahamudra*, 30-31.

⁴³⁶Jane Stewart Townsend, “Temari Reiki: A New Hands-off Approach to Traditional Reiki.” *International Journal of Nursing Practice* 19 (2013): 35.

⁴³⁷Townsend, “Tamari Reiki,” 35.

⁴³⁸*Ibid.*

⁴³⁹*Mount Royal University Continuing Education Calendar Winter 2014* (Calgary: Mount Royal University Press, 2014), 44.

Dang (1942-2007) that similarly claim to offer subtle-body healing.⁴⁴⁰ Visitors can receive free treatments from trained members. In this type of treatment, multiple members place their hands on a patient's body, while concentrating healing energy to a patient's afflicted areas of pain.⁴⁴¹

Feedback from visitors suggests that Buddhist temples may be competing with these energy healing groups that claim to yield instantaneous results. For example, a visitor attended the temple's services regularly for two months but later stopped her participation. In later correspondences, she confessed that she had joined an energy healing group. The treatment provided by the undisclosed group appealed to her because she could feel the immediate sensations on her chakra points. Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe claim, "It is very significant that most members of new religions. . . have participated in more than one – and sometimes more than a dozen – different kinds of these therapies and practices."⁴⁴² The appeal of holistic therapies lies in their "seemingly greater affinity to science."⁴⁴³

In regards to the reception of such practices by the True Buddha School, Grandmaster Lu's response to the method of Qi Gong, a Chinese-based exercise that combines physical movements with the direction of one's breath to parts of the body, suggests the organization's openness towards holistic practices. Grandmaster Lu expresses, "It is acceptable to learn Chi Kung [alternate spelling for Qi Gong] because it helps to strengthen one's chi and health."⁴⁴⁴ Grandmaster Lu, however, advocates that the therapies should also be practiced alongside the goal of Liberation. He expresses,

⁴⁴⁰Jean-François Mayer, "Healing for the Millenium: Master Dang and Spiritual Human Yoga," paper presented at the 4th Conference of the Center for Millenial Studies at Boston University, November 1999, <http://www.cesnur.org/testi/SHY.htm> (accessed January 31, 2014).

⁴⁴¹In contrast to Reiki where the hands do not physically touch the body, the healing conducted by the Universal Energy Movement involves touch. Based on field observations at the Universal Energy Movement branch in Calgary.

⁴⁴²Hexham and Poewe, *Understanding Cults*, 49.

⁴⁴³*Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁴⁴Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 32.

If one devotes oneself principally to the study of the human aura as a healing practice, and disregards the practice of the Buddhadharma. . . one becomes an expert in healing and not in Buddhist practice and cannot transcend life and death.⁴⁴⁵

According to Master Lotus Wen, English-speaking visitors placed a strong emphasis on feelings and sensations as an important or memorable part of their temple experience. During the field observation period, ten participants also claimed to feel the sensations of light or “good energy” after attending the formal meditations conducted by the temple. They reported feeling “lighter” or more “purified,” which led to a feeling of calm for the remainder of their day. Marty Hansen recalls,

I found the routine of the meditation to be quite confusing and complex but adversely, I was amazed at how light, balanced, and how happy I felt for the remainder of the day. The styles of meditation that I’ve used have not been able to achieve the same lightness.⁴⁴⁶

Feelings such as these were particularly strong during larger monthly services, which are attended by a hundred people on average.

Where language barriers and the length of formal ceremonies pose a hindrance to regular attendance, the appeal or need to experience healing energy and other sensations was an important avenue for English-speaking participants to cross over language and cultural barriers.⁴⁴⁷ While such sensations were regarded as positive experiences, they were not worthwhile enough factors to result in regular visits since the observed participants did not return the following weeks and months. In other cases, attendance stopped completely when they no longer experienced feelings and sensations. Master Lotus Zhe of New York recalls, “People didn’t get excited anymore when they didn’t experience a spiritual encounter, so they left. They

⁴⁴⁵Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 32.

⁴⁴⁶Marty Hansen, interview by author, Calgary, AB, March 26, 2013.

⁴⁴⁷These factors will be examined in Chapter Seven of the dissertation.

were bored.”⁴⁴⁸ Robert, a Caucasian who conducts the weekly English group meditations at the True Buddha School’s Edmonton branch recalls,

A lot of people come in looking for a quick fix. They might have family problems at home and they want an immediate solution . . . an empowerment to fix their problems. They don’t realize that it’s a lot of work to sit down and cultivate for an hour a day. Without that commitment, they don’t make progress and become discouraged.⁴⁴⁹

Follow-up feedback with some participants, coupled with their sporadic attendance of activities at the Pai Yuin Temple two to three times a year, also suggests that the participants that had dabbled with the practices of other groups were likely not full-fledged members of the other groups. Thus, the degree of competitiveness between Buddhist organizations and other holistic therapies is challenged by reluctance towards formal membership, which is discussed in Chapter Seven.

6) Preferences for Iconoclastic and Non-Denominational Organizations

Despite the fact that every branch of Buddhism is represented in North America, Buddhism has not shed its connection with the Zen school within the psyche of popular culture. The representation of Zen in the West is largely attributed to the influence of D.T. Suzuki, who promoted the Zen school at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.⁴⁵⁰ Suzuki is also known for authoring twenty volumes on the Zen teachings, in addition to a long teaching career in the field.⁴⁵¹ Because the iconoclastic teachings of the Zen school have served as an ideal or picture perfect model of Buddhism in the West, ethnic orientations of Buddhism are dismissed as being cultural distortions of the tradition. David McMahan explains,

An important part of Zen’s adaptation in the West, and especially in America, has involved an attempt by some of its interpreters, both Asian and Western, to

⁴⁴⁸Master Lotus Zhe, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 22, 2013.

⁴⁴⁹Robert Rosinski, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 23, 2013.

⁴⁵⁰Christmas Humphreys, “Dr. D.T. Suzuki,” in D.T. Suzuki’s *The Field of Zen* (New York: Perennial Library, 1969), xiii.

⁴⁵¹Humphreys, “Dr. D.T. Suzuki,” xiii.

decontextualize it and de-emphasize elements thought to be “too Asian” or “too traditional,” or that simply don’t work in the West.⁴⁵²

Some of the differences between the Zen “repackaging in the West” and the tradition in Asia is the emphasis of the former on meditation while removing “the complex tradition of rituals, priesthoods, and hierarchies that held little attraction for many Westerners.”⁴⁵³ Examples include the emphasis of the latter on chanting scriptures, the strict hierarchies among seniors and juniors, the strict disciplines involved with cultivation, the employment of bells, the importance of bowing, and the veneration of deities.⁴⁵⁴ McMahan also clarifies that “most Zen temples in Japan have little to do with meditation. Rather they function largely as social centers and places for the performance of ancestral death rites.”⁴⁵⁵ An example of the dilution of Zen in the West encompasses the transformation of the word “Zen.” While Zen is the Japanese noun for *Dhyana*, which literally means “meditation” in Sanskrit, the term has been embraced in popular culture as an adjective. Zen has become a synonym for inner peace, tranquility, and a nature-based Japanese aesthetic. Not only has the word departed from its original meaning but it is, instead, attributed to marketing language used to promote a vast array of products including spa treatments, candles, and fragrances, alongside the desire for calmness. McMahan admonishes,

While such a way of understanding the term may have something vaguely to do with the actual practice of this tradition, the use of the term Zen to designate a state of mind completely dissociated from the long and complex historical tradition of Chan and Zen in Asia is a unique development of the modern West and the missionary-minded Japanese.⁴⁵⁶

Although this particular presentation of Zen has helped to popularize Buddhism in the West, it has also resulted in the formation of a romanticized model of Buddhism that excludes other

⁴⁵²David McMahan, “Repackaging Zen for the West,” in *Westward Dharma* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 219.

⁴⁵³*Ibid.*, 222.

⁴⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 226-227.

⁴⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 223.

⁴⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 218.

ethnic presentations.

Asian Buddhist organizations are, thus, faced with the challenge of dispelling assumptions caused by the proliferation of Zen Buddhism in popular culture. In particular, the organizations are held with the responsibility of clarifying two myths to the public. The first myth is the notion that an iconoclastic orientation of Buddhism is the most pure form of Buddhism, and hence the rituals such as the chanting of scriptures, the use of implements, and the veneration of deities, for example, serve no purpose towards the goal of Awakening. The second myth is that the Buddhist theory of emptiness or *sunyata* supports the first myth. These misunderstandings stem from the different approaches of reading the Buddhist literature. To illustrate, the following stanza written by Bodhidharma, the 6th Century patriarch of the Zen school, represents a reflection of his Awakening:

A special tradition outside the scriptures,
With no dependence upon words and letters.
A direct pointing into the mind;
Seeing there one's own nature, and attaining Buddhahood.⁴⁵⁷

This stanza, which is popular in Buddhist literature found in North American bookstores, emphasizes the understanding that Awakening cannot be expressed through words, letters, and scriptures. By approaching this stanza from a rational perspective, the stanza indicates that words, letters, and scriptures are not needed because Awakening lies beyond the realm of words. This line of reasoning has also been applied to rituals, images, and other practices regarded as embellishments that can be done away with. Passages such as these appeal to Western audiences by emphasizing a return to simplicity. McMahan comments,

A number of early Western admirers and modernizing Asians tried to extract the empirically minded philosophical and practical ingredients of Buddhism from what they considered its idolatrous and superstitious elements.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷Mitchell, *Buddhism*, 221.

⁴⁵⁸McMahan, "Repackaging Zen," 219.

However, when such passages are taken out of context of the tradition, it leads to misunderstandings. Such a reading overlooks the critical emphasis in the tradition that the *process* of reaching Awakening is just as important as the end goal itself. Bodhidharma's stanza represents his validation of Awakening realized through his intimate contemplation.

The purpose of the stanzas call for the reader to contemplate and to verify the statements inwardly, a process that requires actual time spent on the meditation cushion. Rational acceptance of the teachings, however, does not lead to liberation and freedom from unhappiness and suffering, according to the tradition's tenets. Furthermore, a solely intellectual reading of the literature may even lead to arrogance as opposed to empathetic detachment. For example, a visitor claimed that he was well read on Zen literature. Subsequently, he felt a personal duty to attend the temple's services because he wanted the other participants to learn from his readings. It was his perception that the beliefs held by the temple's members were distorted, in particular the need for a guru, and thus he felt the need to inform the others about Buddhism in its true form. Wentz, however, admonishes,

Zen Buddhism, for all of its denial of religion and ordinary rationality, is a tradition that includes ritual and community. As a matter of fact, it is necessary to point out that the success of the Zen master's enterprise is dependent upon ritual activity and process.⁴⁵⁹

Wentz speaks about the paradox that "the Truth is free of all texts and priests and teachers and Buddhas, but the texts, priests, teachers, and Buddhas are an inevitable necessity."⁴⁶⁰

The second myth underlying the criticisms towards Asian forms of Buddhism involves the claim that the teaching of emptiness or *sunyata* supports the idea that the rituals, images of the deity and their veneration, and the other practices serve no purpose towards the goal of

⁴⁵⁹Richard E. Wentz, *Religion in the New World: The Shaping of Religious Traditions in the United States* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 337.

⁴⁶⁰Wentz, *Religion in the New World*, 339.

Awakening. These ideas can be expressed by the comments of the following visitor who claimed to be a staunch advocator of the emptiness teachings, “Why do they bother to worship deities and chant mantras? These practices are not important.”⁴⁶¹ Upon entering the Pai Yuin Temple, for example, there are several rows of Buddhist statues. The shrine is elaborately decorated with colorful banners and adornments, numerous implements and symbols, fierce looking deities bearing weapons, and numerous multi-armed deities dressed in jewels and clothing. This visual representation appears to contradict the teaching of emptiness or *sunyata*, which claims that the highest Truth is empty of permanent existence. Donald Mitchell elaborates, “The term *sunya*, which we translate as ‘empty,’ can mean in Sanskrit ‘hollow,’ as in something that looks solid but is in fact hollow inside.”⁴⁶² He continues, “It is this profound Mahayana experience of penetrating insight into the emptiness of all things by the awakened consciousness that brings one freedom.”⁴⁶³ In pragmatic terms, the realization of emptiness is the awareness that the factors that get in the way of one’s inherent peace do not in fact exist. In this awareness, all troubles are forgotten, and even the perception that one is suffering is forgotten. Thus, the awareness of emptiness cannot be captured through words and must be experienced directly.

The teaching of emptiness, thus calls for the reversal or freedom from mental biases or attachments that accumulate throughout an individual’s lifetime, a process that requires continuous effort and self-introspection. Although the rituals, disciplines, practices, and forms of veneration are empty of permanent existence, Asian Buddhists generally regard these vehicles as convenient methods or *upaya* for dissolving mental biases by creating space or detachment from ordinary and conceptual patterns of thinking. Without such vehicles, the genuine awareness of emptiness is difficult to achieve. While an intellectual understanding of Buddhist concepts is

⁴⁶¹Based on conversations with a visitor at the Pai Yuin Temple in August, 2012.

⁴⁶²Mitchell, *Buddhism*, 105.

⁴⁶³Ibid.

regarded as a critical part of an individual's journey towards liberation, the misreading of Zen and other Buddhist texts potentially lead to biases and discrimination towards Asian forms of practice by removing or extracting the teachings from their cultural context.

The above-mentioned misconceptions are not completely dependent on readings of Zen literature and teachings about emptiness, however. Misunderstandings are also caused by the clergy or members' lack of awareness in clarifying the subtle nuances behind the rituals or visual symbols. For instance, a visitor confessed,

When I came to the temple last week, I had no idea what I was doing. The monks just told me to burn some incense and to follow what they were doing. They tried their best to communicate to me but I did not understand why I was doing these things.⁴⁶⁴

Another visitor, Hansen, claimed that he did not fully appreciate the splendor of the statues until the deeper "meaning behind the statues" was explained in detail.⁴⁶⁵ He recalls, "Once I understood the meaning behind the statues, it was incredibly beautiful."⁴⁶⁶ It is thus suggested that the patterns of communication between the temple's members and the visitors need to be improved.

Other Vajrayana Buddhist groups such as the New Kadampa Tradition, whose congregation is comprised mainly of Western converts, have responded to the aversions towards rituals by simplifying the complexity and number of rituals in their practices. Wherein the practice of Guru Yoga in the True Buddha School consists of approximately four mudras or hand gestures and twenty-five different mantras that are recited in Tibetan, for example, the Guru Yoga of the New Kadampa Tradition consists of one mudra or hand gesture, and one mantra that is recited in Tibetan. The length of time devoted to the recitation of mantras has also been significantly simplified by the New Kadampa Tradition. Wherein the mantras are recited up to

⁴⁶⁴Based on feedback received from a visitor on January 25, 2014.

⁴⁶⁵Marty Hansen, interview by author, Calgary, AB, March 26, 2013.

⁴⁶⁶Ibid.

108 times in the Guru Yoga of the True Buddha School, the offering mantra is recited only once in the Guru Yoga of the New Kadampa Tradition.⁴⁶⁷ The latter has also introduced contemporary melodies to accompany the prayers and chants in the Guru Yoga that resemble gospel music.⁴⁶⁸ In comparison, the chants in the Guru Yoga of the True Buddha School follow the Mahayana Buddhist melodies of the Liang Dynasty of China, which dates to the 6th Century CE.

7) Wealth and Temples

Upon visiting the Pai Yuin Temple for the first time, a visitor complained, “There’s too much gold in this temple,” in reference to the expectation that temples should not display wealth overtly. The prevailing idea among some “sympathetic Western Buddhist converts” can be summed by Rachelle Scott’s comments in *Nirvana for Sale?*, “Buddhism and money simply do not mix. When money becomes associated with Buddhism, it taints the religion.”⁴⁶⁹ Scott’s research of the Dhammakaya Organization, one of Thailand’s richest temples, shed light on the popular criticisms of temple wealth. She writes,

The condemnation of the Temple’s wealth rests on a distinction between otherworldly spiritual values, ideals, and goals and those of this world. Individuals who draw this distinction invariably view the accumulation of monastic wealth as corrupt or decadent in contrast to their otherworldly view of ideal religiosity.⁴⁷⁰

Scott’s examination of the sexual and monetary controversies of monks in Thailand also suggest that the greater the status of the monk and organization, the longer the length of criticism in the media.⁴⁷¹ In fact, such scandals often fill “the popular news dailies” in Thailand.⁴⁷² There are two main views about the link between wealth and piety. Scott writes,

⁴⁶⁷Based on observations with the members of the Calgary branch of the New Kadampa Tradition from April 17 to 19, 2015.

⁴⁶⁸Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹Scott’s work examines the benefits and tensions in the relationships between religion and prosperity in Thai Buddhism. Rachelle M. Scott, *Nirvana for Sale?: Buddhism, Wealth, and the Dhammakaya Temple in Contemporary Thailand* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009), 158.

⁴⁷⁰The Dhammakaya Organization was founded by Phra Dhammachayo. Ibid., 141.

⁴⁷¹Ibid., 155.

⁴⁷²Ibid., 151.

Conversely, some Buddhists today argue that contemporary relations between religion and global capitalism undermine authentic forms of religiosity and foster socioeconomic trends that are antithetical to the core values of the tradition.⁴⁷³

On the other hand, the Buddhists who,

... correlate wealth with religious piety employ the traditional idea that wealth is a sign of merit and infuse it with contemporary sensibilities, aesthetics, and identities, many of which are mediated through the lens of global capitalism.⁴⁷⁴

Regarding the latter view, wealth is perceived as a blessing based on an individual's past merit. It is also viewed as a powerful means for performing charitable acts.

Grandmaster Lu's opinion about wealth accords with the latter perspective as he states,

One must generate bodhicitta [vow of Liberation] such that upon receiving massive wealth, one gives away alms and vows to do more charities. Hence, with the expansion of your bodhicitta, blessings and merits shall increase continuously. These acts of generosity shall transform greed into the purity of compassion.⁴⁷⁵

Based on these comments, the possession of wealth in the True Buddha School is not seen as a manifestation of greed so long as an individual vows to perform charitable acts. When Reverend Lotus Fong of the Pai Yuin Temple was asked to comment about the visitor's reaction, she spoke,

This understanding is wrong. We build the temple to look this way because it evokes dignity. When people see the dignified appearance of the Buddhas, they feel a sense of reverence and their faith increases. It has nothing to do with greed.⁴⁷⁶

The divergent opinions on wealth and piety draw attention to the fact that differences in value judgments serve as deterrents for participation.

The rejection of temple wealth and piety are not only limited to those outside the ethnic group, as one Chinese visitor complained, "Why am I always asked to make a donation every time I want to register for the ceremony?" However, the aversion to temple wealth was not a

⁴⁷³Scott, *Nirvana for Sale?*, 157.

⁴⁷⁴Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵Lu, *The Aura of Wisdom*, 78.

⁴⁷⁶Reverend Lotus Fong, interview by author, Calgary, AB, July 22, 2013.

significant complaint among the Chinese visitors, perhaps due to the fact that the building of large scale temples and display of temple wealth has been a part of the history of China and other Asian countries for centuries.

Summary

While the challenges presented in this chapter are not exclusively demand-side variables that are outside of the control of the True Buddha School, they draw attention to some of the main preferences, attitudes, and criticisms of potential English-speaking converts. It is suggested that the divergent cultural assumptions and predispositions between the Chinese and English-speaking groups affect the receptivity of visitors to Asian Buddhist temples, which act as a deterrence towards deeper community participation. Expansion into the greater community is not merely a matter of translating Chinese pamphlets and promotional literature into English, but the transferability of a set of ideas from one cultural context to another is a critical consideration. As discussed in this chapter, misunderstandings result when ideas are taken out of their cultural context. In order to create a hybrid community, Asian Buddhists organizations need to develop a greater awareness of the assumptions of English-speaking visitors. At the same time, local branches must balance the needs of all members while also avoiding the alienation of the existing congregation. This requires a delicate balancing act.

More importantly, however, the challenges discussed raise the following issue: Is it necessary to embrace Chinese thinking to become a member of True Buddha School? Richard Wentz sheds light on this question,

Some religious entrepreneurs have tried to market Asian religious techniques while claiming that they are ‘not religious’. . . It remains to be seen, of course, whether it is possible to abstract ideas and techniques from a tradition without understanding the intricate relationship of all these matters within the context of a specific Asian tradition.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁷Wentz, *Religion in the New World*, 331.

Based on interviews with key clergy in the global administrative body, the True Buddha School is concerned with accommodating the needs of English-speaking participants, as opposed to enforcing a Chinese way of thinking on English-speaking members. However, Henry from the Las Vegas branch argues, “TBS [True Buddha School] is not very accessible if you don’t speak Chinese.”⁴⁷⁸ Robert from the Edmonton branch shares, “I didn’t join TBS [True Buddha School] to become Chinese. I had to make something out of it for myself.”⁴⁷⁹ In order for the True Buddha School to be accessible to those outside the ethnic community, a great deal of resources is required for members to emphasize the features that are meaningful in the context of Canadian societal concerns. However, given the widespread availability of Buddhist resources outside of the organization, the competitiveness of the religious “market,” and the general preferences of individuals towards personal and private practice, most visitors are not willing to put in the time and effort to draw personal insights from Asian presentations of the tradition. Thus, the onus of increasing the accessibility of Buddhist teachings falls on the internal factors of the temples.

Despite the cultural and language barriers, however, there are dedicated English-speaking members in the organization. In fact, some of them have taken on active leadership roles, and their involvement has helped to pave major changes in the transition experience of other English-speaking members in the organization, in terms of helping them to navigate and feel comfortable in an unfamiliar environment. Interviews with these members reveal that there are specific factors and predispositions that draw English-speaking participants to True Buddha School. These factors, which will be discussed in Chapter Six, serve as potential points to explore and emphasize in future promotion strategies.

Although this chapter has explored the contrasting range of responses offered by visitors

⁴⁷⁸Henry Wolf, interview by author, Taichung, Taiwan, November 19, 2013.

⁴⁷⁹Robert Rosinski, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 23, 2013.

as their reasons for visiting the temple, no particular response can be singled out as the main factor that deters regular attendance. The field observations and collective feedback from visitors and members point to the characteristic that the general enthusiasm for formal and collective participation in Buddhist activities is low among Western audiences. Though there are a small segment of visitors who attend the temple's formal activities, regular participation and formal membership did not appeal to them.

Chapter Six: Outreach Successes Based on Grandmaster Lu's Charisma

This chapter will shed light on the inside factors that have attracted members, as well as clarify the problems for new participants and the reasons for the lack of participation or departure of visitors, participants, and members. The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the reasons for the polar developments of both the Chinese and English-speaking communities by analyzing the merits and challenges of pedagogies adopted by Grandmaster Lu.

Based on a study of qualitative inside factors in True Buddha School that have affected the growth of the organization, two main patterns emerge: 1) Grandmaster Lu's charisma and the True Buddha School's coordination of volunteers have contributed to the rapid growth of the organization in the Chinese community; and 2) the same factors of success for the Chinese community pose challenges and problems for the growth of the English-speaking community.

Grandmaster Lu's Charisma

According to Gordon Melton's survey of the True Buddha School, Grandmaster Lu attracts a large following through his charismatic authority.⁴⁸⁰ Charismatic authority is defined by Douglas Barnes as,

. . . that authority relationship which arises when a leader through the dynamics of a set of teachings, a unique personality, or both elicits responses of awe, deference, and devotion from a group of people.⁴⁸¹

Charismatic authority requires the mutual acknowledgment of participants who identify with and support the leader, as Barnes states, "Without proper social conditions the society would regard the potential leader as an eccentric getting excited over nothing."⁴⁸² Furthermore, Barnes claims that "charismatic leaders usually have an intimate connection with a transcendent or immanent

⁴⁸⁰Melton, "The Affirmation of Charismatic Authority," 301.

⁴⁸¹Douglas F. Barnes, "Charisma and Religious Leadership: An Historical Analysis," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17 (1978): 2.

⁴⁸²Barnes, "Charisma and Religious Leadership," 4.

divine source,” described as an “intense connection with a force or being beyond every day or normal reality.”⁴⁸³ In the case of the True Buddha School, Grandmaster Lu demonstrates his charismatic leadership by garnering “the membership’s acceptance of his teachings and acknowledgement of his abilities as a bearer of various super-mundane powers.”⁴⁸⁴

To illustrate the growth and expansion of the True Buddha School’s membership numbers, Grandmaster Lu initially conducted ceremonies in his home at the onset of the organization’s establishment in 1975.⁴⁸⁵ According to statistics released by the True Buddha School in 1991, there were a purported one million members and one hundred chapters globally.⁴⁸⁶ In 1993, Grandmaster Lu’s sermon drew an audience of 25,000 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.⁴⁸⁷ In 2006, the membership numbers grew to five million and four hundred chapters globally.⁴⁸⁸ Grandmaster Lu’s transmission of the Kalachakra teachings in 1999 in Hong Kong attracted 70,000 people. Today, there are an estimated six million members in True Buddha School, though official numbers have not changed since 2006, due to Grandmaster Lu’s expressed wish to retire when membership numbers reach six million.⁴⁸⁹ As a result, clergy have been reluctant to release actual membership numbers.⁴⁹⁰ Currently in Taichung, Taiwan, ceremonies conducted by Grandmaster Lu draw an audience of 20,000 to 30,000 people on a weekly basis.⁴⁹¹ This tremendous growth in membership numbers has occurred within a span of 39 years since the organization’s establishment, and exceeds the percentage of growth of the

⁴⁸³Barnes, “Charisma and Religious Leadership,” 3.

⁴⁸⁴a) Melton, “The Affirmation of Charismatic Authority,” 301.

b) Padmakumara literally means “Lotus Child.”

⁴⁸⁵The TBS was originally named Ling Xing Zong in 1975, and its name was later changed in 1983. *The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 39.

⁴⁸⁶“About the Author,” in Lu, *The Inner World of the Lake*, 7.

⁴⁸⁷Lu, *Plethora of Scenic Splendours*, 107.

⁴⁸⁸Based on estimates by Reverend Lotus Ze, Calgary, AB, March 13, 2014.

⁴⁸⁹Based on estimates by Reverend Lotus Ze. However, this number has not been officially announced. Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰Ibid.

⁴⁹¹This estimate is based on discussions with volunteers at the Taiwan Leizang Temple in Taichung on November 28, 2013.

Church of Latter-Day Saints or Mormons on a per year basis, which is among one of the fastest growing global religious organizations.⁴⁹² In North America, however, the attendance numbers drop considerably since the majority of members are based in Asia. Bi-annual ceremonies conducted by Grandmaster Lu in Redmond, WA attract 2,000 to 3,000 global members. When Grandmaster Lu is not present at temple conducted services in Redmond, however, the attendance numbers drop significantly to less than twenty during weekly group meditations.⁴⁹³ These variances illustrate the weight of Grandmaster Lu's personal presence in attracting large crowds, but what qualities lend to a teacher's charisma?

To summarize Melton's findings in his article, "The Affirmation of Charismatic Authority," Grandmaster Lu's authority in the True Buddha School "rests upon the membership's acceptance of his teachings and acknowledgment of his abilities as a bearer of various super-mundane powers."⁴⁹⁴ While Melton examined Grandmaster Lu's methods of amassing spiritual credentials and garnering public acknowledgments from spiritual leaders in the Buddhist community, I will instead focus on the personality and pedagogical traits that have contributed to Grandmaster Lu's charisma.⁴⁹⁵

- **Humor as Pedagogy**

Lu engages his audience into a deeper understanding of the Buddhist teachings in a manner that is typically unconventional of Chinese Buddhist monks. Where the scene of a Buddhist monk delivering a dharma lecture may conjure an image of austerity and sternness,

⁴⁹²This estimate is based on statistics released by the Church of Latter Day Saints. The church was founded by Joseph Smith in 1830, and has a current membership base of 15 million members. See "Facts and Statistics," Newsroom [Official website for the Church of Latter Day Saints News], last updated November 12, 2014, available at <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-stats>.

⁴⁹³This figure is based on the researcher's observation during the low season (September to April) when Lu is conducting propagation activities in Taiwan and does not reside in Redmond, WA. This estimate does not include the monks and nuns.

⁴⁹⁴Melton, "The Affirmation of Charismatic Authority," 301.

⁴⁹⁵Ibid., 298.

Grandmaster Lu uses humor as a main pedagogy. Though ceremonies initially appear to be solemn events with a formal procession of masters in ceremonial robes and a full orchestra of Buddhist instruments playing in the background, the dharma talks afterwards are filled with audience laughter and cheer. Where some teachers may view “their role or their topic as too serious to engage humor or view humor as merely a disruption,” Grandmaster Lu embraces comedy in his sermons.⁴⁹⁶ Grandmaster Lu often interjects jokes during the least expected occasions, such as in the midst of explaining instructions for esoteric practices, conducting ordinations for monks and nuns, or performing wedding nuptials. The following is an example of his use of humor in his talk about the notion of *Trekcho* or no-mind,

To cut through delusion, directly and thoroughly, one must be completely naked. By being naked do I mean to strip away all one’s clothing and become totally nude? Do I mean strip dancing, or being what Americans call “topless” (audience laughter). . . . I am not asking you to go watch topless dancing or to show yourself off by streaking. I am asking you to rest in the nakedness of the innermost essence, where there is only luminosity and not a trace of defilement.⁴⁹⁷

On a pragmatic level, humor takes away the boredom that people associate with attending sermons and encourages participation because it fosters a positive association with going to church. In fact, Grandmaster Lu’s love for telling jokes is so prominent amongst disciples that they were observed passing handwritten jokes to Grandmaster Lu to share in his sermon.⁴⁹⁸ According to R.L. Garner, humor has a “positive effect on student enjoyment.”⁴⁹⁹ The interjection of humor helps to break down the guard of the audience by generating positive emotional experiences, increasing focus on the teachings, and engaging the audience.⁵⁰⁰ In this way, humor functions “as a bridge between educators and students by demonstrating a shared

⁴⁹⁶R. L. Garner, “Humor in Pedagogy: How Ha-Ha Can Lead to Aha!,” *College Teaching* 54 (2006): 179.

⁴⁹⁷Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 151.

⁴⁹⁸Based on the researcher’s observations.

⁴⁹⁹Garner, “Humor in Pedagogy,” 179.

⁵⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 177.

understanding and a common psychological bond.”⁵⁰¹ In Garner’s study, for instance, participants claimed that “content-focused humor was helpful in comprehension of the material, made for a more enjoyable educational experience, and created the impression that the instructor took the extra effort to get the message across.”⁵⁰² This led Garner to include that “the ‘ha-ha’ of humor in the classroom may indeed contribute to the ‘aha!’ of learning from the student.”⁵⁰³

The problem with humor is that some jokes do not always transfer smoothly from one language or cultural context to another, especially ones that draw on a pun or play of words. Thus, in some cases, the use of humor loses its effect in different cultural contexts.

- **Storytelling as Pedagogy**

Aside from humor, Grandmaster Lu also adopts storytelling as a central pedagogical method in his writings and sermons. Barnes emphasizes that the personal charisma of a leader must be paired with the ability to take away the suffering of the audience as he writes, “. . . regardless of the variety of personal styles, the teachings of a religious, charismatic leader must deal with the ultimate concerns of a group of people.”⁵⁰⁴ Walter Fisher asserts that human decision-making or rationality “is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings” and “their constant habit of testing narrative fidelity, whether the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives. . . .”⁵⁰⁵ Grandmaster Lu’s stories weave Buddhist values about mindfulness and ridding worries, and solving the day to day problems and concerns of his students, with pragmatic advice from a Buddhist lens. A main theme in his writings contains accounts of miraculous healing. For instance, in his book of stories *Sightings*

⁵⁰¹Garner, “Humor in Pedagogy,” 177.

⁵⁰²Ibid., 179-180.

⁵⁰³Ibid., 180.

⁵⁰⁴Barnes, “Charisma and Religious Leadership,” 2.

⁵⁰⁵Walter Fisher, “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument,” *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 8.

from *Thousands of Miles Away*, Grandmaster Lu highlights the efficacious power of reciting the High King Avalokitesvara Sutra.⁵⁰⁶ In the story, a female disciple approached Grandmaster Lu about her child who was affected by a tumor, and he advised her to print, distribute, and chant the sutra, and dedicate the merits to her child.⁵⁰⁷ According to a “letter of appreciation” sent by the disciple, upon completing the instructions, the tumor “shrank day by day” until it gradually disappeared.⁵⁰⁸ Stories such as these are passed through word of mouth amongst the disciples and shared by clergy in dharma talks, which validate and reinforce Grandmaster Lu’s teachings to the members. For example, following a group meditation at the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple, the teaching assistant Dicky Ma advised one of the participants to recite the same sutra one thousand times as a dedication to the individual’s wishes, citing its efficacy to her personal experiences.

Another theme among Grandmaster Lu’s stories is the telling of folk tales to teach lessons about morality. These themes are particularly prominent in Grandmaster Lu’s *Stories of Supreme Spiritual Responses*, *Encounters with the World of Spirits*, and *Travel to Worlds Beyond*. One of the most popular stories that are retold annually at the Pai Yuin Temple is the account of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty. According to this tale, Emperor Wu was approached by a snake during a walk in the courtyard. Upon seeing the emperor, the snake began to speak and revealed that she was the emperor’s former wife who had been reborn into the animal realm as retribution for her jealousy and anger. Out of sorrow for her, the emperor gathered the nation’s monastics to compile a scripture that could be recited and dedicated to his former lover. Upon completing this aim, the snake was reborn into the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods (*Trayastrimsa*). This repentance text is recited annually during the Tomb Sweeping (*Qing Ming*) Festival to honor deceased ancestors and departed loved ones. Not only does the

⁵⁰⁶Sheng-yen Lu, *Sightings from Thousands of Miles Away* (Oakland: US Daden Culture, 2010), 118.

⁵⁰⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 119.

story of Emperor Wu weave the cosmological views about karma, the realms of transmigration, and filial piety into one tale, but it also calls upon the audience to uphold the virtues of loving-kindness and compassion for all suffering beings in the realms of reincarnation. According to Penny Miller et. al., Chinese stories in particular focus on the theme of transgressions to reinforce and personalize “moral lessons through concrete exemplars.”⁵⁰⁹ Denise McDonald further discusses the benefits of storytelling,

Pedagogically, for all levels of learners, storytelling serves the purpose of inciting personal meaning making and trumps lecture as a vehicle for conveying ideas sans dictating ideals.

Storytelling allows for learners to relate their personal experiences to the implicit lessons contained in a story long after a lecture has taken place, as Grace Deniston-Trochta states, “students’ lived experience is the foundation for their learning.”⁵¹⁰ In this way, stories enhance the memory and retention of knowledge. Not only do they “connect theoretical concepts to actual practice,” but they potentially cause “epistemological shifts in the listeners’ thinking and ultimately enact change in behavior or future teaching practice.”⁵¹¹ Without these shifts in thinking, however, “storytelling is only as good as the story itself.”⁵¹²

Because Grandmaster Lu’s stories appeal to an Asian audience with a specific understanding about the relationship between the human and spirit world, this poses a challenge in the proliferation of his writings in a new cultural context. Despite the lessons of morality inherent in the stories, it is more strenuous for a North American audience that is strongly influenced by Judeo-Christian worldviews to relate to the stories and to extract meaning out of

⁵⁰⁹Penny Miller et al., “Personal Storytelling as a Medium of Socialization in Chinese and American Families,” *Child Development* 68 (1997): 565.

⁵¹⁰Grace Deniston-Trochta, “The Meaning of Storytelling as Pedagogy,” *Visual Arts Research* 29 (2003): 104.

⁵¹¹Denise McDonald, “March of the Not-So-Perfect Penguins: Storytelling as Pedagogy,” *Kappa Delta Pi Record* 45 (2009): 181.

⁵¹²*Ibid.*

them. For example, stories about encounters with local earth gods would incite more questions than answers. The monotheistic idea that God is an omnipotent and omnipresent creator of humankind is in stark contrast to the role of the earth god, who serves as the community watch god. In this way, such stories may not capture the large imagination of a North American audience, especially those who value a scientific view of the world.

- **Simplification of Tantric Practices to Attract Members**

Another pedagogical method adopted by Grandmaster Lu to attract followers is the simplification of Tantric practices to meet the demands of modern life and a time-constricted audience. Grandmaster Lu's teachings emphasize the promise of liberation in an individual's lifetime through the practice of one session of *sadhana* per day, which is a type of meditation that combines the visualization of a personal deity, mantra chanting, and the use of hand gestures (mudras).⁵¹³ Some of the innovations introduced by Grandmaster Lu were to combine the main components of the traditional Vajrayana practices into a single session that could be completed in less than an hour. Novices typically begin their practice with a set of rituals known as the Fourfold Preliminary practices, which consists of performing prostrations, making offerings, reciting the refuge verses, and chanting the Vajrasattva hundred-syllable mantra 100,000 times respectively. Where each component is commonly practiced separately in Vajrayana Buddhism, Grandmaster Lu introduced the practice of combining the four components into a single condensed practice, along with other additions, that could be performed in both a group and private setting. He further fused the four classes of Tantra including the action tantras (concerned with ritual and purification), conduct tantras (concerned with external behaviors and internal states), yoga or integration tantra (concerned with the internal body), and the highest yoga tantra

⁵¹³Personal deities are chosen according to an individual's appeal to a particular Buddha or Bodhisattva, or by writing a letter to Grandmaster Lu.

(concerned with Liberation), into a single session. These innovations were introduced with the intention of enabling practitioners to focus their efforts on a single practice that could be easily learned. In order to streamline the effort and time needed to learn new practices, individuals could incorporate minor adjustments in the practice as the level of their spiritual insight deepened.

Despite Grandmaster Lu's effort to simplify the Tantric rites, however, some participants found elements of the *sadhana* to be complex and difficult to learn. Jesse Pohoda, a sporadic participant who works as an electrician in Calgary claims,

I feel relaxed when I hear the 100-syllable mantra but when I try to follow the group, I get lost and then it becomes more of a distraction. So, I don't try to follow the chant anymore and instead try to focus my mind.

While Jesse's experience did not deter him from participating further, it is speculated that other visitors with similar experiences left in search of other groups that taught simpler meditations.

- **Inquiry as Pedagogy**

Grandmaster Lu also uses inquiry to challenge students towards deeper participation by raising critical questions without providing definitive answers, as a way to encourage members to turn inwards and to delve deeper into their spiritual practice. The questions posed by him encourage contemplation and deeper reflection beyond a mere intellectual understanding. Perplexing questions can serve as a motivation for learners by offering the excitement of a challenge and by encouraging learners to think on their own. To cite an example, when Grandmaster Lu chose his successors beginning in 2008, he posed the following *koan* to his disciples, which is a paradoxical riddle used to trigger insight in the Zen tradition: "What did the Buddha realize under the Bodhi tree?" If an individual's answer to the riddle demonstrated an inner awareness of the same profound truth realized by the historical Buddha, then that

individual became recognized as one of the four lineage holders of the True Buddha School upon Grandmaster Lu's passing.⁵¹⁴ When the question was posed, disciples around the globe mailed their answers to Grandmaster Lu and some of those individuals were invited to a face to face interview based on their responses. This type of questioning emphasizes knowledge that comes from an individual's personal contemplation and inner seeing based on their meditative observations, as opposed to relying on the intellect to generate an answer, which is ultimately seen as an unreliable source for freeing an individual from the condition of suffering and unhappiness in life. Thus, critical inquiry helps to generate enthusiasm and learner engagement, and causes learners to think about the knowledge and assumptions that they take for granted.

In the case of the True Buddha School, critical inquiry is a very personal and private process that empowers learners to generate their own answers. Through inquiry,

[Learners] experience the creation of a new or the refinement of an existing understanding and its application to philosophy and practice through their questioning of discrepancies, inconsistencies, and unexamined issues.⁵¹⁵

The questions and riddles posed by Grandmaster Lu encourage his disciples to work through the answers in their own creative way. Through this method, four successors were chosen, including three people from amongst the congregation of lay disciples, while the fourth successor was selected from the existing monastic community. In fact, Master Lotus Ming of Calgary was selected to become a lineage holder by virtue of his response to the riddle. Lotus Ming, who was formerly known as William Lai, was 30 years old at the time and he was married with a full-time job.⁵¹⁶ Prior to his succession, he claims that he had never met personally with Grandmaster

⁵¹⁴The open call search for four lineage holders to represent each of the four sects of Vajrayana Buddhism was known as the "Shooting the Arrow" competition.

⁵¹⁵Cynthia A. Lassonde, "Transforming Philosophy and Pedagogy through Critical Inquiry," *NERA Journal* 44 (2009): 42.

⁵¹⁶The remaining three were residents of Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Brazil. Three of the lineage holders are male, while the fourth is female. Prior to his invitation to meet with Grandmaster Lu, William who is now known as Master Lotus

Lu.⁵¹⁷ This example highlights Grandmaster Lu's use of inquiry to empower his audience and remind his followers of the promise of liberation that is within the reach of modern day householders. It is suggested that this message has appealed to a wider audience, which may feel that the adoption of monastic life is too drastic for them.

The challenge with inquiry is that learners are required to have prior knowledge of "the vocabulary and concepts related to the issues and content . . . and then to be able to use them meaningfully to discuss and clarify their forming views and opinions," before applying these lessons into practice.⁵¹⁸ In the context of the True Buddha School, however, Buddhist terminology confuses potential participants that have no prior knowledge of Buddhist expressions and phases, which leads to a frustrating experience. Such terms may include *sunyata* (emptiness), *samsara* (cycle of reincarnation), Buddha Nature, *homa* (fire offering), and *bardo* (intermediate state), for instance. New participants are required to gain a new vocabulary in order to navigate the teachings espoused by Grandmaster Lu. To illustrate, promotional literature such as *The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook* speaks to an audience who have had prior encounters with Sutrayana or Mahayana Buddhism, the dominant form practiced in Taiwan, as opposed to a Judeo-Christian audience. Thus, Vajrayana is introduced to readers in the context of its differences to Sutrayana Buddhism, which is not helpful to those in the English-speaking community.⁵¹⁹ The handbook also discusses the theme of "diligent cultivation" to "eliminate all negative karma, remove all defilements, and bring forth the innate Buddha light."⁵²⁰ However, it is a culturally specific term that combines the Confucian ethic of working hard and the Daoist

Ming had never formally met Grandmaster Lu.

⁵¹⁷Based on communication with Master Lotus Ming, Calgary, AB, February 7, 2009.

⁵¹⁸Lassonde, "Transforming Philosophy," 48.

⁵¹⁹See *The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook* 9-13 for more details about the comparisons.

⁵²⁰*Ibid.*, 8.

notion of nurturing one's authentic self, with the Buddhist striving towards Liberation.⁵²¹

In order for inquiry to take place, there needs to be patience and willingness on the part of participants to learn the new lexicon and group speak, which may serve as a deterrence for new participants from engaging deeper. Such participants may leave the organization in favor of others that adopt more user-friendly language with less emphasis on Buddhist terminology.

- **Appeal to the Emotions**

Grandmaster Lu connects to his audience by sharing personal feelings of despair, grief, sadness, frustration, and joy, for instance, in regards to his spiritual journey. He shares touching personal stories that evoke emotional responses from his audience. For instance, during a teaching on the Kalachakra Phurba practice, Grandmaster Lu broke into tears due to grief about breaking his promise to his guru, Thubten Daerchi, about publicizing the practice.⁵²² Subsequently, many members including masters, monastics, and lay disciples also broke into tears. In this way, it is suggested that Grandmaster Lu breaks down the barriers between lay perceptions about the sacredness and inaccessibility of monks and nuns.

Monastics are often ascribed with the quality of being other-worldly, in terms of conquering worldly desires and subduing emotions, due to their vows of leaving the mundane life and pursuing the lofty goal of liberation. Grandmaster Lu, however, asserts his charisma by being unapologetic about revealing his emotions to his audience. By doing so, it is asserted that Grandmaster Lu becomes a relatable person that participants can identify with on an emotional level, which in turn encourages a student-teacher bond. According to David DeSteno et. al.,

⁵²¹Kwang-Kuo Hwang and Jeffrey Chang clarify, "The term *xiu-yang* (self-cultivation) in Chinese is an abbreviation of *xiu xin yang xing*, which literally means rectifying one's mind and nurturing one's character with a particular art of philosophy." In "Self-Cultivation: Culturally Sensitive Psychotherapies in Confucian Societies," *The Counseling Psychologist* 37 (2009): 1011-1013.

⁵²²Based on observations at the Hevajra Ceremony, held at the Rainbow Temple in North Bend, WA on August 30, 2008.

“specific emotions can alter the persuasive impact of messages as a function of the emotional framing of persuasive appeals.”⁵²³ They claim that persuasive attempts result in higher success when messages with “emotional overtones” match “the emotional state of the receiver.”⁵²⁴ For example, a teaching that evokes a combination of despair and hope is more likely to appeal to an individual that is suffering from despair. Thus, personal factors in an individual’s life play a large part in influencing the receptiveness of an individual to the message of the teacher.

In regards to the appeal of certain teachers to learners, Bruce Tuckman adds that factors outside of a “teacher’s degree of pedagogical skill” contribute to “teaching effectiveness.”⁵²⁵ He advocates a holistic approach to evaluating instruction “wherein the teacher is regarded as a person, not a teaching device – a human being with a definite interpersonal style marked by identifiable affective behaviors.”⁵²⁶ Valued interpersonal qualities in effective teachers may include the perceptions of being honest and authentic, approachable, dynamic, exciting, warm, accepting, motivating, and so forth.⁵²⁷

Though Grandmaster Lu is revered as a central authoritative figure in the organization’s promotion literature, the interviewees who have had personal contact with him describe Grandmaster Lu as “an easy going and down to earth person.”⁵²⁸ Disciples travel annually to Redmond, WA as a form of spiritual pilgrimage to affirm their faith and to spend time around Grandmaster Lu, who turned 70 years old in June of 2014. In regards to his interpersonal qualities, Grandmaster Lu is described by Master Lotus Ming as “the type of person that does not

⁵²³David DeSteno, Duane T. Wegener, Richard E. Petty, Derek D. Rucker, and Julia Braverman, “Discrete Emotions and Persuasion: The Role of Emotion-Induced Expectancies,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 86 (2004): 43.

⁵²⁴*Ibid.*

⁵²⁵Bruce Tuckman, “The Interpersonal Teacher Model,” *The Educational Forum* 59 (1995): 177.

⁵²⁶*Ibid.*

⁵²⁷*Ibid.*

⁵²⁸Master Lotus Ming, Dharma talk at the Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, November 4, 2013.

like to say ‘no’” to his students’ requests.⁵²⁹ Despite endless requests for healing, personal consultations, and so forth, it was Master Lotus Ming’s perception that Grandmaster Lu rarely turned individuals away and he remained amicable in light of apparent exhaustion.⁵³⁰ In November of 2013, an online petition was even circulated by some disciples via Facebook “to stop the exhausting and grueling schedule for Grand Master Sheng Yen Lu when he travels to Taiwan and overseas.”⁵³¹ The petition continues, “We must take care of our Guru, not overkill him with non-stop daily activities and traveling so much.”⁵³² Evidence of Grandmaster Lu’s reaction to these petitions is scarce so far as the English literature is concerned. On one occasion during his birthday celebration in 2010, however, Grandmaster Lu joked that his students had asked him to conduct ceremonies on that day instead of allowing him to have the day off.⁵³³ In subsequent years, ceremonies were no longer scheduled on Grandmaster Lu’s birthday. These examples offer a rare glimpse into the mutually-dependent relationship between students and their teacher, as far as guru-based organizations are concerned. The examples also challenge the perception that authority is strictly hierarchical from the top down, due to the fact that Grandmaster Lu’s schedule is determined by the requests and needs of his followers.

Alternately, the perception of interpersonal qualities is subjective depending on “what the observer [student] perceives” and “how the observer construes reality.”⁵³⁴ For instance, a religious leader that displays specific emotions such as self-doubt may be regarded as being less

⁵²⁹Master Lotus Ming, Dharma talk at the Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, November 4, 2013.

⁵³⁰*Ibid.*

⁵³¹“Petition for GM's [Grandmaster's] Overseas Schedule,” *Ipetitions*, available at <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/petition-for-gms-overseas-schedule/?m=0> (accessed February 18, 2014).

⁵³²*Ibid.*

⁵³³Based on his lecture following the Bathing Buddha Ceremony at the Ling Shen Ching Tze Temple in Redmond, WA, May 7, 2011.

⁵³⁴a) Tuckman, “The Interpersonal Teacher Model,” 178.

b) Although my assertions are based on the visible reactions of participants to Lu’s sermons and physical presence, these claims cannot be verified quantifiably without a formal system of measuring the member’s reception to his interpersonal qualities.

reliable or credible by individuals. While personal encounters with Grandmaster Lu may engender endearing moments of excitement, laughter, and tears of joy amongst some disciples, it is also a cause for alienating those who do not share the same intense sentiments and connection with him.

As the emotional bond between students and teachers in a guru based organization intensifies, the frenetic behavior of some members towards the teacher's divine abilities or status potentially pose a challenge to public perceptions of the organization. Melton, an anthropologist, explains, "Once a person joins the group, the process of charismatization becomes one of great emotional intensity, especially on the part of the members."⁵³⁵ He continues,

Basic to the members' feeling of closeness to the leader, whom they may see only on rare occasions, are sentiments of gratitude for what the leader has done for them in bringing them into the fellowship.⁵³⁶

The scholar Tiradhammo expands on the alienation that arises from the so-called homogenous behaviors in a community, "This can result in all manner of presumed appropriate behavior, such as imitation (usually of the leader's behavior and ideas), common jargon, and group think."⁵³⁷ He continues, "The assumption of homogeneity can result in simmering resentments (ie., toward those who toe the party line and those who don't)."⁵³⁸ Especially in the case of family members who observe a change in the behaviors of members, familial relationships become strained in some cases. Master Lotus Zhe claims that since becoming ordained as a monk in True Buddha School in the early 1990s, some of his family members have not accepted his decisions.⁵³⁹ Due to previous objections from spouses and families, the True Buddha School does not accept

⁵³⁵Melton, "The Affirmation of Charismatic Authority," 295.

⁵³⁶Ibid.

⁵³⁷Tiradhammo, "The Challenge of Community," 247.

⁵³⁸Ibid.

⁵³⁹Reverend Lotus Ze, Field notes collected by the author at the Annual Members Meeting of the Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, January 26, 2014.

applications for ordinations without the expressed consent of the individual's spouse or parents.⁵⁴⁰ The reasons for objections from spouses or parents may range from concerns about child care, sexual abstinence and separation (in the case of spouses), and the need to uphold filial piety by caring for elderly parents. Thus, ordination highlights the tug-o-war of sentiments that exist between family members and members, due to the change in behaviors of the latter as a result of their participation in the True Buddha School.

- **Addressing the Concerns of the Audience**

Another important factor about charismatic leadership is related to the “innovativeness of those teachings.”⁵⁴¹ Innovation may include “an updated version of previously established, religious doctrine.”⁵⁴² While the ultimate goal of True Buddha School, for instance, is to lead people to “Realize the mind, see the Buddha Nature, and attain self-mastery over life and death,” the organization also aims to support the daily pragmatic concerns of its audience.⁵⁴³ In fact, the practices and ceremonies of True Buddha School claim to address six of the following worldly concerns: achieving harmony in relationships and families, increasing wealth and abundance, purification of negative hindrances and eradicating disasters, receiving protection from conflicts and unfavorable events, receiving healing from illnesses, and praying for the deliverance of the deceased.⁵⁴⁴

The significance of the worldly aims is symbolized by the rainbow of colors adorned on the shrine, which are also visualized during meditation. The corresponding significance of the colors are detailed as follows: red represents harmony and magnetization, yellow represents wealth and resources, white represents purification and deliverance of the deceased, black

⁵⁴⁰See Rule #8 in “Fourth Dharma Assistant Examination Manual,” 101.

⁵⁴¹Barnes, “Charisma and Religious Leadership,” 5.

⁵⁴²*Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁴³*The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 50.

⁵⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 28.

represents subjugation, and blue represents healing and protection. During a ceremony for increasing harmony, for instance, members offer red colored candles, flowers, and food items to symbolize this aim. The worldly practices claim to address pragmatic concerns that must be met first before pursuing the more lofty goals of enlightenment. Grandmaster Lu expresses these concerns through his following views about the need for harmony,

When I provide help to sentient beings, I observe that the pain felt when the family is in disharmony is no less than the pain felt when a person is sick. This is when the husband and wife are not happy with each other, cannot get along and desert each other. The afflictions caused by such disharmony are painful beyond words.⁵⁴⁵

As a response, Grandmaster Lu imparted the practice of Kurukulla, a Vajrayana deity who is associated with enchantment, to foster “mutual respect and love” and to “reverse a marriage crisis.”⁵⁴⁶ Other concerns that Grandmaster Lu addresses include the desire for employment, praying for fertility, seeking an auspicious house, and so forth.⁵⁴⁷ Through these practices, it is believed that individuals eventually decrease their desires for transient and mundane pursuits, and orient themselves towards the more meaningful goal of spiritual liberation.

According to Dicky Ma’s observation, the majority of Chinese participants are attracted to the organization due to their desire for enhancing the above-mentioned areas of their lives. Her observations are affirmed by the fact that there are higher attendance numbers at ceremonies that pray for enrichment than those aimed at achieving purification. When the claimed benefits of the practices are verified by the personal experiences of members, this leads to a snowball effect that draws new members by word of mouth. According to Hexham and Poewe, such primal experiences “are remarkably common” among religious movements, which provide the comfort of a common “theological interpretation,” allowing members to “talk freely about primal

⁵⁴⁵Lu, *The Aura of Wisdom*, 175.

⁵⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁴⁷See Sheng-yen Lu, *The Mystical Experiences of True Buddha Disciples* (San Bruno: Amitabha Enterprises, 1993) for a collection of stories on these topics.

experiences” and to “testify to the reality of the spirit world in their lives.”⁵⁴⁸ In a sermon delivered by Master Lotus Ming, the account of a miraculous story by one member subsequently inspired an entire village in Indonesia to take refuge in Lu.⁵⁴⁹ To cite a local example, my mother Tina Ho was drawn to the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple through her business interaction with a member of the temple. Tina operated a bakery and restaurant in the city’s Chinatown during the early 1990s, and she filled the temple’s orders for special occasion cakes.⁵⁵⁰ When the temple’s member picked up the order, Tina noticed that the dark spots that had once plagued the member’s face had faded completely and the member’s face had a healthy glow. When asked, the member claimed that the spots had disappeared due to her diligent chanting of the guru’s mantra taught by Grandmaster Lu. Subsequently, Tina joined the organization and has been a dedicated member for 18 years. She claims that the daily practice of mantra chanting has enabled her to feel gratitude in the face of suffering and to feel a sense of protection and guidance during stressful times.⁵⁵¹ In interviews with clergy, the clergy have also claimed to experience miracle healings from illnesses. Due to the shared common ground of these experiences the bond between members is reinforced, which contributes to a sense of closeness in the community.

- **Disenchantment and Members Leaving the Organization**

Alternately, however, when the experiences of the participants do not accord with the endorsed promises of the practices, members leave the organization. Grandmaster Lu has also shared stories about disappointed members that had left the organization due to these circumstances. Grandmaster Lu recalls the story of a female disciple who performed the above-mentioned Kurukulla fire offering forty-nine times to fulfill her wish of marrying a specific

⁵⁴⁸Hexham and Poewe, *Understanding Cults and New Religions*, 61.

⁵⁴⁹Master Lotus Ming, dharma talk at the Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, November 4, 2013.

⁵⁵⁰Tina Ho, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 6, 2014.

⁵⁵¹Ibid.

man.⁵⁵² However, her desire was never fulfilled because the man was in love with someone else.⁵⁵³ He recalls her response,

She got rid of her picture of Grand Master and all the Buddha statues on her shrine, and gave away her fire offering stove. She threw away all of her implements and burned her robe. . . . Her hatred lingered without end. I cried in vain, as I could not change her mind. She tore up her refuge certificate. I felt ashamed that I couldn't help her . . . I was sad but I couldn't do anything about her situation.⁵⁵⁴

The experiences of ex-members highlight the feelings of disappointment, lost confidence, and disenchantment that arise when their realities do not accord to the discourses of the leader or organization. In response, Grandmaster Lu claims that while the practices imparted by him are powerful, the outcome is dependent on the karmic circumstances of each individual.⁵⁵⁵

In conversations with two members that grew up in the organization, they also felt letdown in adulthood because the prescribed practices did not fully address their needs in remedying unhappiness and the stresses of daily life. The cause for the disgruntlement lies in the different cultural needs of both audiences. Since second-generation children are either born or raised predominantly in North America, their needs can be aligned more closely with North American understandings and preferences. Aronson elaborates on these preferences, “. . . we North Americans may have cultural needs for which the tradition has no established resources.”⁵⁵⁶ Such needs include the desire to express “emotions effectively” and enhance “intimacy” with others.⁵⁵⁷ However, Aronson admonishes,

This is not part of the Buddhist teacher's traditional repertoire. . . . We can make progress with this approach at least for a short while. Over time, with more prolonged contact with the tradition, we cannot help recognizing the differences in what is emphasized traditionally and what we consider valuable.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵²Sheng-yen Lu, *Travel to Worlds Beyond* (Oakland: US Daden Culture, 2010), 19.

⁵⁵³*Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁵⁵Sheng-yen Lu, *Travel to Worlds Beyond* (Oakland: US Daden Culture, 2010), 21.

⁵⁵⁶Aronson, *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground*, 12.

⁵⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁸*Ibid.*

In Vajrayana Buddhism, Buddhist teachers prescribe specific ritual practices to remedy afflicting emotions based on their observation of the disciple's character. In order to counteract anger, for instance, disciples are taught to chant the mantras of the wrathful deities until the illusion of anger is conquered through a momentary insight. Aronson, however, discusses the shortcomings of such prescriptions, "We learn that we cannot simply apply a technique for sitting meditation and expect it to improve every aspect of our lives automatically."⁵⁵⁹ Discussions with second-generation Chinese members confirm Aronson's assertions.

According to the members' responses, the traditional prescription of meditation and ritual practices alone were not effective sources for providing comfort and relief in life's unhappy experiences. Nancy, a medical practitioner in her early thirties, claims that while she does not reject her childhood faith, she feels that the practices taught in the True Buddha School did not enable her to adequately relieve emotions such as depression or sadness.⁵⁶⁰ She comments, "I have my own army of techniques to deal with pain apart from the practices [of True Buddha School]."⁵⁶¹ These holistic methods include the consultation with energy healers and psychics, and the reliance on Chinese medicine such as the use of herbal remedies and acupuncture.⁵⁶² Treatments with psychics include past-life regressions and cord-cutting therapies, which rely on subtle forms of trance or hypnosis to recover past-life memories and to sever or enhance existing relationships based on past-life connections.⁵⁶³ Nancy's response suggests that some second-generation members retain the cosmology of their early Buddhist roots such as the belief in cause and effect, past lives, and the use of *prana* or energy to heal the chakras. However, the use of Tantric practices and rituals is only a periphery treatment for making meaning out of the world,

⁵⁵⁹Aronson, *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground*, 12.

⁵⁶⁰Nancy (pseudonym), interview by author, Calgary, AB, November 12, 2013.

⁵⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁵⁶²*Ibid.*

⁵⁶³*Ibid.*

in addition to other holistic or psycho-therapeutic techniques.

Similar to Nancy's story, Victoria's experiences with the Tantric practices also resulted in disappointment.⁵⁶⁴ Victoria, a healthcare practitioner in her early thirties, was originally a member of the United Church.⁵⁶⁵ At the age of twelve, she became a member of the True Buddha School when her mother converted. As a child, she was an avid participant at the Pai Yuin Temple and had volunteered for nine years.⁵⁶⁶ At the start of her conversion, she recalls chanting the scriptures and mantras, and performing the deity visualizations on a regular basis.⁵⁶⁷ Aside from expressing her devotion, she had hoped that the practices would fulfill their purported purposes. However, her prayers were unfulfilled, which led to a continued series of setbacks and as a result, she began to withdraw her participation in the practices, both publically and privately. Though she still adopts a Buddhist worldview in terms of the beliefs in karma, reincarnation, and the recognition of Buddhist deities, she claims that she is now "spiritual and not religious."⁵⁶⁸ To her, being religious means to engage in the prescribed set of daily practices proposed by Grandmaster Lu.⁵⁶⁹ Alternately, spirituality largely involves her connection with Grandmaster Lu and Buddhist deities through prayer and thought, but not ritual involvement.⁵⁷⁰ Nancy and Victoria's responses also suggest the greater need for an enhanced clarity between the function of prescribed practices and Buddhist teachings in relation to emotional experiences such as depression. Despite the decline of Nancy and Victoria's involvement in the organization, their participation has not stopped entirely and they still claim to have a strong connection to Grandmaster Lu. For instance, Victoria attends four to five ceremonies annually and Nancy

⁵⁶⁴Victoria (pseudonym), interview by author, Calgary, AB, November 12, 2013.

⁵⁶⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰Ibid.

volunteered in the ceremony conducted by Grandmaster Lu in Calgary in 2009.⁵⁷¹

Based on the attendance patterns of second-generation members, it is suggested that the resources required to retain existing members are less than the resources needed to gain new members because the cosmology of the inactive members aligns closer with the espoused views of the organization. From a strategic point of view, the True Buddha School should focus its efforts on re-sparking the interest of less active members. According to Bibby's study,

55% of adults who are currently attending services less than monthly say they 'would consider the possibility of being more involved in a religious group if (they) found it to be worthwhile for themselves or their families.'⁵⁷²

Bibby further clarifies that adjustments in "ministry factors," in particular, would encourage attendance including the ability to address "personal needs, personal fulfillment and growth, and affinity with others."⁵⁷³ He adds, "some [respondents] want activities and programs and ministries aimed at specific age and family cohorts."⁵⁷⁴

The extent of whether less active members would be receptive to temple adjustments for encouraging attendance would have varying results. Victoria comments on a follow-up interview,

If a monk called up some of these members and reached out to them, it would work for some people. But, for me, it [increased participation] would depend on personal factors in my life . . . It takes energy to catch up with others and I feel so drained at the end of the work week.⁵⁷⁵

Interpersonal factors also served as deterrence to Victoria's participation because she wanted to avoid seeing certain individuals that reminded her of "the ugly side of human nature."⁵⁷⁶ Her response points to the reality that members leave the organization when they do not get along

⁵⁷¹Prior to her decline in attendance, Victoria visited the Pai Yuin Temple twice a week.

⁵⁷²Reginald Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing, 2002), 220.

⁵⁷³*Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁴Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 220.

⁵⁷⁵Victoria, follow-up interview by author, Jan 31, 2014.

⁵⁷⁶*Ibid.*

with each other. Disagreements may include personality conflicts, hurt feelings from gossip and rumors, diverging perspectives about how to run the organization, misunderstandings, and resentment, for instance. According to Ajahn Tiradhammo's critique about Buddhist community dynamics, a "common idea is that community entails homogeneity, rather than a shared commonality."⁵⁷⁷ Tiradhammo claims that the "harmony-preserving attitude of non-confrontation" that is typical in Asian Buddhist communities is detrimental to a sense of community, which bears a resemblance to a large family unit.⁵⁷⁸ It is a common attitude among Asian Buddhist communities that grievances and dissatisfaction stem from an individual's failure to exert patience, to conquer the passions, and to govern their internal world. Weaknesses in an individual's personal spiritual practice are blamed as the root cause of dissatisfaction instead of the dynamics in a group. As a result, personal conflicts are regarded as spiritual tests for individuals to contemplate on and to move past, as Grandmaster Lu advises:

All phenomena that hurt or damage us are opportunities to help us develop endurance. The instigators are great bodhisattvas and benefactors to spiritual cultivation. Instead of feeling anger and hatred toward them, engender gratefulness and appreciate the role they play.⁵⁷⁹

In order to preserve harmony in the community, the onus lies on the responsibility of individuals to look inwards to fix the problem. Tiradhammo, however, recalls his encounter with the down side of non-confrontation, "It is an effective short-term means of maintaining communal harmony, but in the long term it left many issues unresolved and festering."⁵⁸⁰ He continues, "Communities are comprised of individuals, so eventually many issues devolve to personal dynamics. Every individual brings personal issues to a spiritual community."⁵⁸¹ Unfortunately,

⁵⁷⁷Tiradhammo, "The Challenge of Community," 247.

⁵⁷⁸Ibid., 246.

⁵⁷⁹Lu, *Stories of Supreme Spiritual Responses*, 95.

⁵⁸⁰Tiradhammo, 246.

⁵⁸¹Ibid., 250.

personal conflicts between members are often undocumented and are considered to be a taboo subject that is kept under wraps, for fear that these conflicts will disrupt the harmony of the community.

Alternately, the passive nature of Asian Buddhist communities and the desire for preserving harmony often leads to gossip, which arise from the unspoken sentiments of members. Due to the close knit nature of the community, some members are prone to gossip due to the perception that the congregation is a large spiritual family and thus, some members feel the need to be informed about the personal matters of others. In the past, disagreements have arisen due to hurt feelings about personal boundaries being crossed and personal information being divulged amongst members. This characteristic highlights the fact that too much togetherness is not always a good thing. Due to interpersonal conflicts arising from gossip or other unvoiced matters, members leave the organization in silence and the organization's administrators are perplexed about the reasons for the departure of the members. At the same time, the close knit nature of the community is intimidating towards outsiders, and English-speaking members have expressed anxieties about "fitting in" in the congregation, which will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

- **Efficacy of the Power of Deities and its Effect on Membership Numbers**

Due to members leaving the organization, it is difficult to estimate the number of active participants in the True Buddha School. Stories shared by Grandmaster Lu about the members who left suggest that participants who join the True Buddha School based on the primary incentive of seeking wish-fulfillment from deities, departed the organization when the power of the deities were no longer regarded as effective. It is speculated that these participants left in favor of other temples that were deemed more efficacious, due to the nature of Chinese

indigenous religion. Based on the blending of the Buddhist tradition with Chinese indigenous practices, the role of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are often ascribed with the same role as the Chinese deities. In Chinese indigenous religion, the relationship between people and deities is “contractual.”⁵⁸² In Alessandro Dell-Orto’s survey of popular Earth God (*Tudi Gong*) temples in Taiwan, the gods “may be temporarily sanctioned or even replaced by the community” if their power is perceived as losing effect.⁵⁸³ He elaborates on this relationship,

. . . there have been cases in which Tudi Gongs have been left in the sun for not having managed to provide the rain needed for agriculture; or they have not been worshipped for a while because of delays in granting people’s requests for help; or they have been mutilated and then thrown away for having failed to indicate to gamblers the exact numbers to be played in lotteries.⁵⁸⁴

Consequently, Dell-Orto asserts that the popularity of temples “wax and wane concomitantly with the ‘magical power’ of *Tudi Gong* [local earth god] and other Chinese deities. . . .”⁵⁸⁵ While the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are ascribed as having magical power in Vajrayana Buddhism, their vows serve to liberate beings from the causes of suffering. Through the process of doing the rituals, individuals ideally gain the penetrating insight to see through the illusion of their desires. In Chinese indigenous religion, however, the deities gain prestige and power from the worshippers. Consequently, while the worldly practices of the True Buddha School attract membership numbers through the innovative approach of merging the daily concerns of its audience and the desire for propitiating deities in light of a Buddhist worldview that accepts and even embraces the cravings of humankind, these sources of attraction are also causes for departure when the practices do not deliver on their promised efficacy.

Another reason for the difficulty in determining actual membership numbers lies in the

⁵⁸²Alessandro Dell-Orto, *Place and Spirit in Taiwan: Tudi Gong in the Stories, Strategies and Memories of Everyday Life* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 2.

⁵⁸³Dell-Orto, *Place and Spirit in Taiwan*, 2.

⁵⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 3.

fact that participants typically register all of their family members on the membership registration form known as refuge initiation, and the convenience that the initiation does not need to be performed in person. Interested participants may mail their registration forms to the Ling Sheng Temple in Redmond, where Grandmaster Lu performs a “remote empowerment.”⁵⁸⁶ In these cases, such “members” are not aware that they have joined the organization. As well, some branches may not be as concerned with record keeping as others and thus, the membership numbers collected at global branches may be lost.⁵⁸⁷ These circumstances pose a challenge in collecting actual membership numbers. As far as the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple is concerned, however, observations suggest that the majority of members have not left the organization though they have remained inactive. To illustrate, the Pai Yuin Temple has collected roughly 1,000 refuge forms since its establishment.⁵⁸⁸ However, the monthly ceremonies are attended by 120 participants, which suggest that an estimated 12% of the congregation is active on a monthly basis.⁵⁸⁹ During Grandmaster Lu’s visit to Calgary in 2009, approximately 800-900 participants attended the ceremony conducted by him, which reveals that the members did not completely sever ties with the organization.

On the other hand, stories about members leaving the organization also function as a common source of encouragement for the members that stay. The stories create connections among members who have experienced similar setbacks. They also serve as a form of fortitude for cultivating the Bodhisattva virtues of patience and vigor, which are described as the “endurance of hardships” and “the sustained fervor that is necessary to maintain enthusiasm on

⁵⁸⁶*True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 18.

⁵⁸⁷Master Lotus Wen, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 11, 2014.

⁵⁸⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁹There are between 10 and 15 participants during weekly group meditations conducted in Chinese.

the spiritual journey – which at times can seem long and arduous.”⁵⁹⁰

- **Non-Chinese Views About Devotion**

Contrary to the assumption that Chinese Buddhism is based on devotion and propitiation to the deities, and therefore English-speaking convert audiences may be turned off by this aspect of Buddhism, there was an unexpected finding in the research. Group interviews revealed that devotion is still an important aspect to English-speaking audiences. For the English-speaking group, however, the roles of the deities are more ambiguous. The deities are not viewed as wish-granting beings. However, the English group claimed that the deities played a role in their quality of life and helped to fulfill their wishes in a general sense. In fact, the participants used the word “God” and “Buddha” interchangeably, and three of the seven participants considered themselves to be Christians. When the group was asked whether or not they practiced wealth practices for the sake of procuring money during times of need, for instance, the group collectively answered “no.” Although the worldly practices had less appeal to them, the practices did not deter them from participating in the True Buddha School’s activities.

The group viewed God as a higher power who listens to the prayers of the devoted and provides assistance when needed, but this view does not include the notion that the enactment of prescribed rituals produces a specific outcome. Instead, the deities have a peripheral role in offering guidance, albeit in an ambiguous way. Giovanni, an Italian in his forties who works as a parking lot attendant in Calgary’s downtown core claims,

If God could grant you wishes, we wouldn’t have a use for God. You have to get these things yourself. However, if I am making a prayer, I might ask God to give me a hand at the end of the prayer.⁵⁹¹

Xochi, a single mother from Mexico with two children adds, “If I need money, I might pray to

⁵⁹⁰See pp 121-122 of David Mitchell’s *Buddhism* for a discussion of the six bodhisattva perfections.

⁵⁹¹Group interview by author, Calgary, AB, November 2, 2013.

God but I would also ask my mom or my sister or those people around me for help.”⁵⁹² Devotion is not viewed as the reliance on a higher power, but it is demonstrated through the persistent effort in getting rid of negativity, aligning oneself with a path of positivity, and staying committed to this path.⁵⁹³ Wendy, a regular Caucasian member explains,

Devotion is faithfulness. It is continuing your practice without pause, and sticking to it and repeating it. It is not about changing your mind every day. You need to seek one purpose and stay with it.⁵⁹⁴

Devotion further involves the commitment to not getting angry at others, “not losing one’s cool towards others,” and not losing one’s compassion for others.⁵⁹⁵ According to Wendy, a former Calgary police officer who now works in the transportation and construction industry, she believes that the key in wish-fulfillment lies in her intention.⁵⁹⁶ When her intentions are continually good, she maintains that her wishes will naturally be fulfilled. Wendy views devotion as a form of sustainment and encouragement in maintaining good intentions towards others. Giovanni, a participant at the Pai Yuin Temple with the highest rates of attendance among the English-speakers, referenced the book “Laws of Attraction,” and saw wish-fulfillment as the output of his intentions into the world, along with the practice of ridding negative intentions.⁵⁹⁷ Where the Chinese-speaking audience emphasized concrete methods and rituals for wish-fulfillment, the English-speaking audience upheld a laidback approach wherein wishes were believed to be naturally fulfilled by the correct orientation and alignment of one’s behaviors. For instance, Xochi shares her views, “If you are compassionate and you follow the good rules, then

⁵⁹²Group interview by author, Calgary, AB, November 2, 2013.

⁵⁹³In contrast, Chinese participants view devotion as a continual process of accumulating merit through actions such as performing good deeds, practicing the sadhana regularly, doing volunteer work, and making offerings.

⁵⁹⁴Group Interview, interview by author, Calgary, AB. November 2, 2013.

⁵⁹⁵Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷Ibid.

your wishes will come true.”⁵⁹⁸ These findings reveal that there is a common ground for English and Chinese-speaking members to practice together despite their differences in interpretation, and also highlight the importance for personal meaning-making within the sub-groups.

- **Grandmaster Lu’s Personal Involvement**

Despite the fact that Grandmaster Lu has appointed a hundred masters (*acharyas*) to aid in the global expansion of the True Buddha School, Grandmaster Lu continues to remain involved and personally accessible to members, to the extent that an organization of this magnitude allows. According to Timothy Mottet et al., a teacher’s availability and immediacy is an important factor for encouraging student involvement.⁵⁹⁹ To highlight an example, Grandmaster Lu continues to hold face-to-face personal spiritual consultations to members and the public several days a week in Redmond, WA.⁶⁰⁰ He also partakes all of his daily meals in the same dining hall as the rest of the members, and performs a blessing empowerment for each individual after the meals.⁶⁰¹ He also personally engages and converses with those present, strangers and former acquaintances alike. Rather than delegating the task of conducting ceremonies to the appointed masters, Grandmaster Lu performs all of the rituals such as the fire offerings (*homa*), consecration of temple shrines, and leading the circumambulation of the Buddha personally. It is suggested that the perception of Grandmaster Lu’s active presence in the organization has helped to mobilize members around the globe towards shared common goals.

The extent of Grandmaster Lu’s immediacy, however, is limited by the fact that members are required to travel to Redmond to see him. Consequently, this requires members to expend

⁵⁹⁸Group Interview, interview by author, Calgary, AB. November 2, 2013.

⁵⁹⁹Timothy Mottet, Jessica Parker-Raley, Corey Cunningham, and Steven Beebe, “The Relationships Between Teacher Nonverbal Immediacy and Student Course Workload and Teacher Availability Expectations,” *Communication Research Reports* 22 (2005): 275-282.

⁶⁰⁰The consultation is offered on a voluntary donation basis.

⁶⁰¹The empowerment is done by tapping the crown chakra of each person.

more resources in terms of their time and money for travel and airfare in order to see their teacher. With over 400 branches worldwide, it is logistically impossible for Grandmaster Lu to visit all of them on a regular basis. To cite an example, prior to Grandmaster Lu's second visit to the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple in 2009, his previous visits occurred in 1994 and 1998. Due to his current age, members claim that it is unlikely that Grandmaster Lu will visit the Pai Yuin Temple in the future. Thus, those who lack the resources required for time and travel are not afforded with the same opportunity of consulting with Grandmaster Lu in person, and the lack of direct contact with the teacher potentially deters participants from deeper engagement. This problem calls to the challenges that get in the way of developing close personal relationships between students and teachers in large organizations. Subsequently, the attendance rates of global branches and chapters are relegated to the charisma of local Masters and reverends of the True Buddha School in attracting followers.

Master Lotus Ling, one of Grandmaster Lu's closest confidants and his chosen successor, additionally claims that the dedication and frequency of Grandmaster Lu's teachings is also a main factor of success for the True Buddha School.⁶⁰² Master Lotus Ling claims that Grandmaster Lu has been prolific in both writing, teaching, public talks, and in providing interviews on a weekly basis since his teaching career began in the mid 1970's. With the exception of taking a six year meditation retreat from 2000-2006, Grandmaster Lu's propagation activities have been uninterrupted in the past forty years.⁶⁰³ According to Master Lotus Ling, Grandmaster Lu pens a chapter of each book per day, culminating into the publication of one

⁶⁰²Master Lotus Ling, interview by author, Calgary, AB, August 22, 2013.

⁶⁰³a) Grandmaster Lu writes, "The reasons I want to live in seclusion are: 1.Life is such that we come alone at birth and we go alone upon death, 2.To seek the very limit of life, 3.To review life again by refocusing on oneself after an expansion, 4.To symbolize a change of lane in one's journey, [and] 5.Randomity." In *Whispers of Solitude*, True Buddha School Net [Official Website], available at <http://www.tbsn.org/english2/article.php?id=198> (accessed February 20, 2014).

b) During his retreat, however, Grandmaster Lu continued to publish books with the same frequency.

book every three months since his dharma propagation career began.⁶⁰⁴ Master Lotus Ling speculates, “Grandmaster probably has the world’s record for writing the most number of books.”⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰⁴Master Lotus Ling, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 22, 2013.

⁶⁰⁵Ibid.

Chapter Seven: Reflection of Results

This chapter offers an expanded reflection regarding the thesis question raised in Chapter One of this thesis: What does the departure of potential participants reveal about the cultural preferences, assumptions, and attitudes of both Asian and non-Asian Buddhists? Based on the extensive analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, there is inconclusive evidence to determine whether the causes for the departure of potential participants at the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple are largely dependent on outside or inside factors, as far as the English-speaking participants are concerned. However, the following patterns have emerged from the case study:

Low Interest in Institutional Activities

Eleven years since the publication of Thomas Tweed's article, "Who is a Buddhist? Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures" in 2002, the case study suggests that the interest in Buddhism is still a "Night-Stand" activity.⁶⁰⁶ The results suggest that active interest in participating in Buddhist institutional activities is low on the whole among English-speaking participants. The patterns of informal visitors at the Pai Yuin Temple show little evidence that they could be considered as potential participants based on the intention of their visit, the short length of their stay, and the fact that they did not attend formal services when they were invited by members. Based on their feedback, visitors were primarily drawn to the temple out of curiosity for the aesthetic imagery and forms of the Buddhist temple. Visitors had either driven by the temple or lived in a nearby neighborhood and wanted to take a peek inside. While approximately half of the visitors expressed interest in Buddhist teachings by asking questions about the enshrined deities, the temple's activities, and the goal of Liberation, none of the observed visitors returned for a second time during the observation period. Follow-up feedback

⁶⁰⁶See Thomas Tweed, "Who is a Buddhist? Night Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures," in the *Faces of Buddhism in America*.

with a small sample of visitors suggested that they had positive experiences based on the friendly reception by the members and the openness of the organization towards newcomers without the pressure to convert. Therefore, it is unlikely that the lack of return visits was caused by the poor reception or high pressure attitudes of the clergy and members, though there may be exceptions to the case.

Although there are challenges that affect the receptiveness of Asian forms of Buddhism to visitors, discussed in Chapters Five and Six, there is a lack of tangible evidence to suggest that the lack of return visits was based on an opposition or lack of interest towards Asian interpretations of the tradition. The scholarly literature has alluded to the fact that Asian Buddhist communities are insular based on a lack of interest by potential converts in the practice of deity veneration. Stuart Chandler, a religious studies scholar, elaborates on common attitudes toward devotional forms of Buddhism,

Despite the role Buddhism plays in affirming ethnic identity, for many its arrival in America is seen as an opportunity to purge the tradition of cultural accretions and superstitions.⁶⁰⁷

Alan Wallace, another religious studies scholar, adds,

Some Western Buddhist teachers . . . have already begun to claim that many traditional accounts of Buddhist insights and transformations are counterfeit, or misleading.⁶⁰⁸

Despite these claims in scholarly literature, there is little quantitative evidence in this study to support or deny them. While this observation may hold true for the focus of scholarly literature on Buddhist groups in North America and those whose interest in Buddhism occurs solely on an intellectual basis, the same preference does not necessarily apply to actual participants.

According to John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, individuals rarely seek out religious

⁶⁰⁷Chandler, "Chinese Buddhism in America," 24.

⁶⁰⁸Alan B. Wallace, "The Spectrum of Buddhist Practice," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhist Beyond Asia*, edited by Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 47.

communities and convert solely on intellectual grounds.⁶⁰⁹ Alternately, the same observation holds true that individuals rarely leave religious communities exclusively on intellectual grounds. Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe challenge the assumption that conversion happens on the basis of rationality and objective truths that “have been proved to be true.”⁶¹⁰ The research findings support these assertions. In fact, among the research subjects, there were only two participants whose experiences fit into the mold of what Lofland and Skonovd considered to be an intellectual “motif.”⁶¹¹ Individuals that belong within the intellectual motif “convert themselves in isolation from any actual interaction with devotees of the respective religion” and immerse themselves in “private investigation” by “reading books, watching television, attending lectures,” and so forth.⁶¹² While these participants expressed disagreement and opposition to the forms of deity veneration in the True Buddha School based on their self-study of Buddhism, the individuals continued to participate in the Pai Yuin Temple’s services despite their reservations. Their later decline in attendance was caused by other factors unrelated to their intellectual differences. To explain, while one of the individuals did not return due to a personal disagreement with another member, the other continued to attend services on a sporadic basis. The latter individual claimed that it was important for him to connect with others who valued the same things such as liberation and morality, indicating that people are often willing to set aside their intellectual differences for the sake of connecting with others.

If there were large numbers of participants attending the formal activities who were not returning, then this could be a greater case for indicating an adversity towards Asian forms of Buddhism. However, the annual number of new participants attending the formal activities did

⁶⁰⁹John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, “Conversion Motifs,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20 (1981): 376.

⁶¹⁰Hexham and Poewe, *Understand Cults and New Religions*, 16.

⁶¹¹Lofland and Skonovd, 376.

⁶¹²*Ibid.*

not exceed thirty. Thus, there were no factors that had a large statistical significance to determine the cause of deterred attendance based on a bias towards Asian forms of Buddhism.⁶¹³

Consequently, I have relied on the qualitative feedback of participants and members to further shed light on the research question.

It could also be argued that the clergy and volunteers were unable to capture the imagination and interest of visitors within the short span of their visit, due to language and cultural barriers.⁶¹⁴ Visitors may not have found a connection or personal value in the practices of the Pai Yuin Temple due to the plethora of foreign images, symbols, and deities enshrined on the altar. As a result, visitors with an active interest in pursuing meditation or other formal service may have explored that opportunity elsewhere. The lack of verbal feedback from visitors expressing a partiality towards Asian forms of Buddhism may also stem from the tendency in Canadian culture to uphold politeness in the public, and thus they did not feel comfortable with sharing their forthright opinion at the onset.

While the above circumstance may hold true for some visitors, whose reservations were unvoiced, a brief survey of the number of attendees at several local organizations supports the suggestion that active interest in institutional activities is low across the board. In fact, communication with Kurt Edwards, a board member of the Calgary Buddhist Meditation group (non-denominational) founded by Shirfu Samanta in 2009, reveals that there are approximately five regular attendees and five visitors on a weekly basis.⁶¹⁵ These numbers are comparable to the rates of attendance at the Pai Yuin Temple, which range from four to eight people weekly. Likewise, according to my brief observation, there were eight attendees at the Avatamsaka

⁶¹³The new participants were typically friends and co-workers of the Chinese and English-speaking members who were invited to attend the formal services.

⁶¹⁴The average length of stay among visitors was seven minutes.

⁶¹⁵Based on face-to-face communication with Kurt Edwards, Calgary, AB, March 15, 2014.

Monastery's (Chinese Mahayana) evening meditation and five attendees at the Calgary Buddhist Temple's (Japanese Pure Land) evening service.⁶¹⁶ According to *Sensei* Ken Madden, a clergy member of the Calgary Buddhist Temple, there are between ten and fourteen attendees on average during evening services.⁶¹⁷ Given the range of Buddhist organizations in this brief selection, which include the Japanese Pure Land School, Chinese Mahayana, Chinese Vajrayana, and a non-denominational group, the numbers between the organizations are in a comparable range. However, if the low attendance rates were caused by a bias towards Asian forms of Buddhism, then non-denominational groups would have significantly higher attendance numbers. Based on my brief survey of attendance at the above-mentioned organizations, however, there is inconclusive evidence to support higher attendance numbers among non-denominational groups. More in-depth research would be required to examine the longitudinal attendance patterns of the other organizations.

The comparable attendance numbers between the organizations also suggest that larger organizations do not necessarily attract higher numbers, considering the assumption that larger organizations are more likely to have more resources in terms of volunteers and money. For instance, the Avatamsaka Monastery is the largest Buddhist temple in Calgary in terms of its physical size, yet their attendance numbers among English-speakers appeared to be comparable to the above-mentioned groups.

A study of the division of human resources in the True Buddha School at the global level suggests the likely cause for the difficulties faced by global Buddhist organizations: The number of ethnic participants is growing at such a quick rate that the current human resources, which

⁶¹⁶Based on the author's observation at the Avatamsaka Monastery, Calgary, AB, on April 23, 2014, and the Calgary Buddhist Temple, Calgary, AB on April 24, 2014. The Avatamsaka Monastery is a branch of the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association and the Calgary Buddhist Temple is a branch of the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Churches of Canada.

⁶¹⁷Ken Madden Sensei, interview by author, Calgary, AB, April 24, 2014.

largely rely on the monks and nuns as the major workforce of the organizations, are engaged at full capacity to meet the growing demands of the ethnic membership base. Subsequently, the taskforce that is needed to promote the organization to English speakers and to foster a hybrid community, suffers from the lack of human resources. As a result, ethnic Buddhist groups such as the True Buddha School appear to be insular. To cite a local example, the weekly meditation at the Pai Yuin Temple has been conducted by Dicky Ma, a lay member, for the last fifteen years. When I made the suggestion that at least one of the nuns should also join the practice to serve as a knowledgeable consultant and to serve as a form of spiritual and moral support to the others, the board members and nuns enthusiastically agreed at the quarterly board meeting.⁶¹⁸ In fact, one of the nuns volunteered to attend every week. However, the request never materialized because the nun was exhausted from her full-time duties during the other six days of the week. Furthermore, among the temple's six full-time monks and nuns, two of them serve the global demands of the organization by conducting services at chapters and branches outside of North America that do not have resident clergy. The semi-retired Reverend Lotus Yin, for instance, frequently spends more than half of the year outside of Canada assisting the True Buddha School's branch in Panama City, Panama. Consequently, the True Buddha School's aspiration for creating a hybrid community suffers as a result of meeting the demands of the current membership base.

The attendance patterns at the Pai Yuin Temple also reveal that the majority of new participants were introduced by existing members. The number of active seekers who came to the Pai Yuin Temple after seeking out information about meditation groups in Calgary was rare. In comparison to the Avatamsaka Monastery and the Calgary Buddhist Meditation group, both of which have dedicated websites to advertise their activities, the Pai Yuin Temple has a weak

⁶¹⁸The meeting occurred in the basement of the Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, May 26, 2013.

marketing strategy, which is completely reliant on word of mouth introduction and passers-byers.⁶¹⁹ The study found that visitors that were introduced by existing members were more likely to attend formal activities than visitors from the public because previously established relationships reduced the anxiety of being in an unfamiliar group. In fact, new participants typically consulted with existing members about whether or not they were going to upcoming events as a deciding factor for their attendance. Especially in the case of social events involving the entire congregation, the new participants showed considerable uneasiness around the Chinese members due to language barriers and the lack of familiarity.

Lack of Time

Follow-up feedback with participants who attended the formal group meditation reveals that the lack of time for organized activities was another main factor that hindered their participation. The busyness of life was attributed to factors such as caring for children or grandchildren, taking a break from a busy work week, having too many activities on the go, and the need to study. As a result, their calendars were incompatible with the scheduled times of the temple's services, which led to sporadic gaps in attendance. Furthermore, it was not uncommon to meet many "new" participants that had large gaps in their attendance. In fact, four participants claimed that the last time they had visited the group was a year prior, while Jesse Pohoda attends once every two to three months due to his out of town work schedule.⁶²⁰ An annual attendee confessed, "It [group meditation] had always been at the back of mind, but life got in the way . . . I missed going to the temple."⁶²¹ As well, a mother and daughter who came on a weekly basis for over half a year also stopped attending when the daughter moved away for school following the

⁶¹⁹The Calgary Buddhist Meditation group also promotes their activities in local online meet up forums such as www.meetup.com.

⁶²⁰Jesse Pohoda, interview by author, Calgary, AB, September 27, 2013.

⁶²¹Based on follow-up email correspondence on April 21, 2014.

summer break. Due to the long gaps in attendance spanning upwards of a year, it was difficult to assess whether the lack of participants was based on sporadic visits or whether the participants were not returning at all. Participants frequently expressed in follow-up communications that they had intended to attend services more often but their attendance was hindered by other priorities. This feedback suggests that they were not closed to further participation. Bibby asserts that the lack of scheduling priority for institutional activities is based on a participant's perception of what he or she deems is worthy of their time. In other words, individuals set aside time for the things that they deem are worthy. Consequently, Bibby claims, "The trick is for religious organizations to provide the things that the less involved and non-involved define as worthwhile."⁶²²

Sources of Attraction for English-Speaking Participants

The lack of time for institutional activities further raises deeper implications about contemporary attitudes of religiosity. To explain, the top three motives of participants for attending the Pai Yuin Temple's group meditation are: 1) The desire to experience the positive effects of meditation, which involve the reduction of stress from personal issues or the busy work week. Participants reported that they simply "felt better" after the meditation session. 2) The desire to connect with a higher power. In a group interview, all participants recognized the universality of world religions and perceived no difference between the higher power of the Buddhas, the Christian God, Jesus Christ, and so forth. These manifestations were seen as different forms of the same power. 3) Lastly, participants expressed the desire to connect with spiritual friends and other like-minded people. In considering the top three motives of participation, the following implication is raised: If participants can satisfy two of the three motives of participation in a home setting (namely, the desires to practice meditation and connect

⁶²²Reginald Bibby, "Why Bother with Organized Religion?," 93.

with a higher power), then the frequency of attendance at institutional services is negatively affected given the lack of time cited by participants. After all, meditation is an individual and private activity even in a group setting. Furthermore, Buddhist organizations do not have an exclusive or proprietary offering of the practice of meditation.

Group Meditation versus Personal Meditation

Meditation is increasingly becoming incorporated into the programs of both non-religious and religious groups that have not been formerly associated with the practice. The Deer Park United Church of Calgary, for instance, offers classes on Himalayan Yoga Meditation.⁶²³ In fact, guided meditations can be streamed through internet sites such as Youtube and Vimeo. Therefore, participants must see value in group meditation in order to set aside time for organized practices. If the Buddhist organizations are perceived as being unable to offer special benefits through their particular version of meditation, participants may instead choose to participate at locales that are closer to their homes. To illustrate, one member confided that she was unable to attend the Pai Yuin Temple's meditation on the weekend due to her work schedule. As a result, she attended the services at another Buddhist temple nearby. In her opinion, she was able to experience the beneficial effects of group meditation at another institution. Nonetheless, the observations of the case study suggest that the regular participants preferred to come to the Pai Yuin Temple despite the longer commute because they enjoyed visiting with other members who they were friends with. In this way, personal friendships and relationships serve as a strong bond for cultivating temple communities compared with other forms of recruitment such as marketing or advertising.

Alternately, if participants favor a particular version of meditation offered by one institution, then they may instead choose to practice their preferred type of meditation at home.

⁶²³“Groups and Activities,” *Deer Park United Church*, <http://dpuc.ca/groups/> (accessed May 27, 2014).

After all, teachers such as Shirfu Samanta of the Calgary Buddhist Meditation group and Grandmaster Lu advocate that the positive benefits of meditation are maximized through daily practice.⁶²⁴ To cite an example, a member confessed that he had set his alarm clock for three consecutive Saturdays in preparation for plans to attend the Pai Yuin Temple's service. However, he slept in three weeks in a row and practiced meditation at home in order to make up for the missed sessions. This example highlights the fact that attendance is affected by the proximity of the institution to an individual's home and the preference for convenience. These examples further show that attendance relies on individual factors including personal motivation and preferences for the particular types of meditation offered by organizations. It was also not uncommon to meet participants who wanted to sample the techniques taught by a variety of organizations, whether Buddhist or not, and thus their participation was affected by their attendance at other institutions. According to Esposito et al., the interests of "new age seekers" involve the enthusiasm "in the mystical traditions and meditation practices of all religions."⁶²⁵ Two of the participants claimed that the Pai Yuin Temple was one organization among a rotation of various organizations that were visited, although it is suspected that there may have been more individuals that followed the same routine.

Postmodern Culture and the Collapse of the Metanarrative

The participant feedback suggests that the interest in Buddhism is peripheral to a larger new age movement that embodies the ideals of postmodern culture. John Esposito et al.'s description about the correlation between new age religion and postmodern culture shed light on the tendency to remain undecided about an individual's religious identity,

Postmodern culture is pluralistic, relativistic, and eclectic – seemingly without any public

⁶²⁴Lecture by Shirfu Samanta at the Calgary Buddhist Meditation's center, Calgary, AB, March 15, 2014.

⁶²⁵John Esposito, Darrell Fasching, and Todd Lewis, *Religions of Asia Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 368.

norms or standards. The choice between “truths” is said to be intellectually undecidable and so is decided pragmatically, in terms of “what works for me.” Truth, goodness, and beauty are in the eye of the beholder. People mix and match beliefs, practices, and aesthetic choices to their own taste in all areas of life – whether music, clothing, architecture, intellectual beliefs, or religion.⁶²⁶

The characteristic of picking and choosing different beliefs was reflected by a segment of the participants, who liked to sample the practices and techniques taught by a multitude of organizations, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, while at the same time not committing to any of them as a formal member, including the Pai Yuin Temple. A synopsis of the gathered opinions can be summarized by Marty’s comments, “I wanted to find my own way. It would have been much easier to go to the Buddhist temple and just start and trust that process in a kind place.”⁶²⁷ However, Marty claims that he wanted to pursue his own path by combining the techniques gleaned from a variety of sources.⁶²⁸ Esposito et al. clarify the motivations of participants such as Marty,

What unites new age seekers, despite their diversity, however, is the quest for the perfection of the self. Their goal is to realize a ‘higher self’ through intense personal experiences of transformations.⁶²⁹

Based on these observations, it is suggested that the sporadic attendance patterns at the Pai Yuin Temple are not significantly caused by participants that leave in favor of formal membership with other organizations. In fact, participants such as Marty did not join any of the other organizations.

Further evidence that support the values of plurality and the “choice between truths” in the postmodern narrative lies in the observation that at least half of the participants did not define

⁶²⁶Esposito et al., *Religions of Asia Today*, 368.

⁶²⁷Marty Hansen, interview by author, Calgary, AB. March 26, 2013.

⁶²⁸Ibid.

⁶²⁹Esposito et al., 368.

themselves as Buddhist, despite their regular attendance.⁶³⁰ It is suggested that the rejection of labelling oneself as a Buddhist, at least for some individuals, represents the position of an individual's values for openness and ecumenity, as opposed to a radical departure of an individual's cosmology from Buddhism, discussed in Chapter Five. This assertion is based on the qualitative assessment of participant responses, which confirmed their beliefs in the tradition's major tenets including the belief in cause and effect, karma, reincarnation, and the goal of achieving personal liberation.

Another characteristic about postmodern culture is the propensity for consumption. Consumption may manifest in tangible forms, including the purchase of material items such as Tibetan singing bowls, mala bracelets or rosaries, and statues of laughing Buddhas, and intangible forms, such as the consumption of physical spaces. While the large majority of the Pai Yuin Temple's English-speaking visitors were not interested in participating in formal activities, their visits represent intangible forms of consumption. According to Manel Hamouda and Abderrazak Gharbi, consumption is closely tied with personal identity.⁶³¹ It is "a social act of symbolic meanings, social codes and relationships," in which "each individual is different from another by a set of consumption choices and experience."⁶³² It is suggested that both tangible and intangible forms of consumption are an extension of an individual's yearning to recognize the shared truths of all religious traditions. It was not uncommon, for example, to witness visitors purchasing jewelry inscribed with Buddhist mantras or depictions of Buddhist deities at the Pai Yuin Temple. Hamouda and Gharbi suggest that such forms of consumption represent a deep

⁶³⁰a) Esposito et al., *Religions of Asia Today*, 368.

b) Approximately one quarter of the participants were undecided and the remainder considered themselves to be Buddhists.

⁶³¹Manel Hamouda and Abderrazak Gharbi, "The Postmodern Consumer: An Identity Constructor?" *International Journal of Marketing Studies* 5 (2013): 41.

⁶³²*Ibid.*, 43.

desire “to live deeply” in all of the various identities that an individual creates for him or herself.⁶³³ The construction of these various identities may involve, for example, the opinion of oneself as being worldly and learned about religious traditions outside of the Judeo-Christian traditions.

The consumption of religious objects was not only limited to the English-speaking visitors. It was also a common sighting for Chinese-speaking members to sport t-shirts, amulets, pendants, monk bags, pins and other jewelry inscribed with the True Buddha School’s logo, consisting of the school’s Chinese name in a moon disc atop a lotus flower. The consumption and display of the logo-branded objects reflect a growing trend among Taiwanese Buddhist groups that are marketing themselves as a consumer brand, in addition to displaying an individual’s pride of belonging to a specific group.

Postmodern culture is further characterized by the collapse of metanarratives, which are “the grand stories or myths that gave each civilization a sense of meaning, purpose, and identity.”⁶³⁴ David Surrency clarifies that “the collapse of the metanarrative does not mean the disappearance of metanarratives; it just means they seem to function differently in a social environment.”⁶³⁵ He continues, “metanarratives become smaller ‘canopies’ for particular groups or individuals,” rather than society as a whole.⁶³⁶ The study found that there were a variety of narratives adopted by the Chinese and English-speaking members, which served multiple functions within the groups.

In comparing the group dynamics within the Chinese and English meditation groups, the Chinese-speaking members emphasized cohesiveness by echoing the perspectives of

⁶³³Hamouda and Gharbi, “The Postmodern Consumer,” 41.

⁶³⁴Esposito et al., *Religions of Asia Today*, 367.

⁶³⁵David Surrency, “The Proliferating Sacred: Secularization and Postmodernity,” (Master’s Thesis, University of South Florida, 2007), 3-4.

⁶³⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

Grandmaster Lu and the values of the organization. The Chinese members were more likely to toe the party line as a show of united support and belonging to the organization, which is both a Confucian expression of loyalty or *zhong*, and the value placed by the organization on maintaining the unity of the community or *sangha*. For instance, members could recite the famous quote of Padmasambhava, “Honor the guru, cherish the dharma, and practice diligently,” which is the goal of the organization, in verbatim.⁶³⁷ In contrast to the top-down structure in which knowledge is passed down within the Chinese group, the English-speaking participants placed a high value on mutually shared knowledge and individual expressions through round table discussions. Both preferences for sharing knowledge in a formal setting were accommodated by the Pai Yuin Temple.

Where the metanarrative of Grandmaster Lu’s teachings and his life experiences served as an ideal exemplary for the Chinese members to model their life upon, the English group regarded the metanarrative as one perspective among many spiritual streams of thought, rather than the ideal model. For example, the Chinese members passed on stories of healing and miracles amongst the congregation, which reinforced the metanarrative of Grandmaster Lu’s identification as the human incarnation of Padmakumara, an emanation of Amitabha Buddha. On the other hand, the English group focused on the interpretation of Grandmaster Lu’s teachings in light of individual truths. They sought to make meaning from the readings as it applied to their personal experiences and lives through open discussion, whereas the Chinese participants rarely voiced their opinions after a dharma talk as a means of showing respect for the knowledge of the ordained. Even in the case of large monthly services attended by both English and Chinese-speaking members, the former were more likely to ask questions than the latter, despite the fact that the added step of translation was required. This observation does not mean that the Chinese

⁶³⁷*The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 50.

members did not value Grandmaster Lu's teachings in light of personal truths but self-study was regarded as a private endeavor in favor of presenting a united front. This passive characteristic, however, led some members to withdraw their participation in the case of personal disagreements with others. As a result, their reasons for withdrawing were unvoiced. At the same time, however, the passive nature of the congregation helped to foster an environment for the English-speaking participants to discuss their own beliefs and truths, as opposed to creating an environment in which the narrative of Grandmaster Lu was enforced upon participants.

The English group discussions also revolved around the themes of ecumenity and the inclusiveness of other faiths by weaving various parts of multiple narratives together, especially in regards to shared parallels between Buddhism and Christianity. The majority of participants were raised in a Christian home and while some participants rejected their childhood faith in favor of exploring the possibility of a more compatible cosmology in the Buddhist teachings, others confessed that the openness of the Buddhist tradition towards other faiths allowed them to reconcile connections with their earlier faith. In this way, some members regarded the metanarrative of Buddhism as a lens for understanding the narratives of other faiths. For instance, Wendy Feagan interprets the incarnation of Jesus Christ and Mohammed as the appearance of the bodhisattvas, and regards the Three Bodies of a Buddha as a parallel expression of the Holy Trinity.⁶³⁸ In addition to Wendy, two other participants considered themselves to be Christians, and the word God and Buddha were used interchangeably during group discussions to represent a higher power.⁶³⁹ In this way, the Pai Yui Temple was seen as an institutional environment to explore and construct these narratives, and to build friendships with other compatible people. These findings further suggest that the focus on the personal vows

⁶³⁸Wendy Feagan, interview by author, Calgary, AB, April 13, 2013.

⁶³⁹Ibid.

and identities of various deities in Vajrayana Buddhism appealed to some participants who valued their Christian upbringing and who wanted to explore their belief in a higher power. This observation challenges the assumption that former Protestants are more drawn towards iconoclastic representations of Buddhism, at least for some individuals.

Group interviews also reveal that the practice of deity veneration by the Chinese members did not deter the attendance of the English group, due to the values expressed for the inclusiveness of all religious traditions. Although the Buddhist deities were not regarded as wish-granting beings by the English group, the Buddhist deities were viewed as tangible forms of an abstract higher power shared throughout all religious traditions.

The individual identities and vows of the deities held less importance among the English group, but nonetheless, their collective power represented a source of crucial guidance in the lives of the participants. For instance, during a group interview on February 22, 2014, individuals could only identify a few central deities on the shrine, despite their weekly practice of reciting the names of over twenty different deities during the group meditation's invocation prayer. Upon further questioning, participants were not concerned about the individual qualities of the deities. Xochi, a member who frequently reads Grandmaster Lu's works claims, "Whether in Catholicism or Buddhism, prayer is the same. You ask for something when you need it."⁶⁴⁰ Giovanni, a regular participant, further clarified that the various deities all serve the same function and states, "Gods are there to guide you."⁶⁴¹ As discussed in Chapter Six, devotion was still an important aspect of faith in the group, though this view does not include the notion that the enactment of prescribed rituals produces a specific outcome, as Giovanni clearly states, "I do

⁶⁴⁰Group interview by author, Calgary, AB, February 22, 2014.

⁶⁴¹Ibid.

not do specific practices to pray for wealth.”⁶⁴² Wendy, a frequent member who has since moved to Edmonton following the group interviews, clarifies that her intention to gain wealth is included in her general prayers.⁶⁴³ However, the individuals do not supplicate specific deities, such as Ganesh or Yellow Jambhala, who are associated with wealth and abundance in the True Buddha School.

The English group also valued the expression of their individuality by defining the temple’s community as a collective of like-minded independent thinkers. For example, when the participants were asked whether or not their definition of community involved the notion that individuals must make personal sacrifices for the sake of the collective, such as favoring the wishes of the majority opinion in order to get along with others, as is the frequent case in Asian group dynamics, the English group rejected this understanding of community. Jesse, an electrician who makes the time to attend Saturday morning group meditations when his busy work schedule permits, shares his views, “Self-sacrifice is not needed if one feels complete, whole, and feels self-love.”⁶⁴⁴ He explains, “Community is about individuals that come together to share in something.”⁶⁴⁵ The participants in the group interview emphasized the importance of autonomy and making personal choices in a community. For example, Giovanni and Jesse recalled their “fears and doubts” about being “welcomed by the temple” during their initial visits.⁶⁴⁶ Despite the cultural and language barriers, however, they claimed to have an “inner knowing that the people were loving” and thus, they “made the choice to be closer to the community.”⁶⁴⁷ In their interview responses, such as the previous example, participants

⁶⁴²Group interview by author, Calgary, AB, February 22, 2014.

⁶⁴³Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴Group interview by author, Calgary, AB, September 27, 2013.

⁶⁴⁵Ibid.

⁶⁴⁶Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷Ibid.

frequently stressed the significance of independence and individual choices in their ideal community. Aronson claims that identity and individuality in Asian culture are expressed in terms of upholding one's role and duties in relation to the greater whole, in contrast to the emphasis on "bridging the gap between two autonomous individuals" in the West.⁶⁴⁸ He provides the following illustration, "Once two people recognize each other as separate, they then establish areas of common interest through conversation."⁶⁴⁹ This contrasts with the "strong emphasis on social warmth and connection, particularly among friends and family" in Asian culture.⁶⁵⁰ The Chinese-speaking participants tended to emphasize identity through family units, conformity to the espoused values of the organization, and the fulfillment of specific volunteer roles. To cite an example, the names of children and even adult children are often unknown in the Pai Yuin Temple except by their association to their parents or grandparents. Thus, the family unit is represented by the elders, which highlights the expression of filial piety or *xiao* in Confucian culture. Subsequently, volunteer work involving clearly defined roles served the function of validating the individual contribution of members, in terms of their specific part within the greater whole.

The importance of weaving different narratives together was also characteristic of the Chinese group, albeit in a different way than the English-speaking group. For example, the Chinese-speaking members do not entirely follow the metanarrative of the historical Buddha's method of determining the seniority of ordained persons. Where the seniority of monks and nuns was determined by age and the length of their ordination by the historical Buddha, seniority in the True Buddha School is decided by an individual's diligence in their meditative practices and the actualization of compassionate acts. Reverend Lotus Fong shares,

⁶⁴⁸Aronson, *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground*, 16.

⁶⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 15.

In the True Buddha School, the level of one's spiritual cultivation is the focal point [for deciding seniority]. We don't look at someone's age but we look at his or her spiritual attainments. Take for example, the school system. Everyone graduates elementary or high school around the same age, but spiritual cultivation is not the same. This is not the case in Vajrayana Buddhism. There are some people who take refuge for only a short time, but they can achieve a high level of cultivation. So, this is our perspective in the True Buddha School.⁶⁵¹

Master Lotus Wen and Lotus Ming, for instance, were promoted to the position of *acharya* or teacher in their early thirties, which is considered a young age in the True Buddha School, given the fact that the majority of reverends choose ordination during their retirement in later adulthood. It is suspected that this approach of recognizing teachers is not readily accepted by some members, given the fact that the metanarrative regarding the priority of elders has dominated the rhetoric of Chinese culture. However, these reservations are not openly expressed due to the group dynamics of preserving a united front. Also, the authority of administrative positions is not unmitigated and stringent, due to the fact that the status of individuals may be revoked by the True Buddha Foundation, the central committee of the organization. Additionally, all positions of the administrative hierarchy must work closely with the local board of directors of the branches, consisting of democratically elected lay members. Esposito et al. explain the effects of globalization on postmodernism,

Postmodern culture represents the loss of a normative center in every culture that has been touched by global mass media, international corporations, and global mass transportation.⁶⁵²

In regards to the blending of various religious traditions, the True Buddha School also blends the narratives of the Pure Land School of Buddhism with the Vajrayana Branch, regarding their practices and beliefs in rebirth. For instance, members chant the name of Amitabha Buddha to express their desire for rebirth in the Western Pure Land. At the same time,

⁶⁵¹Reverend Lotus Fong, interview by author, January 8, 2013.

⁶⁵²Esposito et al., *Religions of Asia Today*, 367.

the clergy chant during funeral services every seven days during a period of forty-nine days, to facilitate the rebirth process for the deceased, based on the teachings of the Tibetan text, *Bardo Thodol* or Liberation Through Hearing during the Intermediate State. Furthermore, Grandmaster Lu chose his four successors based on their ability to answer a *koan* or riddle, a practice that is central to the Zen tradition. These examples highlight the merging of various narratives amongst different branches and sub-schools of Buddhism.

The flexibility of the True Buddha School to accept the blending of narratives has been an attractive feature to participants because the organization has been able to appeal to a variety of different preferences for ritual practices and perspectives. At the same time, a paradoxical challenge is created by this orientation because it has also been a considerable cause of confusion for participants in making sense and gaining clarity in the blended traditions. To cite an example, a major challenge is caused by the use of foreign terminology. While the string of sacred syllables or *mantras* is chanted in Sanskrit, the discourses or *sutras* are chanted in Chinese. Although English translations are provided for all liturgies, and wireless headsets broadcast the procedures in English during monthly services, the chants are exclusively conducted in Sanskrit and Chinese.⁶⁵³ It is suspected that the burden of attending a two to three hour service in a foreign language is a significant cause for the sporadic gaps in attendance.

Follow-up feedback with participants suggested that some individuals, however, had positive experiences due to sensations or perceptions of spiritual energy felt from the collective efforts of the congregation. For instance, Craig Mowat, a graduate from the University of Calgary's business faculty and a five-year member of the temple, prefers to attend the ceremonies conducted in Chinese because the solemn and decorous style of the services feel more "authentic" to him compared with the laid-back and casual feel of the English group

⁶⁵³The monthly services are attended by both English and Chinese-speaking participants.

meditations.⁶⁵⁴ He explains,

With Saturday morning [English] practice, you're in and out quickly, and there are also a lot of people that are just beginning to experience Buddhism as opposed to people that have been at it for a quite a while. I feel that at the English group practice, you don't really get the full experience of what happens at the Chinese ceremonies, which are more meaningful to me. It seems more like a pure ceremony as opposed to holding people's hands.⁶⁵⁵

Where the Chinese services feature a full orchestra of Buddhist instruments and a stately procession of clergy entering and exiting the meditation hall, the English services emphasize egalitarian attitudes such as addressing coordinators on a first name basis as opposed to title and rank, in order to appeal to Western preferences. In his case, Craig feels that the greater number of people that are familiar with the chants and procedures in the Chinese services is also responsible for creating contrasting moods between the Chinese and English services. As a regular member who has committed the meditation chants and procedures to memory, Craig says, "I feel distracted when I am surrounded by people who are just there to check things out or who are not as serious."⁶⁵⁶ Craig's view, however, represents an exception to the case rather than the majority opinion of the English group, who favored the more laid-back atmosphere of the latter's services.

While the clergy and members are open to the future possibility of conducting the services and chants in two languages, there is currently no perceived demand due to the low numbers of English-speaking participants at the services, which are less than 5% of the total attendees. Thus, a conundrum is created about the prioritization of supply and demand.

Predispositions that Increase the Rates of Attendance

The study found that there are predispositions that increase the likelihood of attendance and the inclination towards formal membership at the Pai Yuin Temple among the English-

⁶⁵⁴Craig Mowat, interview by author, Calgary, AB, September 12, 2013.

⁶⁵⁵Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶Ibid.

speaking group. Participants that had groups of Asian friends were less likely to feel apprehensive about being a minority ethnicity within the congregation. The same pattern holds true for participants with blended families such as Chinese spouses or relatives. Additionally, participants who expressed an interest in Asian arts such as kung-fu, tai chi, qi gong, and Asian films were more likely to actively seek out participation in the Pai Yui Temple's activities. Friends of existing members or participants that attended in groups of two or more were also more likely to attend on a consistent basis. There were frequent rates of attendance for individuals that were going through a difficult time in their lives. However, these attendance patterns only lasted for the duration of their personal hardships. For example, participants whose family members recently passed away were more likely to attend services immediately following the passing but the attendance rates were not sustained. Other factors include those who expressed value in the benefits of group meditation and the need to connect with people who have similar interests. Participants who were recruited to volunteer and assist with the temple's activities showed higher rates of attendance, though not all participants had the time to volunteer despite their interest.

Lastly, those who claimed to have a primal or mystical experience were most likely to maintain their attendance in the long run compared to the others. Craig, a regular member who makes an annual trip to Redmond, WA, to see Grandmaster Lu in person, equates that personal encounter to a mystical experience. Craig elaborates,

If I hadn't been down to Seattle to feel the energy at the temple and to visit the Rainbow Temple [another True Buddha temple located in North Bend, Washington], I don't think I could fully comprehend what was going on. The difference between a ceremony conducted in Calgary and Seattle is that Grandmaster is there. In Christian terms, it is the equivalent of making a pilgrimage to see the pope. When I get blessed by Grandmaster, I feel so much better afterwards. It is a reaffirmation of my beliefs.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁷Craig Mowat, interview by author, Calgary, AB, September 12, 2013.

According to Craig, these experiences have led him to return to the Seattle area year after year.

Sources of Attraction for Chinese-Speaking Participants

The patterns of Chinese-speaking participants indicate that the emphasis on maintaining filial piety to ancestors was one of the main reasons for consistent regular visits. Furthermore, Chinese participants typically visited the temple as family units, which contributed to higher attendance numbers. Based on these findings, it is argued that many participants are culturally predisposed towards high rates of attendance based on the importance of ancestor veneration in Chinese culture, at least among those who uphold the tradition. As a result, the temple's members had unrealistic expectations that English-speaking visitors would follow the same patterns of regular visits based on a lack of knowledge about the cultural dispositions of the latter. The Chinese visitors who came to the temple regularly for the main purpose of venerating their ancestors were not necessarily formal members of the temple. Based on their activities in the temple, approximately half of the daytime visitors expressed little interest in formal Buddhist services. In this way, a visit to the temple was analogous to a visit to a cemetery or mausoleum, although temples do not typically house the remains of the deceased.

Based on discussions with a sample of second-generation children and teenagers who accompanied their parents or grandchildren to the temple, the children expressed little interest or knowledge about the activities of ancestor veneration. Grandmaster Lu remarks that such "traditional ideas will probably be gone in the first couple of generations after transplanting to America."⁶⁵⁸ Grandmaster Lu continues, "Children growing up in America have their own ideas about life" and thus, the families "should not try to control them."⁶⁵⁹ Additionally, according to the Pai Yuin Temple's clergy, the past cohorts of second-generation children were largely

⁶⁵⁸Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 96.

⁶⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 97.

uninterested in their parent's faith and thus, the members have concentrated their efforts on encouraging adults to attend services. This may be an isolated case within the True Buddha School, however. Interviews with Master Lotus Zhi of the Chin Yin Temple, the Edmonton branch of the True Buddha School, reveal that a large number of youth have been active within the congregation due to Master Lotus Zhi's recruitment of youth for volunteer roles.⁶⁶⁰

The attendance patterns also suggest that the wider Chinese ethnic community continues to rely on Buddhist temples to perform funeral services. After reviewing the temple's annual record book, clergy estimated that roughly half of all funeral services conducted by the Pai Yuin Temple were performed for non-members. These findings contrast with the national patterns among Christian churches, which have experienced a decrease in the number of church-conducted funerals among the public, discussed in Chapter Four.

Another source of attraction for visitors to the Pai Yuin Temple involved venerating the Earth God or *tudi gong* on the first and fifteenth of each lunar month, a common practice in Chinese popular religion. Practices such as these highlight the cultural importance placed on auspicious days in the lunar calendar.

According to the clergy, there have been higher rates of success towards increasing the attendance of Chinese visitors at formal services.⁶⁶¹ The clergy claim that Chinese-speaking visitors were more responsive and enthusiastic to their invitation to attend formal services compared with the English-speaking visitors.⁶⁶² Thus, the cost of acquiring new members in terms of the resources and time utilized to encourage the visitors of the value of formal attendance is considerably lower among Chinese-speaking visitors. It is suggested that the cause for this occurrence lies in the observation that Chinese-speaking visitors had a general propensity

⁶⁶⁰Master Lotus Zhi, interview by author, Redmond, WA, August 23, 2013.

⁶⁶¹Master Lotus Wen, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 11, 2014.

⁶⁶²Ibid.

towards the benefit of generating merit through regular monetary donations to the temple. Thus, the clergy were able to stimulate their interest in attending formal services by explaining the benefits of accruing merit through spiritual practice and personal cultivation, and the benefits of dedicating the merit from those activities to their families and deceased ancestors' wellbeing.

Factors Affecting Rates of Conversion

Lofland and Skonovd suggest that there is a correlation between the amount of time that it takes for an individual to convert and the circumstances of their conversion experiences, which they call "conversion motifs."⁶⁶³ They claim that conversion experiences that are characterized by high levels of emotional intensity, which they call "affective arousal," results in shorter conversion times.⁶⁶⁴ The conversion motif with the shortest conversion times are those experiences that are characterized by mystical encounters. An example of a mystical encounter may include an auspicious dream, a vision during meditation, or intense feelings of grace and so forth. According to Lofland and Skonovd, mystical encounters are accompanied with high levels of "emotional arousal," "sometimes involving theophanic ecstasis, awe, love, or even fear."⁶⁶⁵ Subsequently, "the conversion is quite brief – perhaps on the order of minutes or hours."⁶⁶⁶

Lofland and Skonovd continue,

And, the event signals the onset – or active intensification – of belief which is then followed by participation in the ritual and organizational activities of the religion with which the conversion experience is associated.⁶⁶⁷

Owing to this understanding, participants are more likely to toe the party line and assume enhanced participatory roles in an organization following a mystical encounter. In comparison, participant experiences that are characterized by experimental attitudes involve longer

⁶⁶³See Chart 1 in Lofland and Skonovd, "Conversion Motifs," 375.

⁶⁶⁴Lofland and Skonovd, "Conversion Motifs," 375 and 377.

⁶⁶⁵Ibid., 378.

⁶⁶⁶Ibid., 377.

⁶⁶⁷Ibid., 378.

conversion times based on lower levels of emotional intensity.⁶⁶⁸ Lofland and Skonovd expand,

[E]xperimental conversions involve relatively low degrees of social pressure to participate since the recruit takes on a ‘try-it-out’ posture. The actual transformation of identity, behavior, and world view commonly called conversion takes place over a relatively prolonged period – often months or even years – and does not appear to be accompanied by high levels of emotional arousal in most instances. The affective content of the experience appears to be that of curiosity.⁶⁶⁹

In this way, “try-it-out” approaches towards religious traditions, which are mainly driven by “curiosity,” are attributed to slower conversion rates that occur over “months or even years.”⁶⁷⁰

It is suggested that Lofland and Skonovd’s assertions provide a likely reason for explaining why the Chinese membership base of True Buddha School has grown rapidly and disproportionately compared to the development of the English membership base. This connection is based on the assessment of both individual and group interview responses, where mystical occurrences accounted for the majority of experiences recalled by the Chinese-speaking members, while the experiences of the English-speaking members were largely associated with experimental attitudes. Regarding the former type of occurrence, Brian Nguyen, an employee in the courier industry and a member of the Pai Yuin Temple since 1996, describes the help that he and his family received from Kuan Yin Bodhisattva, a saint representing love and mercy, when they fled Vietnam as refugees on a fishing boat in the early 1980s,

When we escaped, my mom prayed to Kuan Yin the whole time to bless us to have a safe journey. Throughout the whole trip, whenever we had trouble, all of these people came out of nowhere to help us. When our boat broke down, people came out of nowhere to fix it for no cost. Some would feed us and even give us money without expecting anything back, so this is part of the heavenly plan because my mom was very faithful to Kuan Yin. She had a good affinity to Kuan Yin and that’s how we managed to get to Hong Kong.⁶⁷¹

Brian’s story is a representation of common mystical experiences recalled by the Chinese

⁶⁶⁸Lofland and Skonovd, “Conversion Motifs,” 379.

⁶⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 378-379.

⁶⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁶⁷¹Based on conversations with Brian Nguyen (pseudonym) in Calgary, AB, October 20, 2013.

members. As discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis, miraculous stories and events surrounding the efficacy of the healing powers of Grandmaster Lu, Buddhist deities, and the practices taught by him have been widely circulated through word of mouth, sermons, books, and the organization's newspaper and magazine; therefore the narratives about conversions surrounding mystical encounters are reinforced as normative experiences within the organization. It is further suggested that Chinese cosmological views about the overlap and co-existence of the ancestral spirit world and the human world contributes to greater social acceptance within the cultural group to talk openly and to share experiences about higher forces, such as deities or spirits that intervene in daily life.

On the other hand, it is suggested that English-speaking members may likely feel greater stigma and more resistance towards such experiences because they are less socially acceptable, due to the emphasis on logic and rationality that is based on a scientific-materialist view of the world. The scientific-materialist view rejects the possibility of a spirit world based on a lack of tangible and reproducible evidence and hence, individuals who claim to have such encounters are often regarded as suffering from hallucinations or psychological impairments.

Experimental motifs may subsequently be more commonplace among the English-speaking congregation because it is more culturally acceptable to seek an intellectual interest in Buddhism due to the practical value offered in Buddhist philosophy, such as the teaching of compassion, or the therapeutic value of meditative practices. This observation is based on two findings from group discussions. In regards to the most common themes shared amongst the group's casual talks, English-speaking participants shared their experiences of 1) applying Buddhist principles in their daily lives, and 2) elaborated on the various sensations they felt during meditation, with higher frequencies than any other type of experience. The insights shared

by Mike Rainey during a group discussion, who is a technician in the telecommunications industry and an involved member of the Pai Yuin Temple, highlights the first theme,

We often see dead squirrels or road-kill along the side of the highway when we drive by and pay no attention to these sightings. We don't think twice about the loss of life of these creatures because these are common sights. But the Buddhist practice of mindfulness reminds us that these beings once lived. Whenever I see them, I remember to chant the Rebirth Mantra for them.⁶⁷²

The members of the English practice placed significant importance on finding meaning in everyday life by sharing their wisdom about the practical applicability of Buddhist principles. An observation of Melania, who is a first-time visitor, and her subsequent comments and experiences highlights the second most common theme of discussion. During her visit, Melania stepped inside the temple with much hesitation during a Saturday morning meditation and claimed, "I'm not sure if I want to participate. I wouldn't feel comfortable with just a few people here," upon seeing that there were only three people present for the meditation.⁶⁷³ After receiving some encouragement by the temple's teaching assistant, Melania decided to stay, but as the rest of the group began the walking meditation she commented, "I'm just going to sit and watch you guys if that's okay."⁶⁷⁴ During the sitting meditation, however, Melania attempted to follow the service as indicated by her flipping the pages of the meditation booklet, forming the hand gestures, and reciting the verses. At the end of the service, Melania's mood had transformed from high trepidation to surprise. She alleged,

During the meditation, I felt lighter like I was floating. I felt the presence of light. At home, I do not feel these things. There are just too many distractions. I want to come again next week and bring a friend.⁶⁷⁵

Melania's experience is a frequent representation of the types of comments made by participants.

⁶⁷²Based on observations at the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, February 22, 2013.

⁶⁷³Based on observations at the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple, Calgary, AB, October 18, 2013.

⁶⁷⁴Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵Ibid.

Even in the case of regular participants in the English group, continual emphasis was placed on sharing and comparing the various feelings and sensations from the meditation week after week as a way to gauge their skill level of entering into deep meditation. Thus, it is suggested that the experimental motifs are characterized by lower levels of emotional intensity in comparison to mystical encounters with deities such as Kuan Yin Bodhisattva. As a result, the slower growth of the English-speaking congregation may be attributed to the longer process of conversion associated with experimental motifs. The slow growth is additionally affected by the postmodern propensity for sampling the practices of a variety of religious traditions coupled with the reluctance of identifying with a single tradition. Esposito et al. claim, “Many new age seekers are not interested in joining religious institutions.”⁶⁷⁶

Factors that are internal to the True Buddha School are also responsible for the slow growth of English-speaking members because the current presentation of the True Buddha School is too specific in its orientation towards an Asian audience, despite the school’s receptiveness towards non-devotional interpretations. Experimental approaches, however, are not exclusive to the English-speaking community, as they account for the second most common type of conversion experience in the Chinese community. Nonetheless, cultural rituals concerned with ancestor veneration led to regular temple visits and thus, according to Master Lotus Wen, the head master of the temple, there were higher rates of participation among the Chinese-speaking members due to the rapport and trust that the visitors built with the clergy through their repeated visits.⁶⁷⁷ In turn, the higher frequency of participation led to higher rates of conversion. These findings suggest a strong correlation for the staggered growth within the organization along cultural lines.

⁶⁷⁶Esposito et al., *Religions of Asia Today*, 368.

⁶⁷⁷Master Lotus Wen, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 11, 2014.

Current Factors of Success

The success of the True Buddha School in the Asian community is largely attributed to Grandmaster Lu's charisma in speaking to the needs of participants by offering the benefits of wish fulfilment for worldly endeavors such as improved harmony in the family, protection from disasters, and success in one's career through a tangible spiritual practice, which he calls the True Buddha Tantra.⁶⁷⁸ Where Mahayana Buddhist practice may be conceived as being too difficult to adopt for some people, based on the perceived need to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle and to abandon worldly attachments, Grandmaster Lu adopts the narrative of Vajrayana Buddhism to embrace natural human desires.⁶⁷⁹ In this way, Grandmaster Lu merges the interests of busy professionals, unmarried singles, and retired individuals concerned about their families and grandchildren, with the promise of achieving Buddhahood in this lifetime through the daily practice of True Buddha Tantra.

Through the simplification of Vajrayana Practices, Grandmaster Lu offers a novel method of completing the necessary steps that he deems is necessary for liberation for time-constricted individuals. The promise of liberation is not only reserved for the clergy but it is equally accessible for lay people. Through his True Buddha Tantra, Grandmaster Lu envisions the transformation of an individual's worldly desires into the desire for liberation by channeling an individual's energy and concentration through formal meditative practice. Consequently, Grandmaster Lu encourages individuals to relinquish their desires at their own pace as opposed to enforcing, at the onset, the message that participants must abandon all worldly desires for the sake of liberation. In addition, Grandmaster Lu's open approach towards participants with a variety of concerns and interests for ancestor veneration, Chinese popular religion, Daoism, Pure

⁶⁷⁸*The True Buddha School Introductory Handbook*, 28.

⁶⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 13-14.

Land Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, and Vajrayana Buddhism, among other forms of Buddhism, and its acceptance of all religious traditions is an attractive feature to both Chinese and English-speaking participants.

The success of the organization is also attributed to administrative factors. The True Buddha School is a highly mobilized organization that has a large global cohort of volunteers with specialized and compartmentalized roles to achieve the organization's objectives efficiently. The strongest glue that holds the organization together is the dedicated clergy, who serve as a powerful force for fulfilling Grandmaster Lu's vision and who serve as a form of spiritual and moral support for members around the globe. The True Buddha School has also created opportunities for the active involvement of laypeople by establishing formal administrative positions in the form of teaching assistants, teaching instructors, and positions on the board of directors of local branches. Additionally, the organization is able to ensure the cohesiveness of the organization's objectives by managing its four hundred global chapters and the central training of clergy through the True Buddha Foundation, the organization's central administrative body. Finally, the organization has mobilized the worldwide circulation of Grandmaster Lu's books, monthly magazines, and a bi-weekly newspaper to foster the presence of a global community. Lastly, the True Buddha School has coordinated global audiences through the live internet broadcasts of Grandmaster Lu's weekly sermons, which has contributed to the development of an internet congregation.

Exceptions to the Case

Despite the general characteristics of the Chinese and English-speaking participants discussed throughout this paper, it should be noted that not all of the observed patterns were exclusive to one group. For example, the attendance of Chinese-speaking participants was also

affected by time constraints and the subsequent preference for practicing meditation at home.⁶⁸⁰ However, auspicious dates on the lunar calendar served as a strong motivation for increasing attendance, despite the time constraints. Also, the experiences of mystical encounters were not limited to the Chinese-speaking participants. In fact, two of the English-speaking members who claimed to have mystical encounters had the highest rates of attendance and involvement in the organization. Furthermore, not all of the English participants were engaged in ecumenical dialogue. During group discussions, there were shy individuals who were not comfortable with voicing their opinions.⁶⁸¹

Furthermore, in regards to the postmodern narrative of picking and choosing from different beliefs, this characteristic has long been part of the syncretic nature of East Asian traditions, which blend Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and popular religion together. As a result, it was not uncommon for members and participants to frequently visit other local institutions such as the Fung Loy Kok Daoist temple and the Indo-Chinese Buddhist Association, the latter which is located six blocks north of the Pai Yuin Temple.⁶⁸² The notion of belonging to a single Buddhist group among the Chinese was not common until the rise and popularity of global Buddhist organizations in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Taiwan, which include, for example, the Buddha Light Mountain (*Foguangshan*), Dharma Drum Mountain (*Fagushan*), and the Tzu Chi Buddhist Compassion Relief Foundation (*Ciji*).⁶⁸³

Though this paper has focused primarily on the critiques and feedback of the English-speaking participants, according to Xin Li Lin's perception, a native of Taiwan and a former

⁶⁸⁰As a response to this factor, the clergy regularly encouraged the benefits of group meditation in their dharma talks.

⁶⁸¹Based on the participants' own admission following the group meditation.

⁶⁸²The Fung Loy Kok Daoist Temple is located at 2310 24 Street SW, and the Indo-Chinese Buddhist Association is located at 2405 Centre Street NW, Calgary, AB.

⁶⁸³Andre Liliberte, *Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan, 1989-2003 : Safeguard the Faith, Build a Pure Land, Help the Poor* (Richmond, BC: Curzon Press Limited, 2004), 3.

critic of the organization, the True Buddha School had a negative popular opinion in Taiwan in the 1990s.⁶⁸⁴

The organization was criticized for four main reasons: First, Grandmaster Lu claimed to be an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha, which ignited strong sentiments among both Buddhists and non-Buddhists who saw this revelation as a ploy and tactic to gain followers.⁶⁸⁵ Second, the organization gained popularity quickly, which perpetuated the first criticism and also led to increased competition for members with other organized groups. Third, due to its Vajrayana orientation, Grandmaster Lu and his disciple-monastics had a meat-eating diet, which went against the status quo of vegetarianism held by the Mahayana Buddhists, the majority tradition in Taiwan.⁶⁸⁶ Lastly, the mystical stories of Grandmaster Lu appeared to perpetuate the superstitious image of Buddhism that other Buddhist groups were trying to counter in the public eye.⁶⁸⁷ As a defense to the superstitious image of Buddhism among the Taiwanese public, mainstream groups attempted to promote the appreciation of Buddhism by emphasizing its characteristics as a “transnational ethical system.”⁶⁸⁸ Due to the spotlight that charismatic Buddhist clergy have had in the public media in Taiwan, either through commercials, bulletin boards, news broadcasts, and even tabloid magazine covers, there was extended media coverage of the criticisms towards the True Buddha School in the 1990s in Taiwan.⁶⁸⁹ Rachelle Scott’s

⁶⁸⁴Based on communication with Xin Li Lin at the Taiwan Leizang Temple in Tsao-Tun, Taiwan, November 22, 2013.

⁶⁸⁵Sheng-yen Lu, “Defamation and Slander,” in *Living this Moment in Purity* (2001), True Buddha School Net [Official Website], available at <http://tbsn.org/english2/article.php?id=830> (accessed June 2, 2014).

⁶⁸⁶Based on communication with Xin Li Lin at the Taiwan Leizang Temple in Tsao-Tun, Taiwan, November 22, 2013.

⁶⁸⁷Lu, “Defamation and Slander,” available at <http://tbsn.org/english2/article.php?id=830> (accessed June 2, 2014).

⁶⁸⁸Laliberte, *Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan, 1989-2003: Safeguard the Faith, Build a Pure Land, Help the Poor* (Richmond, BC: Curzon Press Limited, 2004), 3.

⁶⁸⁹Sources about the True Buddha School in the Taiwan media is scarce in English. However, Grandmaster Lu has recorded part of the media coverage in his books. See Lu’s *A Plethora of Scenic Splendours*, 17-18 and 163 for more details about the interviews.

research suggests that the length of time that scandals are given attention in the media is directly related to the size of a religious organization; the larger the organization, the more attention that the case is given in the media.⁶⁹⁰ Xin Li Lin, however, claims that the negative public perception towards the True Buddha School in Taiwan began to change in the last decade when the organization's numbers grew past a few hundred thousand members and the branches became established in local Taiwanese neighborhoods.⁶⁹¹

Based on the accounts cited above, the opposition and challenges encountered by the organization were far greater among the Chinese-speaking participants, compared with those in the English-speaking community, due to the previous negative stigma of the True Buddha School in the Taiwanese public and the subsequent media coverage. The events caused much distress and sentiment among the members. In response, Grandmaster Lu encouraged his disciples to change their perspective on the criticisms as opposed to actively retorting their opponents.

Grandmaster Lu writes,

Since there is not a separate and independent existence of the self, others, or everyone else, what is there to trouble one? No more worries! What is there to worry about? People who criticize and denounce one? Newspaper and magazine articles that slander one? One realizes that both good and bad conditions are empty, both praise and criticism are empty.⁶⁹²

In spite of Grandmaster Lu's response, however, it is suggested that some of the affected members internalized the pain due to the fact that my interview questions triggered defensive emotions among the members at times. The passive nature of the congregation is demonstrated, for example, by the fact that it was not until April of 2013, a couple of decades after the media criticisms, that a formal announcement was publicized, asking members to contribute their

⁶⁹⁰Scott, *Nirvana for Sale?*, 151 and 155.

⁶⁹¹Based on communication with Xin Li Lin at the Taiwan Leizang Temple in Tsao-Tun, Taiwan, November 22, 2013.

⁶⁹²Lu, *A Complete and Detailed Exposition*, 134.

support and submission of articles towards a True Buddha Protection Website to defend the organization against slander that took to the internet.⁶⁹³ Globally, however, the organization has escaped the stigma that it had in Taiwan amongst the English-speaking participants, though the distressing memories of the events have been retained by the first generation of immigrant members. In a recent sermon on June 14, 2014 in Redmond, WA, Grandmaster Lu again encouraged his disciples to put their sentiments about the criticisms behind, highlighting the deep-rooted extent of the distress experienced by some of the Taiwanese members.

The Possibility of a Hybrid Congregation

Without the regular financial support of members, religious groups cannot sustain themselves in the long run. Negru's "Survey of Canadian Buddhist Organizations" reveal that the number of active organizations in the country in 2013 decreased from the time the survey was first conducted in 2010.⁶⁹⁴ He discusses their rise and passing, ". . . many centres are started by inspired individuals who quickly discover their intentions are not shared by enough people to make a go of it."⁶⁹⁵ Negru continues,

In other situations, centres that grew up around charismatic teachers, but that failed to establish solid roots and closed when that teacher moved on, was discredited in some way, or passed away.⁶⁹⁶

As a result of the growth and collapse of organizations, Negru characterized the "evolution of Buddhist communities in Canada" by the expression "two steps forward, one step back."⁶⁹⁷

Chinese Buddhist temples such as the Avatamsaka Monastery, the Indo-Chinese Buddhist Association, and the Pai Yuin Temple have the advantage of strong financial support

⁶⁹³"Protecting Grandmaster and True Buddha School," *True Buddha School Net*, posted April 19, 2013, available at <http://tbsn.org/english2/news.php?classid=1&id=352> (accessed May 27, 2014).

⁶⁹⁴The number of organizations decreased from 504 to 483. See Negru, "Survey of Canadian Buddhist Organizations," 2.

⁶⁹⁵Negru, "Survey of Canadian Buddhist Organizations," 4.

⁶⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁷*Ibid.*

from their members compared with non-Asian Buddhist organizations due to the cultural popularity of alms-giving or *dana*. Subsequently, many Chinese Buddhist groups have been able to build dedicated temples to foster the growth of their communities. Due to the lack of interest in institutional services among English-speaking participants and the lack of emphasis on alms-giving, non-Asian Buddhist groups have not typically experienced the same kind of institutional success and longevity, though there are exceptions to the case. Groups such as the Pai Yuin Temple have the advantage of utilizing dedicated buildings for promoting their activities, in addition to having full-time clergy to oversee the day to day operations of the branches. Aside from the Birken Forest Monastery tradition in Knutsford, BC, and the Tisarana Buddhist Monastery in Ottawa, Ontario, whose communities are largely comprised of non-Asian monks, formal ordination has not been common among non-Asian Buddhists.⁶⁹⁸

The future viability of maintaining financial support is also dependent on the organization's ability to sustain members as the congregation ages and the senior members pass away.

Strategies Moving Forward

Although the problems found in this study pertain to the case study of the Pai Yuin Temple and True Buddha School, many of the problems are also similar to those faced by other ethnic Buddhist organizations. Thus, the suggested strategic plan outlined here could also be applied to other organizations. According to Reginald Bibby, "The groups that thrive will be groups that are in touch with the spiritual, personal, and social needs and interests of Canadians."⁶⁹⁹ In order to achieve the goal of creating a hybrid community, the following

⁶⁹⁸Jack Liu, "Western Challenge: The Arrival of Buddhist Forest Tradition in Canada" (paper presented at the second annual Buddhism in Canada Conference, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, October 16, 2010).

⁶⁹⁹Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 234.

strategies are suggested:

1) Enlisting Second-Generation Chinese and Non-Chinese Clergy and Volunteers

According to George Gallup, founder of the Gallup poll, “The fact is, significant numbers of people find churches irrelevant, unfulfilling, and boring.”⁷⁰⁰ By recruiting clergy that can relate to the concerns and interests of Canadians, and by communicating the Buddhist teachings in a way that a Canadian audience deems them to be meaningful and attractive, Asian Buddhist organizations will be better able to engage with a broader audience. Being dually raised in an Asian family unit and the wider Canadian society, second-generation Chinese members are sensitive to the cultural dispositions of different audiences and thereby, they are more equipped than first-generation members, in many cases, to adjust the messages of the Buddhist teachings to suit the varying needs of English-speaking participants. Furthermore, fewer resources are needed to recruit second-generation Chinese members from within the ranks of the congregation.

Non-Chinese clergy and volunteers, on the other hand, provide the benefits of being aware of the social awkwardness of being a minority in a largely Chinese group, having gone through the same experiences themselves. Because they have also had to charter and make meaning from the narratives of the tradition, they are better equipped to contextualize the Buddhist teachings for a Canadian audience. For example, according to Ken Madden of the Calgary Buddhist Temple, who is an ordained Caucasian *sensei* or teacher in the Jodo Shinshu or Japanese Pure Land tradition, he implemented several changes to suit the non-Asian members. Ken incorporated discussions concerning science and astronomy with Buddhist causation theories in his sermons, in response to the desire for contextualizing Buddhist teachings in light

⁷⁰⁰George Gallup, “The Six Spiritual Needs of Americans,” *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* (New York: National Council of Churches, 1992), 12-13.

of scientific research.⁷⁰¹ In response to new participants that have little prior knowledge about the Buddhist tradition, the Calgary Buddhist Temple also holds “Introduction to Buddhism” information sessions each month.⁷⁰² Ken also employs the basic strategies of clarifying the benefits of why certain chants continue to be performed in Japanese and “stopping service in the middle to explain what’s going on.”⁷⁰³ In addition, he continually emphasizes the egalitarian status between the *sensei* and the congregation by encouraging members to wear the *monto-shikisho*, a ceremonial scarf, which resembles the sash worn by the *sensei*, to symbolize their unity.⁷⁰⁴ Ken also “speaks to individual experiences” by breaking down the lofty goals of the tradition into everyday experiences such as explaining the benefits of “mindful driving.”⁷⁰⁵ In this way, he attempts to bridge the gap between outsider knowledge and assumed knowledge or knowledge that may be taken for granted by some of the Asian members, who encountered the tradition based on their cultural upbringing.

Good teachers know how to engage an audience’s attention and take away the boredom associated with church through novel methods. They are able to create an engaging and comfortable environment for the learners as a whole, while being perceptive to the feelings of individuals. Charisma and pedagogical skills, however, are often gained through knowledge and experience. Chogyam Trungpa (1939-1987) is “perhaps the most well-known of the Tibetan lamas to have settled in the U.S. . . ,” who was famed for his charisma.⁷⁰⁶ In the 1970s, Trungpa founded Shambhala International, which has a strong presence in Canada and currently has affiliations with fifteen branches in Nova Scotia.⁷⁰⁷ The appeal of Trungpa’s presentation of

⁷⁰¹Ken Madden Sensei, interview by author, Calgary, AB, April 24, 2014.

⁷⁰²Ibid.

⁷⁰³Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴Ibid.

⁷⁰⁵Ibid.

⁷⁰⁶Bell, ““Crazy Wisdom,”” 56.

⁷⁰⁷Shambhala International was originally named Vajradhatu International. Negru, “Highlights from the

Buddhism lay in his “prolific cultural eclecticism” that not only drew from Vajrayana Buddhism but also included “his own interpretations of English aristocratic life, as well as elements from Japanese arts and philosophies.”⁷⁰⁸ Bell continues,

. . . [H]is quick intelligence, knowledge of Tibetan and Western thought, artistic abilities, and reputation for eccentricity became fused with his status as an authentic representative of shamanic Buddhism to produce an expert cultural broker and innovator.⁷⁰⁹

The innovativeness and appeal of Chogyam Trungpa’s presentation of Buddhism in the West also highlights the effect of personal charisma in translating the salient points and practices of Vajrayana Buddhism.

From a language standpoint, native speakers of English also have less problems with communication, thereby being able to create deeper personal relationships with members and participants.

It is suggested that specialized roles should be created for clergy and volunteers who focus their specific efforts towards creating a hybrid community, as opposed to taking on the responsibility of tending towards all of the administrative and clerical matters of the temple.

2) Creating an Intimate Environment

According to Ken Madden *Sensei*’s experience at the Calgary Buddhist Temple, the non-Asian members felt more comfortable when there were less Asian members.⁷¹⁰ To illustrate, prior to 2008, 80% of the Calgary Buddhist Temple’s congregation consisted of Japanese members, while the remaining 20% of members were non-Japanese.⁷¹¹ From 2008-2010, however, the congregation went through a transition period whereby the percentage of Japanese

Survey of Canadian Buddhist Organizations,” 3.

⁷⁰⁸Bell, 60.

⁷⁰⁹Ibid., 61.

⁷¹⁰Ken Madden Sensei, interview by author, Calgary, AB, April 24, 2014.

⁷¹¹Ibid.

members fell to 5% and the remaining 95% of members were non-Japanese.⁷¹² While the causes of this drastic change were not fully apparent to Ken, it is likely that part of this transition were caused by the aging senior members who had become less mobile and thus, there were less families in attendance.⁷¹³ Furthermore, in March 2011 and April 2014, the Japanese ministers Leslie Kawamura *Sensei* and Susuma Ikuta *Sensei* of the Calgary Buddhist Temple passed away, which also may have attributed to the declined attendance of Japanese members.⁷¹⁴ Ken explains that his introduction into the Calgary Buddhist Temple and his subsequent conversion were largely influenced by Ikuta *Sensei*, who welcomed him into the community and spent considerable time showing him the ropes, which highlight the Calgary Buddhist Temple's endeavor to foster a hybrid community.⁷¹⁵

Communities are created by fostering personal relationships within groups. While a congregation's friendly and warm reception to visitors is a desirable trait, the case study has found that the ability for people to create meaningful connections with others brings them back. Meaningful narratives and a lukewarm interest in meditation alone are not enough to sustain the interest and attendance of newcomers. The trick is to enhance the comfort level of the English-speaking members in a largely ethnic community, which involve simple steps including the creation of opportunities for participants to build rapport before and after services, extending personal invitations to services, and increasing the amount of social activities. Personal connections are created and deepen as the amount of time that members and participants spend together, outside of formal services, increases. In this way, social activities that necessitate members to collaborate with each other for extended periods enable newcomers to overcome

⁷¹²Ken Madden Sensei, interview by author, Calgary, AB, April 24, 2014.

⁷¹³Ibid.

⁷¹⁴Ibid.

⁷¹⁵Ibid.

their shyness more effectively than large banquet-style events that may cause many individuals to feel awkward and out of place. Suggested activities may include Buddhist instrument lessons, classical Chinese dance lessons, Mandarin language classes, cooking classes or informal get-togethers, in cases where the branches lack the human resources to organize formal events. The type of activity offered is not as crucial as the amount of quality time that individuals spend together. Unlike the Chinese-speaking members who are regularly accompanied by their family members at temple services, English-speaking members are not afforded the same level of comfort and emotional support, due to the language barriers and the fact that the participants typically leave their Christian upbringing to explore alternate religious cosmologies on their own. By focusing strategic efforts on nurturing quality relationships, it is suggested that organizations will be able to increase the frequency of attendance and expand their membership bases progressively.

The strategy of creating a close-knit community through program initiatives has been adopted by Soka Gakkai, one of the most successful hybrid Buddhist organizations with “the largest, most ethnically and racially diverse membership of all forms of North American Buddhism.”⁷¹⁶ Their global community encompass large numbers of African Americans and Latin Americans.⁷¹⁷ Peter Bankart et al. discusses the programs of Soka Gakkai,

The social organization of the Soka Gakkai provides a network of constant personal support and a host of public events that provide a training ground for honing interpersonal, social, and leadership skills.⁷¹⁸

Community initiatives include the hosting of musical concerts “to build mutual appreciation of diverse cultural heritages” in addition to offering disaster relief, interfaith symposiums,

⁷¹⁶Peter C. Bankart, Kathleen H. Dockett, and G. Rita Dudley-Grant, “On the Path of the Buddha,” in *Psychology and Buddhism: From Individual to Global Community* (New York: Kluwer Academic, 2003), 37.

⁷¹⁷*Ibid.*, 38.

⁷¹⁸Bankart et al., “On the Path of the Buddha,” 38.

community clean-ups, and planting trees to promote “sustainable living.”⁷¹⁹ Due to Soka Gakkai’s initiatives, “members undergo a transformation” where they “learn to accept responsibility for their lives, experience the control they have producing positive outcomes . . . and become confident, optimistic, and empowered.”⁷²⁰ Although Asian Buddhist groups should model their strategies upon other successful hybrid organizations, they need to determine what type of initiatives work for their particular objectives and orientation, as not all methods have the “one size fits all” applicability.

3) Adaptability

The ability to accommodate and balance the interests of both crowds is crucial for fostering a hybrid community. In addition to increasing the accessibility of services and material in English, the case study has found that English-speaking participants prefer services with simplified rituals and prefer a greater focus on silent meditation. There are several reasons for this preference: First, Buddhism is synonymous with meditation in the West and therefore, meditation is part of an ideal picture of what it means to practice Buddhism. Drawing from these inclinations, Buddhist groups such as the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Temples of Canada have introduced meditation into their Sunday services in order to attract non-Asian members.⁷²¹ Prior to this introduction, however, the organization’s practices did not include meditation because many Asian Buddhist services are primarily centered on chanting scriptures and mantras, performing deliverance rituals for the deceased, and performing repentance rituals. In many cases where meditation is part of a temple’s services, it comprises only a small portion of their

⁷¹⁹a) “Culture,” *Soka Gakkai International* [official website], available at <http://www.sgi.org/community-initiatives/culture.html> (accessed May 27, 2014).

b) Also see “Action for Change,” *Soka Gakkai International* [official website], available at <http://www.sgi.org/community-initiatives/action-for-change.html> (accessed May 27, 2014) for a list of the organization’s community initiatives.

⁷²⁰Bankart et al., 38-39.

⁷²¹Ken Madden Sensei, interview by author, Calgary, AB, April 24, 2014.

services. This is not the case for the True Buddha School, however, since its main practice is comprised of Vajrayana meditation.

Second, silent meditation is preferred because it is more accessible to English-speaking participants compared to the chanting of scriptures. Although English translations of the scriptures are available, the congregation chants in their preferred language, which has led to alienation, frustration, confusion, or fatigue among participants. Furthermore, due to the eclectic nature of the True Buddha School, the services also include the Mahayana practices of chanting scriptures and performing repentance. As a result, the monthly services at the Pai Yuin Temple are three hours in length from start to finish, including the sermon. In order to accommodate the preferences of English speaking participants, progressive changes were made to the procedures of the weekly group meditation including an 80% reduction in the number of chants, an increase in the length of time spent on silent contemplation, the introduction of walking meditation and prostrations to increase the variety of easily accessible practices, and the incorporation of group discussion in lieu of a formal sermon.

Third, meditation is favored because it is seen as a more practical remedy for alleviating the stresses of daily life compared to the chanting of scriptures, the contents of which may require additional exposition or commentary to extract their full meaning. This is not to say that the rituals were not important to the English-speaking participants because they claimed that the rituals aided in their ability to focus and concentrate during silent contemplation. However, too many rituals and chants led some participants to feel distracted and unable to keep up with the rest of the group. For example, according to Wendy Feagan's feedback, who is a regular participant at the Pai Yuin Temple, the incorporation of the wooden fish instrument during the

chanting portion disturbed her ability to be mindful.⁷²² She claims that when she learned about the deeper significance of the instrument, however, her aversion towards it faded.⁷²³

The key points of adaptation lie in the simplification of the meditation procedures, the reduction of rituals or chants conducted in foreign languages, and in cases where the rituals or chants are fundamental to the organization's main practices, an explanation about the significance or practical value of the rituals should be given. The move towards reducing the complexity of Buddhist practices has also been adopted by Soka Gakkai. Peter Bankart et al. discuss the broad attraction of the Soka Gakkai's rituals,

The simplicity of its practice, which involves chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo at a shrine in one's own home without necessarily understanding complicated theories, renders it readily accessible to all socio-economic classes and language groups.⁷²⁴

In addition to Soka Gakkai, Shambhala International has also adopted a similar strategy aimed at streamlining Buddhist practices. The strength of Shambhala International's programs lies in the vast array of secular meditation classes offered at the introductory level, which are attractive to a broader audience due to its non-religious orientation.⁷²⁵ Interested participants may then choose to complete higher-level secular classes or enroll in more advanced classes that involve formal Buddhist practice such as *ngondro* or the preliminary practices.⁷²⁶ In this way, Shambhala International has been able to widen its appeal by aligning its programs with postmodern preferences and attitudes. Where Shambhala International has set up a systematic method of

⁷²²a) Based on follow-up communication with Wendy Feagan, Calgary, AB, May 10, 2014.

b) The wooden fish is a metronome-like device that is used to maintain a rhythmic tempo during chanting practices.

⁷²³Based on follow-up communication with Wendy Feagan, Calgary, AB, May 10, 2014.

⁷²⁴Bankart et al., "On the Path of the Buddha," 38-39.

⁷²⁵See "Introductory Programs: The Path of Meditation," *Shambhala International* [official website], available at http://www.shambhala.org/meditation/intro_programs.php (accessed on May 27, 2014) for more details about the training sessions offered by the organization.

⁷²⁶See "Description of the Path," *Shambhala International* [official website], available at <http://www.shambhala.org/path.php> (accessed on May 27, 2014) for more details about the organization's system of practice.

introducing trainees to formal Buddhist practice through a slow progression, participants of the True Buddha School are immediately immersed in the *ngondro* practices. Thus, Shambhala International represents a potentially ideal model for the True Buddha School to follow due to the success of the former in popularizing Vajrayana techniques.

4) Dispelling Assumptions

Due to the popular stigma towards organized religious groups and cults in the latter part of the 20th Century, and the transference of Judeo-Christian assumptions towards Asian Buddhist forms of deity veneration, administrators and clergy should pay critical attention to the dispelling of popular assumptions. Such assumptions may include the notion that Buddhist practices rely solely on the magical wish-granting power of deities, that formal participation involves sole membership in one organization or tradition while involvement in others are shunned upon, and the criticism that formal organizations enforce strict dogma, restrictions, and pressures to convert members. Other criticisms include the opinion that formal religious organizations are not inclusive of other religious traditions or non-heterosexual orientations, that conversion requires the relinquishment of individual liberties and power for the sake of the collective cosmology, and the suspicions that guru-type figures exploit members for personal profit and gain. In many cases, these suspicions and assumptions are naturally dispelled through prolonged contact and engagement between members and participants, in addition to the dedicated efforts of clergy and members in creating a welcoming and non-judgmental atmosphere towards visitors and participants.

In order to achieve a hybrid community, this endeavor needs the full support and attention of the entire congregation, and not just a couple of individuals. In the same way that a full board of directors, consisting of ten board members, are required to oversee the operation of

the Pai Yuin Temple and the activities involving hundreds of active members, the efforts of an equivalent number of volunteers are required to build a hybrid community. When the collective endeavors of the Chinese-speaking members are applied, the beneficial effects of the collaboration manifest. Craig Mowat's feedback sheds light on his positive experience regarding these efforts,

Even though I don't speak Chinese, I know that they [the members] try to talk to me. Although they speak in broken English, I appreciate their efforts to make me feel welcomed. I feel that I am part of the community. . . I can't believe that it has been five years already.⁷²⁷

Craig's experience, however, may not be equally felt by other visitors and participants.

Due to language barriers, the Asian congregation is generally passive and shy in regards to speaking English. For example, even in cases where clergy members were relatively fluent in English compared with the other Chinese-speaking members, they preferred to relegate native English speakers to communicate with visitors even when the communication involved the added step of telephoning native speakers and passing the phone to visitors or asking the members to reply to their questions through follow-up e-mails.

Asian Buddhist communities also cannot rely solely on active seekers to join the congregation's activities because, unlike many of the Asian members, English-speaking visitors do not follow the Confucian customs of honoring ancestors on lunar dates or visiting the temple on the days of cultural festivals. Esposito et al. suggest that "religions are challenged first to relinquish their position of being identical with the culture and then to accommodate an existing cultural pluralism."⁷²⁸ Subsequently, the outreach of Asian Buddhism must extend beyond the temple's doors to apply the Buddhist teachings of compassion towards social initiatives in the surrounding communities or advertising the practical applications of meditation for decreasing

⁷²⁷Based on follow-up communication with Craig Mowat, Calgary, AB, on May 21, 2014.

⁷²⁸Esposito et al., *Religions of Asia Today*, 368.

daily stresses and improving emotional wellbeing. While a discussion of specific marketing strategies and social initiatives are beyond the scope of this paper, Craig suggests that the distribution of pamphlets or flyers to surrounding households is a starting point for the Pai Yuin Temple to “get the word out.”⁷²⁹

What Does the Future of the Calgary Pai Yuin Temple Look Like?

On May 26, 2013, a list of the proposed strategies for fostering a hybrid community was presented to the Pai Yuin Temple’s board of directors. The proposal was received with enthusiasm and the list of strategies was approved. Despite the initial excitement, a recurring problem arose: there was a lack of volunteers to implement the plans. Slow progress, however, has been made. In November 2013, two of the members were sent to Taiwan to receive central training as teaching assistants who are primarily dedicated to the endeavor of growing the English-speaking community. Since then, the teaching assistants of the Pai Yuin Temple have been engaged in ongoing discussions with participants about the kinds of changes they would like to see in services. The changes that were implemented included increasing the length of time spent on silent meditation, incorporating walking meditation and singing into the procedures, and the addition of occasional tai chi lessons, to increase the variety of services offered. A large banner at the front of the building was also commissioned to welcome new participants and to break down the potential apprehension that the public may have about the receptiveness of the temple to visitors. There are also future plans to increase the marketing of the temple in English through flyers, brochures, and social media sites such as Facebook.

The charity branch of the Pai Yuin Temple, the Lotus Light Charity Society, has also discussed plans to be involved in more social initiatives such as visiting hospitals or doing more

⁷²⁹Craig Mowat, interview by author, Calgary, AB, September 12, 2013.

hands-on volunteering in the community, aside from monetary sponsorship.⁷³⁰ A sub-committee was also created to reach out to participants for moral support and to extend personal invitations to services, as opposed to relying solely on mass invitations to encourage attendance.⁷³¹ Furthermore, volunteers have focused on fostering rapport with participants and building friendships outside of the temple's services. The volunteers have also reached out to the Chinese congregation to encourage them to attend the English services. As a result, two of the Chinese members have participated regularly to support the growth of the English-speaking group, while three other Chinese members including elderly members and second-generation Chinese have attended sporadically. The elderly member participated in the practice despite not knowing a word of English. With the support of the Chinese congregation, the English-speaking participants expressed that these small changes have led them to feel a greater sense of community.

More importantly, the new changes have helped to build stronger relationships between the administrators and the participants by involving their input in the changes. Additionally, the changes have helped to foster familiarity amongst the Chinese and English-speaking members, in addition to increasing the level of comfort by the latter. The ability to respond to demands at a quick rate, coupled by the enthusiasm of the members to implement the changes have been essential elements of growth.

Update on Increased Attendance Numbers in 2015

Since the Pai Yuin Temple applied the suggested changes in this dissertation beginning in November of 2013, follow-up observations from January 2015 to April 2015 reveal that the attendance numbers at the English group meditations have consistently doubled, and on three occasions, have tripled. At the beginning of the observation period in March 2013, the

⁷³⁰Master Lotus Wen, interview by author, Calgary, AB, January 11, 2014.

⁷³¹Based on discussions at the quarterly board of directors meeting at the Pai Yuin Temple on May 26, 2013.

attendance numbers ranged from two to five weekly participants from amongst a pool of approximately twelve attendees. In 2015, however, the weekly attendance numbers ranged from seven to fifteen participants, with ten participants being the consistent average from amongst an approximate pool of twenty-four attendees. Not only did the pool of attendees double, but the frequency of attendance also grew. The increased attendance rates are attributed to the effectiveness of the following implementations:

- 1) The banner advertisement placed at the front of the temple publicized the temple's activities to passer-byers, which exponentially increased the amount of participants from surrounding neighborhoods. The banner also broke down perceptions that the temple's services were exclusive to the Chinese community.

- 2) With the increased number of new participants, the dharma assistants placed concentrated effort on conversing with and building a rapport with the individuals to foster interpersonal connections. Over the course of the conversations, participants often shared personal distressing matters with the dharma assistants and members of the temple who, in turn, offered empathy and emotional support.

- 3) Though there were no volunteers to increase the variety of extra-curricular activities offered by the temple, the English group initiated the routine of going out for lunch after each meditation session. The weekly routine created affective bonds between participants, which contributed to their desire to return. Subsequently, the retention of participants increased.

- 4) The bonds within the English group subsequently led to friendships outside of the temple's services, wherein participants met with each other for social outings. The friendships and acquaintances increased the comfort level of the participants amongst the greater congregation, which led to quick rates of full conversion wherein three members sought to take

refuge in Grandmaster Lu on their own accord within four weeks of their initial attendance.

5) The increased comfort levels between the members led to higher rates of attendance for both the weekly English group meditations, and the monthly services that were attended by the entire congregation. The English-speaking group members then reached out collectively to new participants and visitors, which increased the mutual efforts of creating a hybrid congregation, as opposed to relying only on the initiations of the temple's dharma assistants. On several occasions, the attendance numbers of the English group meditation even exceeded the numbers of the Chinese group meditation, due to some of the Chinese members moving away to other cities.

The snowball effect of reducing the discomfort levels of the minority congregation and increasing the affective bonds between members supports the main suggestion in this dissertation that the cause for the insularity of Buddhist temples, as far as the Pai Yui Temple is concerned, is rooted in sociological factors and is not based on an intellectual bias towards devotional forms of Buddhism. Though some participants had an initial aversion to the prevalence of rituals and meditation on deities in the True Buddha School's practices, social bonds within the congregation helped to dissolve such apprehensions and helped to encourage continued participation. To cite an example, some participants regarded rituals such as bowing to deities, burning incense, and meditating on the images of deities to be cultural practices of Asian ethnic groups, which led them to feel out of place or awkward. However, when the new visitors built a rapport with the existing members and learned that the latter were predominantly university-educated and consisted of working professionals, the aversion decreased and the visitors gradually accepted the practices as a normative way of enacting Buddhist teachings and principles.

Essential Elements of Growth for Ethnic Buddhist Groups

In order for ethnic Buddhist groups to achieve their goal of expanding their community amongst the wider public, four essential elements are necessary: 1) there needs to be a motivated group of volunteers that are dedicated solely to this goal; 2) the proper foundations and necessary resources from *within the organization* must be firmly established and put into place; 3) there must be realistic expectations about the gradual and incremental results that arise from the adjustments made in the supply side factors; and 4) finally, the strategy for building a hybrid community is having patience, patience, and more patience.

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Interviews and Dharma Lectures

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- Cordsen, Renee. Interview by author. Redmond, WA. August 22, 2013.
- Feagan, Wendy. Interview by author. Calgary, AB. April 13, 2013.
- Fong, Lotus Reverend. Interview by author. Calgary, AB, January 8, 2013.
- Group interview by author. Calgary, AB. November 2, 2013.
- Hansen, Marty. Interview by author. Calgary, AB. March 26, 2013.
- Hau, Dicky. Interview by author. Calgary, AB. March 9, 2013.
- Ho, Tina. Interview by author. Calgary, AB. January 6, 2014.
- Ling, Lotus Master. Interview by author. Redmond, WA. August 22, 2013.
- Ly, Ky. Interview by author. Calgary, AB. January 26, 2013.
- Madden, Ken Sensei. Interview by author. Calgary, AB. April 24, 2014.
- Ming, Lotus Master. Dharma lecture at the Pai Yuin Temple. Calgary, AB. November 4, 2013.
- Mowat, Craig. Interview by author. Calgary, AB. September 12, 2013.
- Muh, Molly. Interview by author. Taichung, Taiwan. November 19, 2013.
- Nancy (pseudonym). Interview by author. Calgary, AB. November 12, 2013.
- Pohoda, Jesse. Interview by author. Calgary, AB. September 27, 2013.
- Rahim, Sheba. Interview by author. Calgary, AB. December 15, 2013.
- Rainey, Mike. Interview by author. Calgary, AB. February 20, 2013.
- Rosinski, Robert. Interview by author. Redmond, WA. August 23, 2013.
- Rowell, Jared. Interview by author. Calgary, AB. April 6, 2013.
- Victoria (pseudonym). Interview by author. Calgary, AB. November 12, 2013.
- Wen, Lotus Master. Interview by author. Calgary, AB. January 11, 2014.

Interviews and Lectures (Continued)

Wen, Lotus Master. Dharma lecture at the Pai Yuin Temple. Calgary, AB, November 3, 2013.

Wolf, Henry. Interview by author, Taichung, Taiwan, November 19, 2013.

Yu, Lotus Reverend. Dharma lecture at the Pai Yuin Temple. Calgary, AB. March 10, 2013.

Zhe, Lotus Master. Interview by author. Redmond, WA. August 22, 2013.

Zhi, Lotus Master. Interview by author. Redmond, WA. August 23, 2013.

Appendix 1: Sample of Interview Consent Form



CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW

Researcher:

Jacqueline Ho
University of Calgary
Faculty of Graduate Studies; Department of
Interdisciplinary Studies

Project Supervisor:

Dr. Ian Winchester, University of Calgary, Department of Education

Title of Project:

The True Buddha School in Canada: A Study of the Calgary Pai Yui Temple's Outreach to the Wider Community

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of the informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask the researcher. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of the study is to better understand the experiences of the members of True Buddha School, and the organization's practices of attracting and converting new members in Canada through the case study of the Pai Yui Temple. You have received a copy of the research proposal. For more details about the study, please refer to the research proposal.

What will I be asked to do?

The participant will be asked to participate in a verbal interview either in-person or by phone. The interview will be approximately one to two hours in length. A copy of the questionnaire has been given to you to preview. However, additional questions that are not on the questionnaire may be asked based on your responses, which are relevant to the topic. For example, participants may be asked to elaborate on their responses. No follow-up interview conducted. Out of town participants may choose to fill out their responses via e-mail.

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary. You may feel free to refuse to participate altogether both prior to and during the interview process. You may also feel free to decline to answer any question, at which point the researcher will skip to the next question. If at any point during the interview, you have concerns or questions please express them to the researcher.

The information that you provide will aid in a doctoral thesis study about the True Buddha School in Canada. The thesis will be published. The data may also be used for future publication in the form of a journal article or academic conference presentation.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate, the responses given by you may be quoted and all in-person interviews will be audio taped. By agreeing to participate, you are granting permission for the researcher to retain and archive the information that I give during the interview. All digital files will be stored in a password secured computer, and all paper documents and voice recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet, after the final research paper has been completed. A copy of the final report will be provided to Pai Yuin Temple.:

Should you choose to withdraw from the study, all partial information that you will provide will be deleted on the computer, voice recordings will be deleted on the recording device, and paper documents will be shredded.

You will have the option to:

1) disclose your name. In this case, demographic information such as your gender, age, ethnicity, and relation to the True Buddha School will be revealed. For example, you will be asked to indicate whether you are a former member, current member, and the status of your membership (ie. lay member, attendee, minister) with regards to the True Buddha School.

2) stay anonymous and be represented by a pseudonym of your choosing. In this case, all efforts will be used to ensure your anonymity and your demographic information will not be revealed.

If you choose to participate in the study, please indicate your wish below (note: choose only option 1 OR 2):

Option 1: I grant permission to be quoted, and grant my name and demographic information to be disclosed

Initial _____

Option 2: I grant permission to be quoted, but I choose to stay anonymous and my demographic information will not be disclosed. The pseudonym I choose for myself is:

Are there risks or benefits if I participate?

There are no foreseeable risks or harms to the participant. However, if the participant feels uncomfortable regarding an interview question, you may feel free to decline to answer at any time during the interview.

If you choose to participate in the interview by phone, the researcher will incur the cost of the long-distance phone call.

Your participation will benefit the research project by contributing to the knowledge of Chinese Buddhist organizations in North America, in regards to the True Buddha School.

What happens to the information I provide?

Immediately after the interview, you will have the option of seeing the researcher's notes and to make changes to your responses at that time. Should you decline this option, the researcher's notes will not be available for you to view after you have left the interview location. If you opt to be interviewed by phone, a copy of the researcher's notes will be scanned and e-mailed to you if you choose. Upon receipt of the e-mail, you must notify the researcher of any requested changes to your response within 48 hours. A lack of response within 48 hours for those that are interviewed by phone, indicates your approval of the material as is.

No one except the thesis supervisor and researcher will have access to the information that you provide. All digital files will be kept on the researcher's personal computer (password secured), and all paper files and voice recordings/recording devices (should you grant access to record your interview) will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home library, accessible only by the researcher (and available to the course supervisor upon his request). If you grant permission, the data that you provide will be stored for an indefinite period of time for the researcher's personal reference purposes only.

Signatures

If you are opting to participate in the interview in person, please sign and return this consent form to the researcher. If you are opting to participate by phone, please scan the consent form and return it via email to the researcher at jacquelinedho@gmail.com, or return it by mail to [mailing address has been removed from appendix version for privacy reasons].

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this thesis project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

By signing below, I am indicating that I have reviewed this consent form, am aware of the information that I will be disclosing, and grant permission to be interviewed.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Jacqueline Ho (researcher)
University of Calgary
Faculty of Graduate Studies; Department of Interdisciplinary Studies

OR

Dr. Ian Winchester (thesis supervisor)
University of Calgary
Department of Religious Studies

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Senior Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-3782; email rburrow@ucalgary.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix 2: Sample of Interview Transcription

The following is a transcription of an interview conducted with Henry Wolf, a dharma assistant of the True Buddha School's Las Vegas branch known as the Fortune Deity Temple. The interview took place at the Taiwan Leizang Temple, the main True Buddha School branch in Taichung, Taiwan on November 19, 2013. The interview was recorded and transcribed into Microsoft Word, and represents a sample of the types of questions and conversations that took place during individual interviews.

Question: Can you describe the types of challenges that you think non-Chinese people encounter regarding the acceptance of the True Buddha School and Buddhism in general?

I think what I'm trying to say is that Buddhism, in my opinion, involves a more severe or ascetic outlook on life. It involves denial, meditation, being alone (it's not something you do in a group), a cultivation of the inner world, self-regulation, self-discipline. This is not a social activity and then you have the precepts, such as no smoking and then sexual misconduct. If you have sex outside of marriage, it is a serious violation of the precepts. Otherwise you're not a Buddhist.

Buddhism is an intimidating religion for most people because it is all about the inner self. It requires you to look inside and looking inside requires you to change your focus. Most people are focused on the outside, including other religions. You have to deal with a new set of words and concepts in order to understand Buddhism, because its focus is inward. You have to learn the Buddhist dharma, the meaning of words such as emptiness. What is meant by it. It's not a word that most foreigners can deal with. They think of empty space or annihilation or non-existence, the end of something, non-being. It's a word that conjures up something negative. It's some place that "I don't want to go." It's too different.

Usually the way that Buddhism is transferred in the West is different such as the word “wisdom.” For a westerner, it is something that takes effort to learn. Whereas Christianity requires little effort. It’s easy. You just have faith in Jesus. You just believe, and so there’s nothing to understand. There is no real path to follow. Your whole path is faith. It all boils down to faith and Jesus as the saviour. I do believe in Christianity. I believe that Jesus was real, that there is a heaven in the way that it is described in Christianity but I believe in reincarnation and I don’t believe that heaven is eternal. It’s taught as eternal but I don’t personally believe that.

I believe the Buddhist viewpoint that all of reality is created by the mind, that heaven is created by your own mind, all realms, like a dream. If you’ve created the causes of heaven, then that’s what you’ll see (the karma). If you’ve created the negative karma, then what you will see is hell. The realm as taught in Christianity is part of that realm of illusion that’s created by your mind. Just like any illusion, it only has a temporary existence. Once the karmic seed that caused the illusion is burnt out or ripens, it ceases. Nothing remains forever; it is cyclical.

Grandmaster teaches us how to create karma that will lead us to the Maha Twin Lotus Ponds. We believe in Grandmaster as Amitabha Buddha, that he has come down here to teach us how to get to the Maha Twin Lotus Ponds.

Question: Why did you come here [Taichung, Taiwan] to take the dharma assistant test?

It’s a way of giving back. I’ve had good fortune. I can’t just take all the time. I have to give too. A dharma assistant needs to be a role model and determine that’s what they want to be. You have to present an image that other people can aspire to. You’re not a master or guru. They [other members] see you doing it so they think “I can do it.” Hopefully they like you and respect you, and see you as a devout person that follows precepts. If we didn’t organize the ceremonies, people would not have a place to go. In talking to people, they have serious problems. They need

a place to go. Not everyone wants to go to a church. They don't know where to turn. They don't know that there's an alternative, something that's available aside from Christianity.

In Christianity you don't have to worry about anything after going to heaven. You don't fall out of heaven once you get there. It's the end of the road. My mom is a sincere Christian.

People that read about Buddhism don't know that there's a secret key to Buddhism and realizing the teachings. There is a secret way. They don't know that in Vajrayana Buddhism, it provides a secret path. A lot of people believe that people can do it on their own; that anything that can be achieved such as Buddhahood. "I can do it by myself through my own effort. There's no need for a guru. There's no need for a human interaction or blessings from another person." They see that this is mind control or hypnotism, and that I'm better off doing my best on my own. "If there's anything to achieve spiritually, I can do it on my own. I don't need a church or guru."

My dad would see himself as equal to Grandmaster because he is educated. He is not the kind of person that would humble himself or bow to another person because he, in his own mind, believes that he is the greatest. He is a Yale graduate. "I understand everything. I'm a master of human psychology." He believes that if you believe in someone else, you're being tricked. He doesn't want to know about the spiritual world. He's not interested. He thinks he is going to die and go to heaven and other than that, he's not interested in learning about the spiritual world or any other path. He doesn't believe.

In Asia, you rarely find this type of person. I grew up in an atmosphere of tolerance. They were never against what I believed. They just wouldn't believe what I believed.

Question: Can you elaborate more about the concepts that you think non-Chinese members would find challenging to accept?

In the Buddha-nature, there is no personal identity. In order to realize the Buddha-nature, you have to overthrow the concept of self. Ego is the idea that I exist as a separate identity such as “I am Henry.” I will always be who I am. I am Henry who is separate from everyone and everybody else. I believe I am who I am. Buddhism requires you to overthrow that concept and it is something that needs to be eradicated.

They fear that idea. It’s a place that’s too strange. ‘If I don’t exist, then what is there? Why would I give up myself? I like myself. I like being myself. A lot of people do.’ The goal in Buddhism seems impossible. They want to go on the easier path, to not believe in anything, to use their own efforts; let the chips fall where they may.

Buddhism is more for the elite. It requires someone who is humble, someone whose not extremely attached to themselves, someone that’s capable of seeing outside of themselves. They need to be shown a path that they can’t see themselves. This is representative of people everywhere in my experience. Who am I? I’m not saying that I have the right way. I’m not arrogant. Yes, you can go to heaven but is it going to last? Who am I to tell other people that their path in Christianity is right? Don’t aspire to go to heaven. Aspire to go to the Pure Land.

I want to show people that there is an alternative. When they see someone else who cannot drink and not smoke, and follows the Buddhist precepts, they think “I can do it. Someone else is doing it. Maybe I can do it too.”

I don’t personally care if someone is a Buddhist or not. I don’t personally care if someone doesn’t come to our temple. What matters to me is that it’s there. If people don’t want to go, it’s their decision. When I die, I will have done my best to spread the dharma. If someone believes in

Christianity, she should go to church. Tantric Buddhism is not a denial of pleasure. You should not strictly deny yourself pleasure. If you focus on denying yourself, it's too hard.

Americans want to be free to do what they want to do without any obstacles and no one hindering them. For example, if I want to go out and have sex, that's what I want to do and I don't need anyone telling me that's wrong. They don't like being told what they want to do is wrong in the moral sense. That's why people don't like church. It's a kind of judgment. It's distinguishing right and wrong but in Tantric Buddhism, you don't distinguish right and wrong in the ultimate sense.

Most people draw a line. There's a line where most Americans won't go such as visiting prostitutes. Probably 98% of the Americans that I know follow moral laws but they don't like to be told that what they're doing is wrong, even though they will for the most part follow morality. A lot of them are much better at that than me. I learn from people all the time.

In Buddhism, you take that energy that says, "I want to drink, I want to smoke" and you channel that energy, that desire. And you recognize that it is desire that's inside you, and you recognize that it's wrong to do it. If you prevent it and block it, you want to do those things even more.

I think that Tantric Buddhism is suitable for North America because we're wealthy. We're free, we have the time, we have the education, we've lived in a stable country without a lot of conflict and political disasters and revolutions. We can't practice Buddhism in Iraq and Syria. It's just a matter of knowing about it. As long as people know about it, I'm satisfied. My job is just for people to know about it and provide a place for them to get satisfied. If they don't believe in it, I know I've tried my best.

Question: Can you please tell me a little more about your background and your encounter with Buddhism?

I had my own import business for twenty years. My wife Cathy is from Taiwan and I lived in Taiwan for four years as a student at Taiwan University. I worked in Taiwan as a college professor for four years. I was a professor of business administration teaching business law in Asia for Baker University, and then I got sent to Taiwan to recruit graduate students. Afterwards, I lived in mainland china for two years in Beijing and Hainan, became a law school graduate. I have a Masters degree in East Asian Studies. I also served in the Marine Corps as an officer for five years and served as a lawyer in Korea.

Although I became a Buddhist in the 1990s, I did not formally take refuge. People don't believe in Buddhism because there's no cultural support for Buddhism. Everything is associated with Christianity. People don't see it so they don't think about it or choose Buddhism because they don't see it with their eyes. There's nothing to see. There's no physical representation anywhere. In Taiwan, everything you see supports Buddhism. It supports the existence of a spiritual world. You see statues everywhere. You see people burning money. It's an unconscious factor. They're not aware of it and they're not aware that they're making their choice based on what's visible.

Question: What led you to be interested in the True Buddha School more than other Buddhist schools?

We had been practicing Pure Land Buddhism. We were vegetarians for eight years but Pure Land practice is very simple. It can be difficult because you have to constantly recite the Buddha's name. Eventually it dropped off. We didn't hear about Living Buddha Lian Sheng [Grandmaster Lu] until 2009 when we saw his picture. We took refuge the next day.

Cathy's [Henry's wife] mom is a nun in Sutrayana Buddhism. I had fallen off in my interest of Buddhism because it was too hard to practice. She [Henry's wife] was looking up Buddhist stuff up online, and we wrote a letter to Grandmaster to seek refuge. Just from seeing his picture, it was an affinity. It's like meeting an old friend that you haven't seen in a long time. You don't need to see him again. The True Buddha School is not very accessible if you don't speak Chinese.

The interview ended due to time constraints. However, contact information was exchanged and follow-up conversations took place at a later time.